EXAMINING THE ACADEMIC, PERSONAL/SOCIAL, AND CAREER NEEDS OF MOBILE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

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(Under the Direction of Diane L. Cooper)

ABSTRACT

This study explored the essence of the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile students, those who enroll in a new school from outside the county, state, or country after the school year has started. Six mobile students at a suburban high school in the Southeast were selected for the study. The students participated in two qualitative individual interviews in the Spring of 2012. Analysis of the data resulted in five common themes: 1) assimilating into a different academic curriculum; 2) peer support in the school community; 3) size of the school; 4) socioeconomic status of the new community; and 5) accessing resources on career and college exploration. The study found that mobile students struggle with a variety of environmental changes, including a different curriculum, the size of their new school, feelings of loneliness and isolation due to the lack of peer support, discomfort with the socioeconomic status of the new community, and a lack of knowledge about the post-secondary options in their new state of residence. Based upon the academic, personal/social, and career needs expressed by participants in this study, there is a vital need for school counselors to support mobile students by addressing their academic, personal/social, and career needs as they transition and assimilate into the new school and community. Unlike the existing literature that outlines
the effects of student mobility, this study contributes to the student mobility literature by exploring and identifying mobile students’ needs.

INDEX WORDS: Mobile students, new students, school counselors, school transition, new student support, new student program
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to mobile students- who bravely transition into new educational settings. To my Mom and Dad- you always tell me that you are so proud of me…well, I am a sheer reflection of you. To Trevor- your unwavering love and support made this possible.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Jenna a mobile student, a student who enrolled after the school year started, relocated from New York enrolling in a high school within the Southeast. Jenna was an intelligent young lady with a 98 numeric average who completed seven Advanced Placement courses during her high school career; therefore, she created a list of top science and math research universities in New York to which she planned to apply. However, Jenna’s parents wanted to benefit from the less-expensive in-state tuition her new state of residence offered; so along with Jenna’s best friends, boyfriend, and extended family members, her list of post-secondary options remained in New York once her family relocated to the Southeast.

For months Jenna struggled with the acceptance of a new high school, peer group, and community; she was not willing to abandon her wish of returning to her previous life in New York. One day at school she realized she was going to apply to local universities to spend the next four years of her life; that is when Jenna and I (her school counselor) began to build a relationship. She bolted into my office; she sat in front of me with her head in her hands sobbing, “I don’t know what I am going to do. All of my plans are gone.” As I began to unravel the sentences she kept repeating, I discovered she felt that everything she had worked so hard for was gone. The past three years she had taken every AP course available, earned high A’s in all of her courses, committed to an extensive amount of community service, and served various leadership roles all to be a competitive applicant to the top science and research universities in New York. For weeks Jenna cried, still in shock, that those top New York universities were no longer an
option. With tears and devastation in her eyes, she acknowledged that she was completely unfamiliar with any and all post-secondary options in the state where she relocated. As her school counselor, I was faced with the challenge of supporting this mobile student’s needs during her transition and acclimation to the new school environment.

**Statement of the Problem**

While Jenna’s experience is just one example of a mobile student enrolling into a new high school, the 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the U.S. Census found that 17% of school-aged children had moved in the previous year, specifically one-third were ages 10-19 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). School-aged children relocate and enter new schools for a variety of reasons (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). With the economic recession and increased unemployment, parents are often forced to relocate to find employment. “As employers continue to cut jobs and with few signs of a hiring resurgence on the horizon, new job-search statistics reveal an increased willingness among out-of-work Americans to pull up stakes and relocate to wherever positions are available” (Limbach, 2009, para. 1). Additionally, parents may uproot their children as a result of divorce or for financial reasons, such as the loss of a job, foreclosure on a home, or the inability to pay the rent (Hartman, 2006; Kerbow, 1996; Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1997; Norford & Medway, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). These and other causes of parental relocation may require children to change schools during the school year, creating mobility within schools nationwide.
Given the country’s continuing economic struggles and lack of job growth, we can expect the student mobility rate to increase or at least remain at this high level of 17% school-aged children moving in the previous year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Researchers have examined the effects of student mobility on academic achievement (Dunn, Kadane, & Garrow, 2003; Ligon & Paredes, 1992; Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1997; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Sanderson, 2004; Wildeman & Western, 2010); disciplinary concerns (Engec, 2006; Haynie & South, 2005; McEvoy & Welker, 2000; South, Crowder, & Trent, 1998); and socialization issues (Marlett, 1993; Norford & Medway, 2002; South & Haynie, 2004). Such studies have identified a variety of outcomes of student mobility, including lower academic achievement, higher rates of suspension, and struggles with creating a new peer group.

Although the phenomenon of student mobility impacts all mobile students’ from kindergarten to twelfth grade, high school students are experiencing a unique developmental maturation. Elementary and middle school students are promoted to the next school based upon passing marks, whereas high school students are searching and applying to two-year/four-year colleges/universities, technical schools, a service academy, and/or location for employment based upon their interests, intended college major, and/or academic ability. High school students are academically challenged to earn specific credits progressing towards graduation; those college-bound students also take college entrance exams such as SAT or ACT. Adolescents’ cognitive development is measured through academic achievement (ACT, 2007), which creates the options of appropriate colleges and universities. These high academic pressures are unlike those in the elementary or middle school setting.
Adolescents’ personal/social development heavily relies on their social interaction as they continuously observe others’ behaviors, imitate selected behaviors, and internally assess areas of efficacy (Crain, 2000). Therefore, high school students are developmentally seeking self-understanding, and to develop their identities, through their peer relationships. As elementary and middle school students are exploring career interests, high school students are not only gaining vocational insight, but also starting to crystallize a specific career preference, and beginning training for the specified vocational preference (Zunker, 2006). The phenomenon of student mobility impacts the development of mobile high school students as evident in their academic achievement, behavior at school, and peer relationships (Engec, 2006; South & Haynie, 2004; Wildeman & Western, 2010).

Student mobility impacts not only the individual student, but also high schools themselves (Dunn, Kadane, & Garrow, 2003; Ream, 2005). Mobile students by definition enroll after the school year has started; therefore, they have to adjust to a new curriculum midstream (Prout, 2009). Schools across the U.S. vary in the courses they offer as well as the specific content taught in each course (Prout, 2009). Mobile students may therefore be held accountable for content they have missed, affecting their performance on such assessments as final exams or End-Of-Course-Tests and required graduation tests. Each school’s curriculum is designed for students to learn the material over the course of the complete school year (Prout, 2009), and students who move during the year miss sections of course content and inevitably fall behind. Thus, it is no surprise that mobile students’ standardized test scores were found to negatively impact their high
schools’ overall standardized test scores (Dunn, Kadane, & Garrow, 2003; Ream, 2005; Sanderson, 2004; Wilson, 1993).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) emphasizes the critical role of standardized assessments in ensuring adequate learning outcomes of each state and school district through an annual report card (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The report card is based on its standardized testing results in the areas of language arts and math; the report cards are publicized to parents and communities to raise awareness of state and school progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). NCLB provides schools the opportunity to demonstrate academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2004); the achievement level of mobile students impacts the high-stakes standardized test scores.

Students may relocate in the midst of a school year for a variety of reasons such as a parent’s employment change, bereavement, or divorce. Mobile students may be coping with additional stressors beyond the adjustment to a new school and new peers, and often this heightened stress is exhibited in their behavior. Engec (2006) found a positive correlation between the number of times the students moved/enrolled in schools within the school year and the number of in- and out-of-school suspensions; Boon (2011) also noted statistically significant positive correlation between mobility and suspensions. Researchers continue to link mobility and disciplinary concerns (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Haynie and South (2005) found a positive correlation between residential mobility and participation in violence such as fighting, using a weapon in a fight or pulling a knife or gun on someone. The authors attributed this correlation of increased involvement in violence resulted from the weak family relationships, higher
psychological stressors, increased experiences of victimization, and loss of amity reported by participants (Haynie & South, 2005).

Adolescents enter high school struggling to discover who they are, while relying on the support system of peers offering acceptance and providing interaction allows for adolescents to learn about themselves (Erikson, 1963). Students moving while creating peer support system interrupts this process, and the data illustrate that leaving friends behind and seeking a place in a new social network cause a great deal of stress (Norford & Medway, 2002). Researchers found that mobile students are less involved in the extracurricular activities at school than the non-mobile students (Norford & Medway, 2002). Extracurricular activities such as playing school sports and joining student clubs provide an opportunity to build new friendships and failing to participate in such activities decreases numerous opportunities to make new friends (Norford & Medway, 2002). Furthermore, South and Haynie (2004) noted that mobile students are likely to have fewer friends and are more likely to be isolated. Peer relationships play a vital role in the development and happiness of adolescents; research demonstrates the strain mobility places on students and their friendships.

As researchers uncovered the negative effects of student mobility (Engec, 2006; Sanderson, 2004; South & Haynie, 2004), the positive effects of mobility surfaced; the benefits of enrolling into another school after the school year has started are limited. Rumberger et. al (1999) found that students who made deliberate and premeditated school changes to seek a better educational placement, in general, reported positive academic impacts. Yet often time relocation due to family divorce, employment change, or bereavement is unplanned resulting in students entering new local schools. Catterall
(1998) examined the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 and found that over a two year span 58% of mobile adolescent’s demonstrated resiliency through recovery of low academic performance increasing C’s to A’s or B’s. The author also noted resiliency through examining low school commitment, in which the students thought graduation was unreachable, and then finding that two years later, 92% of the students felt they would probably finish high school (Catterall, 1998). When the author examined the students’ resilience “supportive family behaviors, student engagement in school activities, and school responsiveness to the needs of the students became significant factors” (Catterall, 1998, p. 322). Norford and Medway (2002) support Catterall’s (1998) findings that participation in extracurricular activities impacts the mobile student’s transition and adjustment to the new school. Student mobility may positively impact some students; nonetheless, this phenomenon negatively impacts others and what those mobile students need during their transition is undetermined.

From my experience, mobile students may arrive with an array of emotions--excitement, nervousness, uncertainty--as they adjust to a new school, curriculum, and peer group. Another adjustment mobile students may face is a new set of post-secondary options due to the relocation to another state or country. The mobile student may have intended on attending a college/university or applying for employment located in the state he/she previously lived. While some parents of these mobile students entering from another state may prefer their student to attend local a college/university of their new residency in order to obtain in-state tuition. The mobile student may be unfamiliar with the new selection of local colleges/universities, which requires the student to abandon their initial college/university choice and begin the post-secondary search again. With
the adjustments mobile students face (e.g. new school, curriculum, peer group, and post-secondary options), the school counselor is faced with the unique responsibility of providing support to all students (ASCA, 2004a), regardless of when they enter the school.

According to the American School Counselors Association Model for school counseling programs (ASCA, 2004a), school counselors are expected to support all students’ academic, personal/social, and career development. While the majority of faculty and staff provide specialized support in a particular academic or resource area, school counselors provide comprehensive support to all students, with the goal of removing barriers that prevent success. The comprehensive support outlined by the ASCA Model includes school counseling services “delivered more consistently and requiring school counselors to help students make progress in the following specific areas of academic, personal/social, and career development” (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2006, para. 5). As the population of students continuously changes, school counselors must provide holistic (academic, personal/social, and career) support to mobile students to help them succeed in their new school setting. Providing opportunities for mobile students to meet one another is one way to help students in this population support one another; encouraging school involvement is another way to assist new students in developing a sense of belonging (Duru, 2008). Then the question arises whether these types of assistance offered by schools are truly enough to meet the mobile students’ needs.

Mobile students may arrive at a new high school from within the county, from outside the county but within the state, from out-of-state, or even from outside the U.S.
While researchers have examined the effects of student mobility pertaining to high school students (e.g. lower academic achievement, higher rates of suspension, and struggles with socialization issues (Engec, 2006; Sanderson, 2004; South & Haynie, 2004; Wildeman & Western, 2010)), they have not yet focused on investigating the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile adolescent students themselves. One might say that if we know the effects are decreased academic achievement, disciplinary problems, and struggles with socialization, we can presume that students’ needs are more academic support, clearer disciplinary boundaries, and assistance in social integration into the school. However, addressing the surface level effects of mobility does not address mobile students underlying, unmet needs producing such effects. It is challenging for school counselors to provide comprehensive support to any population without first identifying their needs. By understanding mobile high school students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs, school counselors will be prepared to effectively support this population during their transition and acclimation to a new high school.

The importance of this study was the investigation of what underlies these outcomes (e.g. mobile students earning lower academic achievement, higher rates of suspensions, and socialization struggles), not only addressing the surface issues, but also understanding the essence of students’ experience as they described their academic, personal/social, and career needs. We cannot begin to address and correct the negative outcomes/effects of student mobility until we understand the needs of mobile students through their experience of this phenomenon. This is the unanswered question that this
study sought to answer, the question that is so urgent to answer if counselors truly want to reverse these negative impacts.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile students at the high school under study. Under the guidelines of the American School Counselors Association, school counselors are expected to support the academic, personal/social, and career development of all students (ASCA, 2004b). In order to provide such support for mobile students, it is crucial to determine their needs in each area identified by the ASCA standards. This study therefore focused on the phenomenon of student mobility for the purpose of identifying and describing this population’s needs.

**Rationale**

Across the country, students in a variety of circumstances enroll in schools after the academic year has started. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (2010) analyzed longitudinal data from National Assessment of Educational Progress and found that 18% of students change schools three times before reaching high school; this excludes promotional transitions. Student mobility is increasing year after year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). While numerous studies have explored the effects of mobility on students and schools (Haynie & South, 2005; Norford & Medway, 2002; Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Prout, 2009), researchers have failed to investigate the needs of mobile students in the areas of academics, personal/social development, and career planning.

During high school, students progress toward graduation by earning the required number of credits in specific areas, as well as by passing required standardized tests. At
the same time, students build relationships with peers, identifying similarities and differences between themselves and others as a means of defining who they are (Crain, 2000). High school students are also gaining insight into their vocational interests and values (Zunker, 2006).

Counselors provide academic support for all students, helping them learn organizational and study skills as well as insuring that they complete requirements for graduation. They provide personal/social support by enhancing students’ self-understanding and problem-solving skills. Counselors also offer career support by assisting with vocational exploration and discussing options for colleges and majors (ASCA, 2004b). In working with the ever-changing population of mobile students, providing support in each of these areas presents an additional challenge. Mobile students moving from one high school to another may miss various opportunities to flourish in one or more of these areas.

The phenomenon of student mobility is on the rise, yet the needs of mobile students and the knowledge of how best to support them are undetermined. Understanding these needs is crucial to adequately and effectively support this population. This phenomenological study provided this population a voice, to share what they need to help them thrive in their academic, personal/social, and career development.

**Barriers to Mobile Students’ Adjustment**

As mobile students enter schools throughout the U.S., they face unique barriers impacting their transition. Researchers have found that student mobility negatively affects academic achievement, disciplinary concerns, and socialization issues (Haynie & South, 2005; Norford & Medway, 2002; Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Prout, 2009), yet this
population also faces additional risk factors. Students who change schools are often from families with low socioeconomic status, are African-American, or have limited English proficiency (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010).

Within the population of mobile students, socioeconomic status is an additional risk factor. Mao, Whitsett, and Mellor (1997) found that economically disadvantaged mobile students scored lower on state-mandated tests than economically advantaged mobile students. Mao, Whitsett, and Mellor (1997) continued to highlight a greater academic performance gap amongst mobile and non-mobile students at schools that have higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students. The authors also noted economically disadvantaged mobile students had a lower mathematics passing rate and a similar reading passing rate as economically disadvantaged non-mobile students (Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1997); therefore, mobility and low socioeconomic status hinders the students’ academic performance.

Rumberger (2003) found that in general mobile students not only suffer socially, academically, and psychologically, but also have a higher risk of dropping out than non-mobile students. Economically disadvantaged or minority mobile students are especially linked to higher-than-average school dropout rates (Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Wildeman & Western, 2010); therefore, mobile students who are of low socioeconomic status or minorities have higher school dropout rate than White mobile students of middle to high socioeconomic status. Moreover, researchers note that the families of mobile students often do not own a home and are headed by a single parent (Xu, Hannaway, & D’Souza, 2009). The at-risk factors of this population further compound the effects of student mobility, creating additional barriers for mobile students.
Mobile students also face challenges with regard to class placement. Mobile students often enter schools without records or provide incomplete records (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). A student’s academic record reports previously earned credits, grades, standardized test scores, attendance, disciplinary issues, immunizations, and the reason for withdrawal from the previous school (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). Schools require official records, transferred directly from school to school (Fisher et. al, 2002; Sanderson, n.d.). The new school mails the previous school an official records request; however, the previous school may not always send the records immediately upon receipt of the request (Sanderson, n.d.). The records request to compile the withdrawn students’ records and then mail them to the new school is just one of a large number of tasks that fall to overworked staff members who may not be able to complete the request right away. This is a process that could take months to complete.

Even though schools require official records, a student may arrive with partial records in order to assist the new school during the enrollment process and in class placement (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). The partial records may consist of an unofficial transcript or grades from previous the grading period, which could be inaccurate due to reasons such as the previous school still gathering final grades from teachers or the previous school not releasing grades because of outstanding fines. Therefore, the new school personnel must place the mobile student based upon incomplete grades complicating the evaluation of transfer credit (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010); this also hinders the identification of such special needs as ESL services or special education (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010).
Incorrect assessment of transferred credits may delay graduation or force mobile students to repeat previously completed courses.

Currently, there is no national system in place to transfer records in a timely manner (Fisher et al., 2002). Thus, instead of receiving an appropriate schedule upon entering a new school and beginning to attend those classes immediately, mobile students must attend a provisional set of classes which may be changed after their student records arrive, subjecting them to yet another transition to a new, accurate schedule. The inefficient system of conveying mobile students’ records from one school to another hinders assessment and placement in the appropriate course levels (Fisher et. al, 2002; Schafft & Killeen, 2008).

**Significance of the Study**

Whether due to a natural disaster, a divorce, or other family circumstances, parents are sometimes forced to withdraw their children from one school and enroll them in another. These mobile students must cope not only with the situation that caused the move, but also with the experience of acclimating to the new school itself—an experience that has been found to result in lower academic achievement, higher rates of discipline problems and suspension, and struggles with socialization issues (Haynie & South, 2005; Norford & Medway, 2002; Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Prout, 2009). Researchers have found that a disproportionate number of mobile students come from families with a low socioeconomic status and/or from minority families, and that these groups face additional risk factors (Ligon & Paredes, 1992; Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1997; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010).
Mobile students enter high school with the same goal as all students: to graduate. Nevertheless, mobile students may have greater difficulty achieving this goal due to the negative effects of mobility. In the high school setting, students who enroll in a new school during their senior year may be financially pressed to apply to local colleges or universities just months later, having little or no knowledge about these institutions. Mobile students’ lack of familiarity with local universities is one specific challenge these adolescents face.

Whereas the effects or consequences of student mobility have been well studied, the research reveals little information pertaining to mobile students’ needs. Yet school counselors are still responsible for promoting the academic, personal/social, and career development of all students, including mobile students. This study filled this gap in the literature and give voice to mobile students as a means of discovering the nature of these needs.

This study followed a qualitative phenomenological design that attempted to make meaning of mobile students’ needs. The basis of phenomenology research is to provide a rich description of the participant’s experience of the identified event/phenomenon, which uniquely aligns with the goal of this research study of providing an in-depth analysis of how mobile students describe their academic, personal/social, and career needs. Creswell (2007) specifically defines phenomenological research as reducing “individual experiences with a description of the universal essence” (p. 58). Phenomenological researchers focus on the detailed descriptions the participants’ experiences and identify commonalities within their experiences pertaining to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Through the participants’
in-depth knowledge pertaining to the phenomenon (student mobility), the phenomenological researcher obtains a deeper essence of mobile students lived experiences by focusing on their efforts to make meaning of the experience. Understanding mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs will allow school officials, specifically school counselors, to effectively provide support.

This phenomenological study utilized the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), examining the student within a broader context in order to note the effects of multiple systems. Bronfenbrenner’s approach illuminates the interaction of the mobile student’s experiences with the broader environment—consisting of cultural experiences, family experiences, and community experiences—over the course of the student’s lifetime. The premise of this approach is that students’ cultural, familial, and community contexts influence their academic, personal/social, and career development. This model enables the researcher to identify the systems that are impacted by mobility and to describe the student’s needs during the adjustment process. Overall, this phenomenological study explored mobile students’ needs in the broad context provided by the ecological model’s multiple layers.

As the population of mobile students continues to increase or remain at the current high level, there is a growing need to determine mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs. This research study was designed to understand how the mobile students at the high school under study describe their academic, personal/social, and career needs. The mobile students voluntarily participating in this research study took part in two individual, semi-structured interviews; this data collection method offered the researcher the opportunity to understand the mobile students’ lived
experiences as well as their self-reported needs as they acclimate to the high school. The most significant outcome for this study was for the researcher to use the findings to develop a support program for mobile students based on their own descriptions of their academic, personal/social, and career needs. Another potential outcome was to inform school counselors of the comprehensive needs of mobile students, so that other mobile students may receive appropriate holistic support from their own school counselors.

**Research Question**

This phenomenological study employed an ecological systems theory lens in an effort to describe mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs. This study was guided by the research question (RQ) examining a sample of mobile students’ lived experiences.

RQ: How do mobile students at the high school under study describe their academic, personal/social, and career needs?

**Operational Definitions**

**Comprehensive School Counseling Program (CSCP):** “This program ensures that school counseling services are delivered more consistently and requires school counselors to help students make progress in the following specific areas:

a. Academic development: School counselors help students obtain and maintain the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed for academic success in the present and for the future.

b. Personal/social development: School counselors engage students in activities to promote positive interpersonal knowledge, attitudes and skills. These assets are central to helping students make healthy decisions, set reasonable personal goals,
cope with difficult and stressful situations and consider their personal safety inside and outside the school setting
c. Career development: School counselors help students understand their personal skills and talents in ways that allow them to acquire skills for exploring the world of work and for making informed career decisions.” (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2006, para. 5)

Free and reduced lunch program- This program is part of the National School Lunch Program, a federal program that provides free and reduced-price lunches to students from low-income families.

Mobile student- A student who enrolls in a new school from within the county, outside the county, outside the state, or outside the country after the school year has started. This definition does not include promotional transfer from one school to another. For this study, the terms mobile student and new student are synonymous and are used interchangeably.

No Child Left Behind- The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, often abbreviated NCLB, was passed by the administration of President George W. Bush. NCLB attempts to improve academic performance in pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade students by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts, and schools. Districts and schools must demonstrate adequate yearly progress toward meeting state standards for all students. The focus of NCLB is “to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind” (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, para. 2).
Summary of Chapter

The phenomenon of students moving from one high school to another during the school year occurs throughout the U.S. School officials, in particular school counselors, must be prepared for the arrival of mobile students, as one study found that 17% of school-aged children moved in the previous year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Researchers have outlined the effects of student mobility, including lower academic achievement, higher rates of disciplinary problems and suspensions, and struggles with acclimating socially. Yet this growing population’s needs remain undetermined. The lack of research exploring mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs leaves school counselors without the knowledge to adequately support this population. By listening to the lived experiences of mobile students, I understood their needs during this transition process. This study describes the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile students, providing this population with a voice through which to identify areas where support is vitally needed.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter highlights research on three components integral to understanding the needs of mobile high school students (tenth to twelfth grade students enrolling into a new high school from another school cluster/county/state/country once the school year has started). The first component is the role of the school counselor in addressing mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs. The second component is the development of adolescents. To comprehend of the needs of mobile students, the developmental stages of adolescent students are examined. The subsections within the second component include academic, personal/social, and career skills students develop during adolescence in the educational setting. From my experience, mobile students who change schools miss opportunities to develop various academic, personal/social, and career skills; therefore, the examination of adolescent development is critical to the understanding of mobile students needs. The research pertaining to mobile students outlines particular commonalities; the third component is the commonalities of mobile students. The subsections comprising this component are sociodemographics, academic achievement, disciplinary concerns, and socialization issues. The research outlines the effects of student mobility, highlighting the lack of research in the holistic (academic, personal/social, and career) needs of mobile students.

Role of the School Counselor

After extensive research, in 2003 the National Center for Transforming School Counseling created a new vision of the school counseling field to ensure that all students are educated and supported holistically. The Transforming School Counseling Initiative
(TSCI) was initially adopted by seventy-five programs consisting of university training programs, state departments of education, school districts, and various national organizations, specifically the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) (The Education Trust, 2009). In 2003, this organization incorporated the TSCI vision into a publication entitled *The ASCA National Model: A Foundation for School Counseling Programs*, which outlined a Comprehensive School Counseling Program (CSCP). The new edition of the ASCA National Model will be released Summer of 2012. “The comprehensive program ensures that school counseling services are delivered more consistently and requires school counselors to help students make progress in the following specific areas of academic, personal/social, and career development” (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2006, para. 4).

The ASCA National Model set forth the expectation that school counselors must serve as advocates, facilitating academic success for all students and collaborating with parents, teachers, and administrators to diminish the impact of societal and institutional barriers that hinder such success (The Education Trust, 2009). Examples of barriers that students face preventing access to development opportunities may include parental employment obstacles resulting in emotional and financial strain on the family and student as well as financial struggles removing computer/internet access at home for academic and/or career development. School counselors must also manage a CSCP comprised of the ASCA’s three domains of academic, personal/social, and career development for all students (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2006). A CSCP provides all students with access to resources for holistic development as school
counselors were instructed to implement these measures using classroom guidance, group counseling, and individual counseling.

Foster, Young, and Hermann (2005) assessed the daily tasks performed by school counselors in the domains of academic, personal/social, and career development. Their mixed methods research study was based on a job analysis survey completed by 526 nationally certified school counselors throughout the U.S. Overall, the results from this study indicated that:

1. School counselors rated the academic development of students as “moderately to very important” and “occasionally to frequently performed” academic development work activities.

2. School counselors rated the career development of students as “somewhat to moderately important” and “rarely to occasionally performed” career development work activities.

3. School counselors rated the personal/social development of students as “moderately to very important” and the reported frequency of performing these personal/social development activities ranged from “rarely to frequently.”

In the study, the school counselors acknowledged the importance of the three domains while specifically noting they are not giving enough attention to the career development work duties. These results also reflect an individual, reactive manner of support rather than the proactive manner of the ASCA National Model; the model promotes and encourages school counselors to meet the needs of all students in the three domains. The ASCA National Model also suggests that school counselors should spend
approximately 80 percent of their time providing direct services to students (ASCA, 2005) such as classroom guidance, group counseling, and individual counseling.

The most important element of the ASCA National Model is the requirement that school counselors design, implement, assess, and enhance a CSCP that supports the needs of all students (ASCA, 2009). The specific counseling and guidance needs of students increase and change in content as students mature (Kesici, 2007). Sink and Stroh (2003) completed a causal comparative study of 150 elementary schools in the state of Washington. The authors found that students aged eight to eleven who attended a school with a CSCP had significantly higher grades and higher standardized test scores than those attending schools without an engaged CSCP. Sink and Stroh further noted that schools with a CSCP produced higher scores regardless of the students’ socioeconomic status.

As students progress from elementary to middle school, school counseling departments must continue to provide developmentally appropriate programs for the students. Stott and Jackson (2005) evaluated a comprehensive middle school guidance program based upon the implementation of a service-learning class, which began in one middle school and was subsequently adopted by 180 other middle schools in the area. The service-learning course’s curriculum was based on academic, career, and personal/social development, and multicultural/global citizenship. The phenomenological evaluation conducted by Stott and Jackson (2005) concluded, based on student reports and interviews, that the students participated in an internship and job shadow experience as well as acquired skills of respect, responsibility, altruism, and gratitude. Stott and Jackson (2005) also found that the class:
1. allowed the students to show their authentic selves;
2. provided an environment for co-learning, in which the students improved their acceptance of others;
3. produced a higher academic achievement.

Comprehensive school counseling programs, regardless of school level, provide academic, personal/social, and career development opportunities that positively impact all students (Sink & Stroh, 2003; Stott & Jackson, 2005).

The school counselor’s role must incorporate inclusive and proactive support for all students, regardless of when they enter the school. The ASCA promotes holistic support for all students, emphasizing the importance of academic, personal/social, and career development. Mobile students may enter a school at any point during the school year, arriving from different schools with varying programs that address academic, personal/social, and career development. Holistically supporting this population generally falls to the school counselor; yet, there is no literature pertaining to the needs of mobile students. Understanding mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs will allow school counselors to effectively support and promote the development of these students in all three domains.

**Development of Adolescents**

As a previous middle school counselor and currently a high school counselor, I have found that mobile students who change schools miss opportunities to develop various academic, personal/social, and career skills; therefore, the examination of adolescent development is critical to the understanding of mobile students needs.
Academic Development of Adolescents

High school students fall into an exclusive developmental stage known as adolescence, which is distinct from that of a child or adult; these teens have developed beyond early childhood programs but not yet are ready for adult opportunities (Stevens et al., 2007). Research on cognitive developmental stages began in the twentieth century, pioneered by theorists Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and L.S. Vygotsky. Piaget focused largely on how children acquired knowledge (Boeree, 2006). Kohlberg expanded Piaget’s theory to introduce a stage theory pertaining to moral thinking (Murray, 2008). Vygotsky’s social-historical theory of cognitive development expanded Piaget’s on the concept of abstract reasoning by focusing on the interaction of environmental and developmental influences in advancing children’s abstract thinking (Crain, 2000). By examining adolescents’ cognitive development, Piaget, Kohlberg, and Vygotsky identified the types of skills this age group may acquire.

Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory (1972) centers on the concepts of assimilation and accommodation, which work together to explain all cognitive transformations. As children move through developmental stages advancing their cognitive skills, they assimilate new information into preexisting schemas. Accommodation allows children to adjust those internal schemas when necessary to integrate new information. Piaget labeled the stage of the cognitive developmental process that applies to high school adolescents as the “formal operations stage” (Piaget, 1972). In this stage, adolescents use logical operations in an abstract manner in the development of hypothetical thinking (Piaget, 1972). High school students who have reached this cognitive stage can create and challenge hypothetical scenarios, implement
creative opinions, participate in reasoned discussions, develop alternative strategies to solve problems, reflect on their thought progressions, and prepare for the future (Rice & Dolgin, 2005). These cognitive skills improve as adolescents mature through high school and into adulthood.

Piaget’s cognitive developmental stages provide the foundation for the core values of today’s U.S. educational system. Defrates-Densch (2002) points out that these stages influenced the educational system in the United States by incorporating the following ideas:

1. knowledge must be actively constructed by the child;
2. educators should help children learn how to learn;
3. learning activities should be matched to the child's level of conceptual development; and
4. peer interactions play an important role in the child's cognitive development.

(para. 8)

Building on these core values, Woolfolk and McCune-Nicolich (1984) articulated teaching strategies that incorporate Piaget’s theory. For example, providing high school students with an opportunity to explain how they arrived at an answer develops the formal operational stage skill of reflecting on one’s own thinking processes. Similarly, allowing students to discuss various options for answers develops the skill of hypothetical thinking (Woolfolk & McCune-Nicolich, 1984). High school students demonstrate the attainment of various formal operations skills both in the classroom setting and on assessments.
Building on Piaget’s theory, Kohlberg’s stages of moral development describe children’s cognitive progression through six levels of moral reasoning. Kohlberg’s theory focuses on how children confronted with moral dilemmas reason differently at various stages of development (Kohlberg, 1963). As a child assesses a moral dilemma and reaches a conclusion, the reasoning behind the conclusion reflects the level of cognitive processing the child has achieved and thus determines the specific level of moral development (Kohlberg, 1963).

Kohlberg examined children’s role-taking capacities and ability to consider others’ viewpoints at each stage of moral development (Kohlberg, 1976). Adolescence is often the time when individuals begin to develop empathy and an understanding of others’ roles in society. Adolescents also comprehend their own role as members of society who are required to uphold expectations and societal norms. As development continues, adolescents focus on the importance of following society’s laws to sustain the social order (Kohlberg, 1981). Like Piaget, Kohlberg acknowledged the specific unidirectional stages through which cognitive capacities develop during adolescence.

Vygotsky’s social-historical theory of cognitive development emphasized that children possess not only internal psychological tools, but additional, external tools whose availability depends on the child’s social context. Both types of tools, he argued, influence the child’s acquisition of new cognitive skills (Vygotsky, 1930). Vygotsky identified “sign systems,” such as speech, writing, and numbering, as key tools involved in cognitive activity, thus emphasizing the crucial influence of social interaction on cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1930). While Vygotsky acknowledged that children develop various skills on their own, he also argued that instruction encourages children to
attain higher levels of thinking (Vygotsky, 1934). His concept of the “zone of proximal development,” which he defines as what one can do without help versus what one can do with help, explains how school instruction promotes cognitive development by enabling adolescents to perform beyond their current level of thinking (Vygotsky, 1935).

Like Piaget, Vygotsky emphasized children’s awareness of their own thought processes and regulation of their own behavior as key elements in their cognitive development. However, Vygotsky also highlighted the role of social interaction in producing such awareness and behavior regulation. Thus, for Vygotsky, the presence of teachers and capable peers was required for continued cognitive development among adolescents (Vygotsky, 1934).

**Academic skills of adolescents.** While Piaget, Kohlberg, and Vygotsky presented developmental theories pertaining to adolescents’ cognitive processing, recent researchers also identified specific skills required for adolescents’ academic success within the school setting. In the high school setting, cognitive development is measured by academic comprehension and achievement (ACT, 2007); thus, academic competence exemplifies cognitive development. Dzubak (2010) described academic skills as generally referring to “reading, writing, and math but certainly, more than ever, it also includes critical thinking and application of knowledge” (p. 2).

A detailed description of critical thinking skills includes the ability “to compare and contrast points of view; to interpret findings and contradictory data; to support an opinion with justifying source material; to construct a logical argument and defend it; and to solve complex problems, including those without obvious solutions” (Conley, 2008, p. 2). Academic skills also include the use of effective study strategies and problem solving
skills (Dzubak, 2010; Schleicher & Stewart, 2008). Throughout high school, students are expected to develop and continuously improve these academic skills.

The work of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Vygotsky provided a description of cognitive development during adolescence, exploring the manner in which adolescents reflect on their thought processes utilizing abstract thinking. The work of recent researchers demonstrates that high school adolescents obtain such skills as increased proficiency in internal reflection, participation in hypothetical discussions, and problem solving (Conley, 2008; Dzubak, 2010; Schleicher & Stewart, 2008). The findings of these researchers support the cognitive frameworks provided by Piaget, Kohlberg, and Vygotsky.

**Personal/Social Development of Adolescents**

During adolescence, teens often experience heightened emotions (Erikson 1959). As with cognitive development, adolescents’ perspectives on the world and their emotional processing itself may undergo significant changes during this time. Theorists Eric Erikson, Albert Bandura, and Carol Gilligan examined adolescents’ emotional development and relationship to the world as a means of uncovering their personal/social needs (Crain, 2000).

Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development provide a sequential model of the biological maturation and social expectations that comprise human development (Erikson, 1963). As human beings move through the stages, Erikson argues, their needs change. Adolescents fall into Erickson’s fifth stage, which he refers to as “Identity versus Role Confusion” (Erikson, 1963). Teens search within themselves to determine their individual identity, evaluating and selecting the values they will take with them into
adulthood. The uncertainty involved in establishing one’s identity may produce discomfort and role confusion, creating unsettling emotions within adolescents (Erikson, 1959).

Relationships with peers also play an important role in shaping adolescent identity. Adolescents often cling to their peer group, drawing on a sense of similarity to help develop a sense of identity (Erikson, 1963). Simultaneously, adolescents search for elements of difference or uniqueness that distinguish them from their peers, their parents, or other adults in their lives (Erikson, 1959). As Kohlberg found, empathy often begins to develop during the adolescent years, allowing teens to understand others’ perspectives and roles in the world (Kohlberg, 1958). Kohlberg’s findings support Erikson’s view that adolescent emotional development centers around the development of identity and a sense of one’s role in society, and that this stage often triggers unsettling emotions.

Adolescents’ personal/social development also varies depending upon one’s racial/ethnic identity. There are multiple models of ethnic identity development for specific groups such as African-Americans, Latino-Americans, and Asian-Americans (Arce, 1981; Cross, 1971; Ruiz, 1990). However, Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1989) developed the Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model (R/CID) to encompass one identity development model including commonalities amongst the specific population’s model such as conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness. Erikson’s focus on understanding one’s identity does not take into account the racial/ethnic group with which the adolescent identifies. Adolescent minorities may be at varying stages of their individual identity development, from identifying with dominant group to acceptance of their own group. Unlike other models
of development in which the individual progresses through all of the various stages, the authors of R/CID noted that not everyone experiences all stages of the model, as some may stop at the dissonance or introspection and never progress to the integrative awareness stage (Atkinson et al., 1989). The adolescent’s racial/cultural identity development contributes to his or her own personal/social development.

Psychologist Albert Bandura further contributed to our understanding of adolescent personal/social development through his social learning theory. Like Vygotsky, who emphasized the role of social interaction in cognitive development, Bandura focused on the influence of social interaction on affective development. Bandura highlighted the relationship between cognitive development, observational learning, and environmental influences such as parents, peers, and teachers (Bandura, 1977). His theory focused on how adolescents learn acceptable behavior by observing the behavior of others (known as “models”) and imitating those behaviors deemed desirable (Bandura, 1977).

Observing models’ behavior also allows adolescents to learn the consequences of new behaviors; positive results reinforce motivation to reproduce the behavior. Bandura’s theory explains how adolescents assess and regulate their own behavior. Assessing their strengths and weakness based upon their behaviors and the resulting environmental responses allows adolescents to create self-efficacy appraisals (Bandura, 1986), particularly in such aspects of their life as friendships and dating. Social interaction contributes to adolescents’ emotional development as they continuously observe others’ behaviors, imitate selected behaviors, and internally assess areas of efficacy.
While Erikson and Bandura provided detailed description of adolescents developing their identity, personal values, and relationships, Carol Gilligan pushed forward and discovered the distinction between boys and girls during adolescent personal/social development. Gilligan’s Moral Development Theory examined adolescent’s personal/social development noting distinct differences amongst males and females pertaining to relationships and morality (1982). In contrast with males, females emphasize care for others, relationships and a sense of connectedness to be more important. Gilligan noted adolescent male approach to morality is based upon the individual’s basic rights while having respect for other’s rights, whereas adolescent female approach to morality focuses on the responsibilities people have to others (1982). She detailed a sequence of three levels of females’ moral development including one’s self as the center, then abandoning one’s selfishness to focus on self-sacrifice, and lastly the discovery of the importance of individual needs as well as others’ needs (1982). Gilligan is critiqued for focusing on White, middle-class females and encouraged to incorporate various ethnicities eliciting a multicultural perspective to female moral development (Woods, 1996). However, Gilligan provided a spotlight onto females’ personal/social development, giving females a voice and a description of their differences amongst males.

Erikson, Bandura, Gilligan, and Atkinson et. al outlined the personal/social development of adolescents searching to discover their identity and increase self-efficacy. Adolescents need to build relationships to find similarities with and differences from peers as a means of understanding who they are. In the high school setting, classrooms provide a microcosm of the outside world, fostering relationships among students and
between the students and teachers. High schools thus provide opportunities for adolescents to learn and improve such social skills as communication and conflict resolution skills.

**Personal/social skills of adolescents.** The American School Counselors Association (ASCA, 2005) defines personal/social development as “maximizing each student’s growth and social maturity in the areas of personal management and social interaction” (p. 152). School counseling researchers have identified specific skills and characteristics that promote personal/social development among high school adolescents. Wagner (1999), for example, found that self-acceptance, the capacity to build positive relationships, self-confidence, and cross-cultural knowledge are effective in fostering social learning and educational persistence.

A not-for-profit organization called the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) created an evidence-based program, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), designed to advance social and emotional competence among children. PATHS’ research and evidence-based curriculum address the following social and emotional skills: identifying emotions, managing emotions, solving problems, and building relationships (CASEL, 2003). Similarly, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), another organization seeking to enhance adolescents’ personal/social development, identified four social skills that positively influence adolescents' academics, peer and family relationships, and participation in school activities (NASP, 2002). They include survival skills when communicating with others, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, and conflict resolution skills. By providing
opportunities to develop and expand such skills in the high school setting, educators promote adolescents’ emotional development and support their personal/social growth.

**Career Development of Adolescents**

Theorists such as John Holland, Donald Super, and John Krumboltz have examined adolescents’ vocational development and the assortment of factors influencing career choice (Holland, 1959; Krumboltz, 1991; Super, 1957). Together, Holland’s trait-factor theory, Super’s developmental theory, and Krumboltz’s social learning and cognitive theory explore the interaction of adolescents’ affective and cognitive development as well as their impact on career interest and selection (Zunker, 2006).

Holland’s trait-factor approach to vocational interest and personality development proposes that career selection is an illustration of one’s personality, and individuals choose a career path because it meets their personal needs (Holland, 1959). Holland’s typology consists of six modal personal orientation themes describing six personal orientations and a preferred occupational environment corresponding with each one (Holland, 1959). Modal personal style, or one’s self-concept with reference to one’s vocational preference, changes and adjusts as one develops and achieves a deeper self-concept. Holland argued that the development of self-concept in combination with an individual’s social experiences influence the theme, personal style, and occupational environment the individual is likely to select (Holland, 1973).

Super developed what he termed a “life-span, life-space” approach to occupational aspirations, in which career development is viewed as a continual process consisting of multiple life roles (Super, 1980). As individuals grow from childhood to adulthood, Super (1957) noted, they progress through specific stages associated with
particular developmental tasks. The tasks represent the evolution of vocational choice and career growth through the processes of exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline (Super, 1980). In Super’s model, adolescent vocational development falls into the exploratory stage, in which career choices are narrowed and individuals progress through such tasks as crystallization, specification, and implementation of career preference (Super, 1980). Super highlighted the concept of career maturity, defined as readiness to make educational and vocational choices (Super, 1974). Adolescents develop career maturity by gaining insight into their vocational interests and values, narrowing potential career preferences towards a specific preference, and beginning training for the specified vocational preference (Super, 1974).

John Krumboltz’s original social learning theory of career decision making eventually evolved into the learning theory of career counseling (LTCC) (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). This theory emphasizes the impact of life events on career choice (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Krumboltz outlined four factors critical in the career development process: “(1) genetic endowments and special abilities, (2) environmental conditions and events, (3) learning experiences, and (4) task approach skills” (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996, p. 246). Whether direct or indirect and whether positive or negative, individuals’ learning experiences provide personal awareness of skills, interest, values, beliefs, and personality preferences, all of which guide occupational choice (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999). Krumboltz and Worthington (1999) note that continuous experiential learning promotes skills to create a fulfilling life; however, the components of a fulfilling life are individually defined.
**Career skills of adolescents.** Adolescents are given a variety of opportunities in high school to learn skills that promote career development. The U.S. Department of Education (2007) has highlighted the need for high school students to learn to assemble career portfolios, create resumes, and compose cover letters to prospective employers. Students must also learn to locate and evaluate vocational information, understand the impact of educational achievement on career planning, and recognize how environmental needs influence career interest and planning (Efird & Wiggins, 2004).

The National Career Development Association (NCDA, 2008) also identified the importance of increasing self-knowledge and developing a positive self-concept for adolescents’ vocational growth and awareness. It is crucial, they noted, that adolescents receive “information on career options, the type of academic and occupational training needed to succeed in the workplace, and postsecondary opportunities that are associated with their field of interest” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, para. 2). Opportunities such as job shadowing, work placements, and community-based learning programs provide students with on-the-job experience and foster self-knowledge (NCDA, 2008). Enhancing students’ awareness and knowledge of various careers helps them identify their own vocational preferences and promotes positive career development.

Theorists provided a holistic explanation of the academic, personal/social, and career development of all adolescents. Recent researchers also examined how the high school setting contributes to the maturation of adolescents as they learn specific skills within each developmental area. Understanding the developmental needs of all adolescents outlines the importance of providing holistic support to all students.
Commonalities of Mobile Students

Sociodemographics

Various demographic populations, particularly minorities and the economically disadvantaged, have been linked to higher-than-average school dropout rates (Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Wildeman & Western, 2010); such populations may also experience higher rates of relocation than other groups. Mobile families often do not own a home and are headed by a single parent (Xu, Hannaway, & D’Souza, 2009). Ligon and Paredes (1992) found a strong relationship between low socioeconomic status and greater mobility among students. More recently, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2010) found that students who identify as low socioeconomic status, African-American, or limited English proficiency (LEP) are more likely to change schools frequently. Mao, Whitsett, and Mellor (1997) found further that economically disadvantaged mobile students scored lower on state-mandated tests than economically advantaged mobile students. The sociodemographics of mobile students thus contribute to the at-risk nature of this population.

Academic Achievement of Mobile Students

Researchers continue to demonstrate the negative impact of student mobility on academic achievement. Two widely used measures of academic achievement are the grade point average and standardized assessments. Ou and Reynolds (2008) performed a 20-year prospective longitudinal study with 1,300 youth, examining the child-, family-, and school-related predictors of educational attainment. The authors concluded that a higher frequency of changing schools predicted significantly lower levels of educational attainment.
Another study, based on National Education Longitudinal Survey data from 11,671 students, examined the impact of student mobility between the eighth and twelfth grades. Researchers Rumberger and Larson (1998) found that student mobility reduces the likelihood of graduating from high school, and students with higher academic achievement are less likely to have changed schools. The data from both studies demonstrate a positive correlation between academic achievement and non-mobile students, and the negative impact of mobility on a student’s grade point average and standardized assessment results.

**Inconsistent curriculum.** Mobile students enroll in a new academic environment and receive a new schedule of courses. While the courses may be similar to their previous schedule, often mobile students begin different courses. Prout (2009) interviewed eight educational specialists on the impact of student mobility. A common theme in their responses was a concern that changing curricula would result in gaps in learning specific skills (Prout, 2009). The author noted that exceptional students are often able to handle a new curriculum; however, that was not the case for the majority of new students (Prout, 2009). Dunn, Kadane, and Garrow (2003) analyzed assessment and course information and concluded that inconsistent attendance resulting from student mobility negatively impacted the grade point average of high school juniors (Dunn et al., 2003). The traditional high school curricula are designed for students to learn the material over the course of the entire school year. Thus, students who move frequently will miss sections of course content and inevitably fall behind.

**School-wide impact.** The academic achievement of all students became a national priority when President George W. Bush approved the No Child Left Behind
(NCLB) Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). NCLB emphasized the critical role of standardized assessments in ensuring adequate learning outcomes. These assessments also provide schools the opportunity to illustrate academic achievement. Each state and school district now receives an annual report card based on its standardized testing results in the areas of language arts and math; the report cards are publicized to parents and communities to raise awareness of state and school progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

The achievement level of mobile students impacts the high-stakes standardized test results of schools. One research study by Dunn, Kadane, and Garrow (2003) examined the relationship between educational achievement, student mobility, and student absences. The authors measured academic achievement by the students’ performance on standardized tests. Specifically, the scores of eleventh graders in the Pittsburgh Public Schools revealed a negative correlation between student mobility and standardized test scores; as student mobility increased, standardized test scores decreased (Dunn et al., 2003).

Another research study by Sanderson (2004) also focused on standardized assessments and their relationship to student mobility. Sanderson (2004) disaggregated the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) data for the school district of Granite Rock, examining the PSSA results for three consecutive years. The author’s goal was to uncover the impact of mobile students on the state’s standardized test scores. In eleven of twelve findings in math and reading, the mobile students scored lower than the native students, negatively impacting the overall results of the Granite Rock school district.
Ream (2005) reported similar findings in a quantitative study using longitudinal data to examine the low test scores of Mexican American youth. The researcher compared the twelfth grade test scores of frequently mobile Mexican Americans with those of non-mobile Non-Latino Whites. Ream concluded that student mobility not only negatively impacted the students’ academic achievement, but also negatively impacted the school’s overall test scores.

**Disciplinary Concerns of Mobile Students**

Students may withdraw from one school and enroll in a new school in the middle of the school year for a variety of reasons, including a parent’s employment change, bereavement, or divorce. New students may thus be coping with numerous stressors beyond adjustment to a new school and new peers, and often this heightened stress is demonstrated in their behavior. Engec (2006) found a positive correlation between the number of times the students moved/enrolled in schools within the school year and the number of in- and out-of-school suspensions. Engec’s quantitative study was based on the 1997-1998 school year student suspension rates of mobile and non-mobile students in the Louisiana Public School Student Information System. During the 1997-1998 school year, students who enrolled in four or more different schools in the school year had the highest number of in- and out-of-school suspensions, and the students that did not change schools had the lowest number of in- and out-of-school suspensions (Engec, 2006). Moreover, the lower a student’s number of moves within the school year, the fewer the number of suspensions (Engec, 2006).

Haynie and South (2005) analyzed data from 8,038 middle and high school students who contributed to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The
authors found a positive correlation between residential mobility and participation in violence. The authors used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health 1994-1995, which defined violence as “fighting, pulled a knife or gun on someone, shot or stabbed someone, and used a weapon in a fight” (Chantala, Kalsbeek, & Andraca, n.d., p. 17). The authors proposed that the increased involvement in violence resulted from the weak family relationships, higher psychological stressors, increased experiences of victimization, and loss of amity reported by participants (Haynie & South, 2005).

Researchers continue to link mobility and disciplinary concerns (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Boon (2011) studied 1,127 high school students to determine the connection between mobility, academic achievement, suspensions, and coping strategies. The author noted a statistically significant positive correlation between mobility and suspensions. South, Crowder, and Trent (1998) examined the impact of divorce on students and found that as a result of divorce, previously non-mobile students often became mobile students. Their quantitative study, based upon the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, demonstrated that divorce often forced parents to remove children from their previous school and community and move to a community of a lower economic status, which may subject students to higher crime rates and deviant peers (South et al., 1998).

Socialization Issues of Mobile Students

Friendships and peer support are vital in an adolescent’s life, and mobile students must leave those who are most important behind. As adolescents experience the challenges of becoming new students, they do so without their peer support system. Marlett (1993) asked 30 students what they worried about during the switch to a new
school. Peer relations were the main concern of all the students surveyed (Marlett, 1993). Norford and Medway (2002) found similar results when they studied high school students in grades 10-12 in a medium-sized city. With numerous options given, 67 percent of the mobile students reported that leaving their friends was the worst thing about moving (Norford & Medway, 2002). The authors also noted a negative correlation between the number of moves and participation in extracurricular activities such as playing school sports and joining student clubs, which provide an opportunity to build new friendships (Norford & Medway, 2002). By failing to participate in such activities, students who are highly mobile instantly lose numerous opportunities to make new friends.

South and Haynie (2004) analyzed the quantitative data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which included approximately 13,000 adolescents in grades 7-12. They concluded that new students are likely to have fewer friends and are more likely to be isolated (South & Haynie, 2004). Enrolling in a new school and forming new friendships was found to be harder for older than younger adolescents and more difficult for girls than for boys (South & Haynie, 2004).

During high school adolescents struggle to discover who they are, relying in large part on a support system of peers who offer acceptance and provide interaction (Muller & Hartman, 1998). This process is interrupted for new students, and the data illustrate that leaving friends behind and seeking a place in a new social network cause a great deal of stress, which can further heighten the risk of school failure. South, Haynie, and Bose (2007) examined various factors contributing to the high dropout rate of mobile students and found a link between the lack of a peer network and mobile student dropout rates.
Peer relationships play a vital role in the development and happiness of adolescents; research demonstrates the strain mobility places on students and their friendships.

**Future Exploration**

Various researchers have examined the effects of student mobility on academic achievement (Dunn, Kadane, & Garrow, 2003; Ligon & Paredes, 1992; Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1997; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Sanderson, 2004; Wildeman & Western, 2010); disciplinary concerns (Engec, 2006; Haynie & South, 2005; McEvoy & Welker, 2000; South, Crowder, & Trent, 1998); and socialization issues (Marlett, 1993; Norford & Medway, 2002; South & Haynie, 2004). The present literature seeks to better understand the effects or consequences of student mobility rather than the needs of this population. Preparing students for various post-secondary options includes nurturing mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career development. The absence of research pertaining to the holistic (academic, personal/social, and career) development of mobile students leaves educators lacking the inclusive, comprehensive knowledge to offer the support this population needs.

**Summary of Chapter**

This chapter examined the role of the school counselor in supporting the holistic development of all students. Researchers have outlined the importance of a comprehensive school counseling program providing academic, personal/social, and career development (ASCA, 2009; Sink & Stroh, 2003; Stott & Jackson, 2005). School counselors are charged with the task of holistically supporting all students--including mobile students--yet an examination of mobile students’ holistic needs (academic, personal/social, and career) is unavailable. How can school counselors address mobile
students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs if these needs have never been examined? This research emerges from the recognition of how crucial it is to fill the gap in our knowledge of mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs, and to provide school counselors with an understanding of how to most effectively and holistically support mobile students.

This chapter provided an overview of theoretical perspectives addressing the academic, personal/social, and career development and maturation of adolescents. Researchers have examined adolescent’s academic, personal/social, and career development, detailing the influence of the high school setting on the growth of such skills. Understanding the development of all adolescents outlines the importance of providing holistic support to all students.

After examining the developmental stages of adolescents, the research pertaining to mobile students was examined. Various studies reviewed here examined important considerations relevant to mobile students. Specifically, researchers observed common sociodemographic variables among many mobile students, noting the high percentage of these students who come from minority groups, economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and/or single parent homes. The research also identified mobile students’ lower academic achievement, higher rates of suspension, and struggles with socialization issues; therefore, the research examined the effects of student mobility. This literature highlights the lack of research regarding important considerations of mobile students’ holistic (academic, personal/social, and career) development. While numerous researchers have studied the consequences of student mobility, a significant gap exists with regard to research on the holistic development of mobile students.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology of this research study including the following components: conceptual framework, research participants, research procedure/data collection, instrumentation, data analysis, and trustworthiness. Additionally, I included a section discussing researcher bias, which addresses the trustworthiness of this research study.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding the “how” or “what” is the focus of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). This research study employed a phenomenological approach, which described the participant’s experience of the identified event or phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Phenomenological researchers focus on the detailed descriptions the participants’ experiences and identify commonalities within their experiences pertaining to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Through the participants’ in-depth knowledge pertaining to the phenomenon (student mobility), the phenomenological researcher obtains a deeper essence of mobile students lived experiences by focusing on their efforts to make meaning of the experience. The researcher then organized and coded this data, identifying common themes that emerged as a result of this process. These themes outlined the underlying structures of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007).

This study explored the essence of the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile students at one Southeastern metropolitan high school. Student mobility is a phenomenon affecting students’ academic achievement (Dunn, Kadane, & Garrow, 2003; Wildeman & Western, 2010), behavior at school (Enged, 2006; Haynie & South, 2005),
and social adjustment (Norford & Medway, 2002; South & Haynie, 2004). School counselors holistically support and promote the academic, personal/social, and career development of all students. Because no previous research has investigated mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs, school counselors may struggle to identify effective means of holistically supporting this population. This phenomenological study provided an in-depth description of the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile students as a means of helping school counselors better serve these students.

The theoretical framework and lens used in this research study is drawn from Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This developmental theory examined the student within a broader context, noting the effects of the following systems:

1. Microsystem: the setting or immediate environment in which the student lives: family, peers, school, neighborhood
2. Mesosystem: relations between microsystems and the relations between family experience and school experience; family to peers; school to church
3. Exosystem: social settings in which the student does not have an active role yet the experience impacts the student, such as neighborhood/community, extended family members, mass media, and various agencies of government
4. Macrosystem: relations between exosystem and attitudes and values of the culture in which the student resides
5. Chronosystem: relations between macrosystem and the experiences and environmental events over the student’s lifetime. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977)
Bronfenbrenner’s approach illuminates the mobile student’s experiences within their environment--consisting of cultural experiences, family experiences, and community experiences--over the course of their lifetime. The premise of this approach is that students’ cultural, family, and community contexts influence their academic, personal/social, and career development. This model enabled the researcher to identify the systems that are impacted during mobility and described the student’s adjustment process. In particular, the ecological systems model provided a framework for examining how societal values and policies may perpetuate injustice and oppression faced by mobile students who are also members of marginalized groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Overall, this study viewed mobile students’ needs in the broad context provided by the ecological model’s multiple layers.

**Research Participants**

The research participants in this study were drawn from a suburban high school in Georgia. The county is one of the largest in the state and its school system educates over 86,600 students. The county has also welcomed over 27,000 new students in the past decade. The specific high school’s population in this study consists of almost 2,700 students. This suburban high school’s racial demographics include: 79% White American, 8% African-American, 6% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 2% Multiracial. Among these, 6% of students identify as economically disadvantaged and are served by the Free and Reduced Lunch program.

To support the methodology of a phenomenological study, I utilized purposeful sampling, specifically maximum variation sampling, to gather participants (Creswell, 2007). I began by gathering the names of all new students who enrolled after the official
start of the fall 2011 semester. The students who participated in this research study will be new students who enrolled in the high school from another school once the school year has started. From the list, I removed all ninth graders, as all ninth graders are new to high school and my operational definition of a mobile student pertains specifically to tenth to twelfth grade students. Also, there were numerous new students who entered with siblings; therefore, siblings in grades tenth to twelfth were eligible. I then invited the remaining tenth through twelfth grade students on the list to participate in this study through an individual meeting with the potential participant. The students were asked to participate in two individual interviews and a focus group consisting of all the participants. However, the students were reluctant and unwilling to participate in the focus group portion of the study. They stated that they would be embarrassed to discuss their unhappiness in front of other students and did not want other students to be aware of their positive or negative experiences in transitioning to the high school; they were also apprehensive that confidentiality could not be guaranteed. With the participants disinclined to participate in the focus group, that data collection method was removed from the study. The students received consent forms that were completed by a parent/guardian and an additional assent form the student completed agreeing to participate in two individual interviews of the study. The six students who returned their completed consent and assent forms comprised the participants for my study. Specifically, the focus of this study was to understand how mobile students make meaning of their academic, personal/social and career needs entering a new high school; therefore, obtaining six participants and individually interviewing them twice provided a detailed description of the essence of the mobile student’s needs.
Demographics

The participants’ demographic information was compiled from the schools intranet as well as the students during their individual interviews. The students’ demographics gathered from the high school’s electronic records provided background information such as grade, gender, race, and socioeconomic status (i.e., participation in the Free and Reduced Lunch program). The individual interviews provided information such as where the mobile student relocated from as well as whether they moved from outside the county, state, or continental U.S.; the number of times the student moved since they started kindergarten; the number of times the student moved during the high school time period; and the number of siblings at the high school.

Table 1: Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number of Moves Since Kindergarten</th>
<th>Number of Moves During High School</th>
<th>Moved from Outside the County, State, or Continental U.S. (Geographic Region)</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number of Siblings at the High School</th>
<th>Free &amp; Reduced Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelsey</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Outside the State (West)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outside the County</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Outside the State (West)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Outside the State (Midwest)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alejandro</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Outside the Continental U.S.</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Outside the State (Midwest)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Procedure and Data Collection

The research procedure for this phenomenological study followed the characteristics of qualitative research outlined by Creswell (2009): researcher as key instrument, theoretical lens and holistic account, and natural setting. These important descriptors outlined the research procedure and data collection method.
First, I was the researcher; therefore, I was the key instrument of this study. Qualitative researchers utilize a protocol, an instrument for data collection, often developing an instrument to meet the particular need of their study. The data collection instrument that was utilized was the set of interview questions I developed to meet the needs of this study. The interviews elicited information to making meaning of the mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs. Creswell emphasized the researcher’s key role in not only developing a data collection protocol, but in essentially gathering the data through interviews, examining documents, or observing behavior (Creswell, 2009). As the key instrument of this study, I developed the interview questions and individually interviewed the participants. I also supplemented the information received from the mobile students with another data collection method of examining documents, such as school records, that provided statistical data and background information such as ethnicity, grade, gender, and socioeconomic status (i.e., participation in the Free and Reduced Lunch program). This information was available through the school’s intranet and was helpful in the data analysis stage to highlight commonalities amongst the participants.

Another important characteristic of this qualitative study was the holistic account. Creswell (2009) described qualitative researchers providing holistic account as “identifying the many factors involved in a situation” (p. 176). I attempted to make meaning of the phenomenon of student mobility by identifying students’ academic, personal/social, and career developmental needs through the lens of ecological systems theory. By offering a view of the mobile student within a broader social context, this holistic theory illuminated mobile students’ cultural, family, and community experiences
over their lifetimes. Each of these experiences impacted mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career development and needs.

Because I examined the phenomenon of student mobility, the most appropriate and natural setting for data collection was the school building. The conference rooms at the high school were utilized as the interview location. The consent and assent forms signed by participants informed them that the interviews were tape recorded. Also included in the consent and assent forms was the opportunity for each participant and parent to review their transcript or their child’s transcript of the interview upon request. Another important aspect of the interview included in the consent and assent forms was the use of pseudonyms; therefore, the identity of the participant remained anonymous. The data collected was kept in a password locked computer to which only the researcher had access. Once all of the participants were interviewed, with the assistance of my research team, I coded the interviews and searched for common themes that emerged from the data.

I implemented the assistance of my research team who provided horizontalization and peer review as well as debriefing as an external check for this study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The research team consisted of two other members and myself. As the primary researcher, I am a White, female and a practicing high school counselor in my third year of a PhD program in Counseling and Student Personnel Services at a major Southeastern university. One of the additional peer research team members is an African-American, female and a practicing high school counselor, while the other is a White, male and a practicing college student affairs director; both members of the
research team are in my PhD cohort, working towards their degrees in Counseling and Student Personnel Services.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for the study consisted of semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 35 to 45 minutes, designed to elicit rich descriptions of the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile students. The researcher developed the interview questions (Appendix A) to gather information on each participant’s life history and experience pertaining to the phenomenon of student mobility, and encouraged participants to make meaning of their experience (Seidman, 2006). The questions followed a phenomenological and ecological systems framework as participants were asked to describe their experience of enrolling in a new school and to identify the various factors--such as family, friends, community, and the school itself--that impacted their experience. In developing the questions, it was a priority to use language that was developmentally appropriate for adolescents in a high school setting. The participants were interviewed individually twice and all of the interviews were audio recorded with the participants’ approval.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of a six-step process. First, I transcribed the audio recorded, semi-structured interviews with the participants. Second, I replayed the recorded interviews numerous times to better grasp the participants’ descriptions of their lived experiences. Third, I read the transcripts of their lived experiences while listening to the interviews. As a visual learner seeing the participants’ detailed experiences typed on the transcript as I heard their voice describing their experiences, I obtained an
understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of student mobility. Fourth, I wrote notes in the margins of the transcribed interviews to document my thoughts pertaining to the data and noted particular “significant statements or topics of the interview that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Fifth, the research team reviewed my notes and particular statements I highlighted, and then developed an official list of significant statements from the interviews about how the participants experienced the phenomenon of student mobility. The research team utilized horizontalization, recognizing that each significant statement has equal value regardless of what grade the mobile student was in or where the mobile student moved from. Sixth, in an electronic spreadsheet I clustered similar topics to help provide a description of the mobile students’ experience (Merriam, 2009). These topics became a codebook, which consisted of continuous themes the interviewees discuss. Sixth, the research team examined the three identified themes and two subthemes included in the codebook as well as significant statements supporting each theme and subtheme. After agreeing that two subthemes could stand alone as individual themes, the codebook was adjusted to reflect the five identified themes. The research team’s assistance in building the codebook and indentifying the themes increased the trustworthiness of this study.

In addition to the transcriptions of the interviews, my research team and I also examined the supplemental information (Table 1) pertaining to the participants such as ethnicity, grade, gender, and socioeconomic status (i.e., participation in the Free and Reduced Lunch program). As my research team and I identified themes that emerged
from the transcriptions, we also noted commonalities from the supplemental information of the participants with those emerged themes.

**Research Question**

The focus of this phenomenological study was to describe the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile students. This study was guided by the following research question (RQ):

How do mobile students at the high school under study describe their academic, personal/social, and career needs?

**Trustworthiness**

I utilized numerous strategies to ensure the authenticity of my study such as continuous peer briefing, member checks, and an examination of my own biases. The research team served as an external resource for peer briefing, reviewing not only my transcripts of the interviews but also the topics and interpretations outlined (Creswell, 2007). The team provided varied perspectives due to the members work settings such as two high school counselors and a college student affairs director as well as questioned the interpretations of the participants’ experiences. I also implemented member checks, allowing the participants and/or their parents to review their interview transcripts and note any necessary changes. As the primary researcher, I explored my “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach of the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). I shared my bias and experience pertaining to student mobility with my research team that might impact the data analysis. The other research team members also shared their experiences relating to this phenomenon. This discussion united the team resulting in a common interest to
understand mobile students’ experiences. Continuous peer briefing, member checks, and examining my individual biases after each interview was transcribed were all methods that enhanced the trustworthiness of my research study.

**Researcher Bias**

Following Creswell’s suggestion, I assessed my own biases pertaining to mobile students (Creswell, 2007). As a practicing school counselor, I routinely work with mobile high school students, from their initial enrollment through the class scheduling process to providing individual counseling if requested by a teacher, parent, and/or the student. Another component of my work with this population includes coordinating support services such as a New Student Breakfast and a New Student Group.

Working with mobile students in an individual counseling setting allows mobile students to disclose various concerns. I have observed that mobile students, and particularly those who come from out of state, experience greater than typical stress pertaining to college selection. For example, a mobile senior student coming from New York may be unfamiliar with Georgia colleges and universities, yet the student’s parents/guardians expect them to meet upcoming college application deadlines. I have sat with many out-of-state mobile senior students as they shed tears of sadness and frustration because they do not know which local colleges or universities to apply to. I must acknowledge that this scenario has had a profound impact on me.

The New Student Breakfast I hosted was aimed at welcoming new students by serving them breakfast while providing them with general school information. The New Student Group provided an opportunity for new students to discuss academic and personal/social topics such as getting involved in the high school, graduation
requirements, and making new friends. This group curriculum was already in place prior to my arrival; because of my passion for this population, I offered to facilitate the New Student Group. The group was created based upon topics that a previous school counselor deemed appropriate and necessary.

However, I began to question whether the content was truly beneficial in meeting this population’s needs. I witnessed firsthand the social, career, and academic struggles of mobile students, and it was these observations that led me to begin researching the needs of mobile students. When assessing the available research, I recognized that there is a lack of literature pertaining to mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs. Thus it is my perception that mobile students have particular needs in the areas of academic, personal/social, and career that led me to undertake this study. I realize, nevertheless, that my data may show that mobile students have particular needs in none of these areas, or in only one or two areas, and not necessarily in all three. Abandoning my perception will prevent my bias from influencing the study.

While my experience as a school counselor helps me to understand mobile students’ experience in transitioning into a new school, I personally have never been a mobile student. Therefore, personal experience as a mobile student will not influence the study. Nevertheless, in viewing students through my counseling lens, I do not to try to create meanings that are not present for the students themselves. I utilized my research team to help in this endeavor, encouraging them to question me throughout the process of reviewing the transcripts, margin notes, and searching for common themes.
Summary of Chapter

This chapter outlined the methodology of my phenomenological study examining the specific needs of mobile high school students. Ecological systems theory, created by Urie Bronfenbrenner, provided the lens through which the phenomenon of student mobility was examined. This study focused on describing the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile students. The data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews with students who identified as mobile students, met the criteria of being tenth through twelfth graders enrolled in a high school after the school year has started, and returned consent and assent forms. The trustworthiness of the study was strengthened by support from my research team, the opportunity offered to the participants’ of checking their interview transcripts, and the examination of my own biases. Data analysis incorporated my research team in analyzing transcripts and searching for common themes that emerged from the data.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This research study employed a phenomenological approach, which seeks to describe the meaning and essence of the participants’ lived experiences pertaining to the phenomenon in question: in this case, student mobility (Creswell, 2007). The interview questions elicited a description of the participants’ experience of enrolling in a new high school and identify the various factors such as family, friends, community, and the school itself that impacted their experience. The participants’ in-depth knowledge pertaining to the phenomenon provided rich illustrations of their lived experiences. This chapter presents the meaning and essence of the participants’ experience of the student mobility phenomenon.

Chapter Four includes an analysis of the data collected through the interviews. Through interviews with mobile students, this study provided the participants with an opportunity to reflect on their experience of enrolling in a new high school after the school year had begun. The study attempted to make meaning of the struggles mobile students faced during their transition and elicit their suggestions to help future mobile students entering a new high school. This study also attempted to identify mobile students’ unmet needs in such area as peer support and career and college exploration. Because the participants shared negative as well as positive experiences of being a mobile student at their current high school, the pseudonyms were used to maintain the participants’ anonymity.
Analysis of Interviews

After interviewing the participants, I replayed the recorded interviews numerous times to better grasp the participants’ descriptions of their lived experiences. After repeatedly reading the transcripts of the audio recorded interviews, I obtained an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of student mobility. Following the data analysis procedure outlined by Creswell (2009), I first wrote notes in the margins of the transcripts to document my thoughts pertaining to the data. Then I noted significant statements the participants made in describing their experiences of student mobility.

The research team reviewed the transcripts, including the addition of my notes and the significant statements I noted. The research team utilized horizontalization by recognizing that each significant statement has equal value regardless of what grade the mobile student was in or where the mobile student moved from.

I then clustered similar topics that I compiled in an electronic spreadsheet, which provided descriptions of the participants’ experiences. The research team not only reviewed the significant statements and topics I noted in the interviews, but also provided feedback to aid in the data analysis. Having the research team involved throughout this process increased the trustworthiness of this study. The significant statements produced clusters of meaning from which five major themes were identified (Creswell, 2007); this became the codebook for the data analysis.
Discussion of Themes

After “engag[ing] in a systematic process of analyzing textual data” of the participants’ academic, personal/social, and career needs, and with the research team’s agreement, the codes emerged and five significant themes were identified (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). The first theme was assimilating into a different academic curriculum. The second theme was peer support in the school community. The third theme was the size of the school. The fourth theme was the socioeconomic status of the new community. Lastly, the fifth theme was accessing resources on career and college exploration. Thick descriptions from 12 interviews with the mobile students demonstrate the identified significant themes.

Assimilating into a Different Academic Curriculum

During the transition from one school to another, mobile students must adjust to a new academic curriculum. Throughout the interviews, the mobile students were united in noting the difficulty of the school’s curriculum. Because these students enrolled after the school year had already started, a recurring theme of feeling behind emerged. Alex, who entered Advanced Placement (AP) courses after the semester started, explained how he felt:

It was very hard coming into AP classes late last semester because there was all this summer work and I felt like I was sort of behind. I started off behind curriculum wise and that was so frustrating. I often thought, “I don’t have all these essays done and stuff.” That was hard, I was just struggling to sort of keep up.

Alex also noted the extensive amount of homework assigned at his new school:
The amount of homework here is intense. Even though it’s not worth a lot of my grade, it’s something I’m not used to. I’m used to taking notes and then just studying off of my notes. I’m not used to like worksheets or doing all of these problems. It’s not worth a lot of my grade, but it’s still it’s the difference between an A and a B sometimes and that’s important to me. That’s been my biggest challenge is not only keeping up on it, but just doing it.

Olga echoed this perspective and described how she kept from feeling overwhelmed:

Here, they make sure they assign you homework in every class, so there is definitely more homework here. I’ve always been a student that kind of works in class while everybody talks, so I’m sort of used to doing work. It’s not that hard; well, I’m in on-level courses, but I do as much of the work in class as I can and then there’s not much to do at home.

Olga also volunteered a suggestion to help mobile students adjust to the changes in curriculum:

If you come in after the semester has started, the teacher could tell them exactly what the class already learned. In the other schools I went through Algebra, Geometry and started Algebra 2. I remember going to math and it was like a semester of something I already learned and then a semester of the new thing. I found out that in the previous year they learned something I didn’t learn, so it was kind of like all mixed up. To make sure the student knows what the class already learned what the new class already knows and what they need to catch up on. I
think that would really help. The teacher can explain here’s what they’ve learned so far … that would help big time.

David identified not only the amount of homework, but also the pace of the curriculum as a challenge in his transition. He observed:

This school is a lot higher academic school than most of the schools that I’ve been to and they expect more of you. You learn stuff a lot quicker, a lot faster than usual. It’s hard to keep up. There’s a bit more homework, which is difficult.

Kelsey shared the other participants’ views that homework was a challenge, while also noting the difficulty presented by the inconsistent curriculum:

There’s a lot more homework than my old school. The courses they go at a much faster pace. Also, the difference in what was being taught even though it’s the same class is challenging. I thought Chemistry would be the same; it’s not at all.

Reflecting on his academic transition, Marcus described how the differences in available courses was itself an adjustment:

I am struggling getting used to the new classes. The grading scale is a lot different. Classes are different. The stuff that this school offers is a lot different. We were doing more woodworking, cars, electricity, and plumbing stuff for elective courses at my old school; while here, it’s just business. There’s a lot of computers and stuff here. It’s not my cup of tea. I think it’s a little stricter.

In discussing their transition, the participants described the challenges created by their new curriculum. Not only must mobile students attempt to understand where they are in terms of a new curriculum, they must also adjust to a different pace of instruction and to a new and perhaps greater amount of homework assigned.
Peer Support in the School Community

In addition to sharing aspects of their transition that were challenging and stressful, the participants unanimously identified a need for peer support. Describing feelings of being isolated, alone, invisible, and lost, the mobile students explained their need to have a current student accompany them during the most stressful part of the day: lunch. In addition to the stress produced by trying to catch up with the curriculum they had missed thus far, the mobile students emphasized the social stress that could only be overcome through the support of a peer.

Even though Olga has a twin at school with her and expressed gratitude for the support system her sister provides, she nevertheless recognized the value of peer support:

What I liked about when I came to the French class, and no other class ever did that where I’ve been, is the teacher actually provided a student who knew what they were doing, like a higher student. The student was actually able to sit with me and my sister out in the hall and kind of teach us what we missed. So it really helps having my sister here; well, it definitely helps because I also have someone to eat lunch with. If not, then you’re alone. It’s kind of embarrassing; you’re just standing there with your lunch not knowing where to go. Having my sister may have helped me in a lot of different experiences versus a new student who didn’t have someone. I have her to eat lunch with and walk to class with.

While Olga found comfort in the companionship of her twin sister, Alex felt alone and isolated even though he is a triplet and has an additional sibling in another grade. Alex took advantage of the New Student Group that was offered at the school, which provided six weekly sessions on the topics of school culture, making friends, and post-
graduation options. While he felt the group was beneficial, he still experienced numerous challenges from the moment he started at his new school.

In addition to the New Student Group, Alex suggested another method of support that would ease the transition for mobile students like himself:

The new student classes here were very nice. I really enjoyed that, not classes, but the meetings. Not only was it like a jump start into the social environment, it sort of let me know that I have people here who I can just talk to if I need help getting to or from this class to this class. Maybe on the first day, having somebody with me or someone to meet up with at lunch, I’m not sure how that would work. But having somebody with me just to say “This hallway is over here” would be amazing. Because I know for the first week just navigating to my different courses was difficult. Having this huge building to navigate through, for me, it was especially different. I didn’t even know where these classes were and when I was supposed to be at my classes. I mean, I knew when the class started, but I wasn’t sure how early should I be there. Should I be there on time? What’s the bell system? How do these bells work?

Even though Alex had several siblings at his new school, he still felt alone as a mobile student. Alex continued to explain the importance of having another student provide support during the day:

I think having somebody just for maybe a day or just half a day, but definitely at lunch, just to help out and answer any questions I had. They could also explain the whole lunch and study hall system. Having something like that where someone sits with you at lunch the first couple days, I think that in a perfect
world, that would be amazing because lunch was horrendous. Walking into lunch for the first day was probably one of the scariest things I’ve ever done. I just didn’t know what to do and I felt sort of helpless. I sat by myself for the first week and just sort of hoped nobody was looking at me. I just went to the end of the table and I just sort of sat away from every because I didn’t know anybody. I have a lunch group now, and the only reason they found me was because they said I looked lonely, so they picked me up. I eat with them now, but I don’t know what would have happened if they wouldn’t have come over and sort of invited me to join their group. My sister still doesn’t really have a group because she hasn’t had anyone sort of come up to her and ask her to join them.

Alex’s words stress the importance of having a peer to assist mobile students with their transition, especially in the first few days at a new school.

When Kelsey was asked what suggestions she had to make this transition easier for future new students, she replied:

On the first day or maybe for a week, if someone could check in with them that would be good. But I would love it if there was someone to sit with the new student at lunch to introduce them to people and answer questions. Lunch is really stressful because you don’t know anyone and there are a lot of people. It’s hard to on your first day because you’re kind of nervous to go up to someone say “Hi, I’m new.” Having someone to sit with and them introduce you to other people would be huge. Having someone who you could check in with and kind of just say, “How does this work?” “Where is this class?” or “Where do I get my books?” It is all so different here and they could explain that.
Like the other participants, Kelsey identified lunch as one of the most stressful parts of a mobile student’s day:

I think finding someone to eat lunch with was so difficult and was a lot. Coming here, not knowing anyone has been really hard. It feels so hard because people kind of already have their groups that they’ve kind of grown up with through elementary school and stuff, and so it’s hard just to jump into that. Just not really having any friends is just difficult, and then you have to walk into the cafeteria alone.

Marcus further explained the impact of the lunchroom experience, while also sharing another uncomfortable aspect of a mobile student’s day:

Sitting in the lunchroom by myself with no one around, it was kind of a big deal. I don’t know; it hurt my personality--- I guess my self-esteem. Then I started talking to people from church and it kind of helped a lot. But it’s definitely an awkward situation, especially when you have no one to talk to at lunch or in class and no one wants to work in a group with you because they don’t know you. For me, a difficult part of the day was when you have like a class group thing and no one wants to work with you.

When Marcus was asked what suggestions he had to make this transition easier for future new students, he described how authenticity is a critical component of peer support:

At another school, I’ve had an experience where I got a buddy and they didn’t seem really helpful or like they wanted to help. They didn’t want to have anything to do with me because I was taking away time with their own friends. If
it was a student that honestly wanted to come talk and sit with the new kid at lunch or work on a group project, then that’s a lot different than it being forced by a teacher. It’s clear if that person really doesn’t want to do it because there’s no meaning behind anything he’s saying. The intention has to be genuine. Support is a big thing because not only is it a new environment, but it hurts when you have no one to talk to, eat lunch with, or no one to hang out with. For me, it lasted about a good two months before I started really talking to people in class and it was just really depressing, not having anyone. It felt lonely. So, genuine support is the biggest thing you can do for the kids.

While many participants expressed a desire to have a peer to answer questions and, most importantly, to eat lunch with, Alejandro received just that. When asked what helped most with his transition to a new school, Alejandro described how his English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher provided him with another student in his class who wanted to help him by answering questions, helping him navigate the building, and eating lunch with him:

It helped having another student kind of help me around a little bit. My Hispanic friend helped me out. He showed me around, where my classes are, helped me with the schedule, and sat with me at lunch. He’s in ESL. He’s in my class, and he’s Hispanic, so he spoke Spanish to me. He gave me a little tour of the school and explained the trick of remembering the floors and halls. Yeah, I got it fast. The first two days he took me to the classes I had and that helped me a lot. Lunch was a mess. I’ve never seen so many people in a cafeteria. I’m not used to it; I wasn’t used to it. I was used to 200 people or less and here, there’s like 800
people. There are all these different lines and then on certain days there’s an extended lunch. So I really liked having my friend to help me and answer my questions that I had. He also helped with my homework.

These mobile students vividly described the heightened stress surrounding lunch, as well as the isolation and confusion they felt when they started at a new school. The need for peer support was a consistent theme amongst the participants. According to these mobile students, having a peer to eat lunch with as well as to answer logistical questions pertaining to where to sit in the cafeteria, the lunch lines, the school bell system, class locations, and other questions that arise throughout the day would positively impact their transition.

**Size of the School**

During mobile students’ transition to a new school, changes in the physical environment may hinder their acclimation process. The size of the school, including the building itself and the school population, was a distinct change that the participants identified as particularly overwhelming and stressful for them to adjust to. Specifically, the exterior of the high school resembles a university, and many participants expressed feeling intimidation by the building’s physical size. The participants also detailed the challenges of navigating the interior of the school. With a school population of approximately 2,700 students, the participants noted that the size of the student body was itself overwhelming. Alejandro detailed the extreme difference between the size and student population of his previous school in comparison to his new school:
My school was really small. It was like 600 students in kindergarten to twelfth grade. So it was probably like 50 per class. It’s really small. So the first time I came to the school, I was like wow. What’s this? The outside is intimidating.

Kelsey also contrasted the size of her previous school with that of her new school. She noted how the large student population impacts involvement in sports:

There were about 500 kids in the whole high school. And so like one grade is just a little over 100 kids and there’s two buildings, and then a couple portables, and so it was a very little school. This school is just a lot bigger. There’s a lot more like classrooms and teachers and a lot more students. There’s a lot more like teams here. At my old school you could do every sport almost. Here it seems you can maybe do one sport because there’s just more kids, so there’s less opportunity here. But there’s a lot more clubs here. My old school didn’t really have that many.

Detailing how the large student population made her feel, Kelsey continued:

Well, the first day was just really overwhelming because there’s so many more people and finding my classes was so hard. At my old school, I could kind of look at my schedule and just know it. But here I have to remember the room number and where to go and all the halls kind of look the same. It was just kind of overwhelming just with so many people. It’s a big school, you walk the halls and you feel kind of invisible because there are so many kids here. And the outside of the building is overwhelming. It’s a little intimidating itself.

David emphasized the size of his new school community in comparison to his previous one:
Where I used to live was very small and very country like farms, pretty much everywhere. And the town that I lived in, we didn’t even have like a red light. So it was very small. Here, the area is different! It’s like a city. There’s a lot … there’s a lot more people. I am not used to that.

Discussing the most difficult aspect of being a mobile student, Marcus explained his problems with navigating through the school:

The most difficult part was memorizing how to get around. That was—that was the worst. I was kind of in my own shell; I was really nervous. There’s a lot of stairs and for some reason I couldn’t picture in my mind that all the hallways were to the left and there was different floors. I couldn’t remember that for some reason.

That was the worst part; I felt helpless.

The exterior of the school, the size of the inside of the school building, and the large student population were all overwhelming factors contributing to mobile students’ stressful transition. The size of the school represented a significant change in the participants’ environment that was discussed repeatedly during the interviews.

**Socioeconomic Status of the New Community**

Mobile students must adjust not only to a new school but also to a new community, which may have a different socioeconomic status from that of their previous community. The participants identified many differences between their old and new communities, noting in particular how their new community’s high socioeconomic status impacted their peers’ homes, cars, and clothes. The participants also noted their astonishment and struggle adjusting to the change of their new community’s high
socioeconomic status. Olga described her perceptions of her neighborhood and her neighbors:

This neighborhood was different because the neighborhood has more expensive houses. People are like business people and it’s an expensive neighborhood. So the people there have to be educated to afford that. In other places, well, it was really different because it was more of like a ghetto-type community and like smaller houses. People are not really like here and the school there was also not as academically high as this school.

Even though Alejandro moved from a middle-class community, he was still taken aback by the differences he found in his new community:

I lived in a middle-class city, but it’s not really like I live here. I live in a really nice house. All the houses around are really nice too and it’s like all the people have lots of money. I’m not used to a big house, lots of acres and stuff like that and a lot of nice things here.

David detailed his thoughts and feelings on moving from his previous community to his new one:

It was kind of scary, you know, coming and seeing the front of the school was huge and everything, but it was kind of a culture shock. But I got used to it and it’s pretty cool. The culture shock, I mean the difference in how everything is. Like back home, we had farmland and everything, farm people, and we knew how to do that kind of stuff. Up here, it’s not so much. It’s more of like the office working-type deal; it’s very business-like, very corporate. There’s a lot more
people and a lot more money up here. And with more money means a lot nicer stuff. It’s just overall a nicer area.

Marcus preferred his previous small community and struggled to fit in socially with the other students due to their high socioeconomic status:

I would prefer the small town feel. I’m a country boy, so it fits with me. I don’t like this whole rich town where everyone’s driving a Mercedes and stuff. I don’t fit in. You know, everyone’s wearing Polos and stuff. So this new community is all right, I guess. It’s better than nothing. It’s a huge change though. I would probably say the students are stuck up and the world should revolve around them kind of personalities. That’s what I would say. Yeah. I mean, I’ve literally had to work for everything I’ve got and, you know, their daddy pays for everything and they just ask for it and they get it. I don’t know, but that’s not what I’m used to. So it’s a big gap, you know, and they’re like, “Hey, why don’t you just go ask your dad for a new car?” Well one, I don’t know my dad. Two, I can’t do that because I’m not loaded like you are. So I’m gonna go work and you go play.

From their new neighborhood to the other students at their new school, the change in socioeconomic status impacted various aspects of the participants’ transition. Across the board, these mobile students struggled to adjust to the environmental change brought about by the socioeconomic status of this new community.

**Accessing Resources on Career and College Exploration**

During high school, students are often asked about their post-secondary plans. The plans of mobile students may adjust due to their new environment. Throughout the interviews, these mobile students expressed a desire for help with career and college
exploration. Specifically, the participants described a need for greater knowledge about local colleges, information about programs offered at various colleges, and the availability of career inventories. Mobile students who move from outside the county, the state, or the continental U.S. may be unaware of colleges in their new state of residence. In particular, David (10th grade) moved from outside the county; Alex (11th grade), Kelsey (10th grade), Olga (11th grade), and Marcus (12th grade) moved from outside the state; and Alejandro (12th grade) moved from outside the continental U.S.

Kelsey explained how she could benefit from learning about the colleges near her new school, while also expressing uncertainty about where she would be living at the time she applied to college:

I could go to school here or in Washington State where I am from. But then I don’t know what my dad’s job is going to be like or if my family is going to have to move again. I just don’t know, but I’d like to explore the kind of colleges near here. I’d like to do what the freshmen did recently, you know, the state’s online career survey. I would like to learn of schools through computer websites of career surveys and just college stuff.

Whereas Kelsey expressed a need for career and college exploration, David wanted more information regarding college majors offered at various colleges around his new community:

Where I am from, we had a little college that was usually where everybody goes to college down there. I would like help to see what colleges offer what programs in this area.
When Olga was asked how schools might make this transition easier for future new students, she replied:

I suggest for future new students take the ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Assessment Battery] because it really centers your mind on what you’re good at and what you like. So there isn’t like just a mass of careers that are possible that you think you can do. This helps you realize I don’t know how to do this or I don’t like to do this, so it helps you eliminate the careers that you do not want to do.

Olga also shared how she could benefit from additional college exploration, as well as how her move to a new school has increased her interest in going to college:

I would like to learn what colleges are where. Also, I’d like to know what programs they offer and how much it costs. I definitely think about college more here because there are more programs to help you choose what kind of college you are interested in. The ASVAB test totally helped. Here, it’s more like they prepare you. They try to get you prepared for what you want to do in college, but in the other schools, college was kind of distant and get there when you get there.

Alejandro moved from Puerto Rico to the United States during his senior year. Initially he planned on playing Division One (D1) soccer in college, but he shared how his move changed his plans:

I thought I was going to go into a D1 school, but now I am planning on starting at a junior college then transferring to a D1 school. I realized my grades are not as high as a D1 school wants. My counselor helped me a lot by pulling me out of class and telling me how to apply to college in the United States. I think it’s a
counselor’s job to help me. Just someone saying to do this and this, then I could explain if I had done that or not. The counselor could explain the universities and what they expect as well as how hard the schools are.

The transition to a new high school during Marcus’s senior year allowed him both to realize that graduation was approaching and to recognize the important of a college degree:

I decided that I have to go to college when I realized that I’m on my own now. It’s my senior year, going to college next year and I’m not gonna be anywhere in this business world without a college degree. I can barely get to work at McDonald’s without a college degree.

Because Marcus moved out of state, he was unaware of local schools. Marcus shared how his Computer Applications teacher provided him with an incredible opportunity:

It definitely made it easier with my Computer Apps teacher since he opened that gateway to college. He actually hooked me up with the vice president of a local tech school. I have never even heard of the school before because I am new. He coached the vice president’s daughter in softball. So my teacher set up a meeting with the vice president. I definitely want to go that school. My Computer Apps teacher didn’t even know me; I had probably been here a month or so and he did that. He didn’t even know me. It made it easier and I am so thankful. Cars are what I know; it’s what I love to do, so I’m sticking to it.

Alex, a junior, has a couple of colleges in mind. He explained how his counselor’s availability to answer questions provided valuable support during the college exploration process:
I know I can always just come to my counselor and just sort of talk to her about what do I do. It’s because of the open door policy. I can just pop in and ask her a question. I think that’s the biggest thing because I don’t think I need a lot of help. Since I have a rough sketch, I’m not working off of a blank slate. I have a rough sketch of a couple of colleges I’m interested in and a couple of areas I’m looking into. I know where I want to go, so it’s more of me working along that myself and finding out I don’t know exactly how this is supposed to work, so I can just come to my counselor and ask her about that. That’s the biggest thing.

These mobile students—whether moving from outside the county, the state, or the country—described an interest in and need for assistance with career and college exploration. The participants explained their lack of familiarity with colleges in their new county or state of residence as well as with the programs those colleges offer. For seniors Marcus and Alejandro, their move to another state or from outside the continental U.S. drastically changed their post-secondary plans. Marcus, who moved from outside the state, came to the realization that he was a senior who needed a plan, and college was the next step for him. With the assistance of a teacher, Marcus finalized plans to attend a local tech school. Alejandro, who moved from outside the Puerto Rico, learned about the selective admissions requirements for schools with Division One athletics and readjusted his college plans to begin at a local junior college. Even David, who moved from outside the county, voiced the additional need for college exploration; therefore, it is no surprise that Alex, Kelsey, and Olga (who moved from outside the state) continued to search for additional career and college exploration opportunities.
Synthesis of Experiences

The procedure for conducting phenomenological research moves from a discussion of themes to a synthesis of the participants’ experiences pertaining to the phenomenon under study, in this case, student mobility. The synthesis consists of the “essence,” i.e., the essential, invariant structure of the mobile students’ lived experiences of the phenomenon. The participants’ thick, rich descriptions expressed the students’ experiences of mobility. The identified themes, which emerged from significant statements, demonstrate commonalities among the participants. Five themes were identified: 1) assimilating into a different academic curriculum; 2) peer support in the school community; 3) size of the school; 4) socioeconomic status of the new community; and 5) accessing resources on career and college exploration.

Changes in the mobile students’ environments that created considerable challenges to their assimilation include the fast pace of instruction and the increased amount of homework, the overwhelming size of the school and large student population, and the high socioeconomic status of their new community. Another change in the participants’ environment causing confusion is the unknown plethora of post-secondary options in their new state of residence. Because the participants lack knowledge pertaining to colleges and the programs they offer, the students expressed a need for additional career and college exploration opportunities. In light of these challenging environmental changes, the participants recommended an assimilation success strategy, including peer support to assist with the academic and social transition.
Summary of Chapter

This study was guided by a central research question: How do mobile students at the high school under study describe their academic, personal/social, and career needs? The data collected provided significant statements that emerged throughout the interviews; from these statements, recurring themes were identified. The detailed quotations from the mobile students’ interviews illustrated the five identified themes.

The first theme was assimilating into a different academic curriculum as the mobile students described challenges pertaining to the fast pace instruction and increased amount of homework. The second theme was peer support in the school community as the participants noted a peer would combat their feelings of being isolated, alone, invisible, and lost. The third theme was the size of the school due to the expressed intimidation and overwhelming factors contributing to their stressful transition. The fourth theme was the socioeconomic status of the new community because of the participants’ struggle adjusting to a different socioeconomic status than they were accustomed to. The fifth theme was accessing resources on career and college exploration because of the students’ lack of familiarity with colleges and their programs of study in their new state of residence. The participants’ detailed descriptions of their experiences as mobile students shed light on areas of needed support for this population as they transition into a new high school.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

School-aged children relocate and enter new schools for a variety of reasons (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Parents may move as the result of divorce or for financial reasons, such as the loss of a job, foreclosure on a home, inability to pay the rent, bereavement, or divorce (Hartman, 2006; Kerbow, 1996; Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1997; Norford & Medway, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). These and other causes of parental relocation may require children to change schools during the school year, creating mobility within schools nationwide.

Many reasons causing mobility during the school year are significant stressors in themselves, even apart from the move. Mobile students may be coping with these additional stressors beyond the adjustment to a new school and new peers, and often this heightened stress is exhibited in their behavior. Boon (2011) noted a statistically significant positive correlation between mobility and suspensions. Haynie and South (2005) also found a positive correlation between residential mobility and participation in violence such as fighting, using a weapon in a fight or pulling a knife or gun on someone. The authors attributed this correlation of increased involvement in violence to weak family relationships, higher psychological stressors, increased experiences of victimization, and loss of amity reported by participants (Haynie & South, 2005). The examination of this population’s needs is critical as mobile students may face not just the single challenge of switching schools, but multiple challenges and adjustments at home and school that leave them especially vulnerable to emotional difficulties (anxiety, depression, anger) and/or behavioral problems (poor academic performance, fighting,
acting out to get attention) (Dunn, Kadane, & Garrow, 2003; Engec, 2006; Haynie & South, 2005; Wildeman & Western, 2010).

According to the American School Counselors Association Model for school counseling programs (ASCA, 2004b), school counselors are responsible for providing academic, personal/social, and career support to all students regardless of when they enter the school (ASCA, 2004b). Mobile students face various barriers as they transition to a new high school; they must adjust to a new school, curriculum, and peer group. Student mobility is a phenomenon affecting students’ academic achievement (Dunn, Kadane, & Garrow, 2003; Wildeman & Western, 2010), behavior at school (Engec, 2006; Haynie & South, 2005), and social adjustment (Norford & Medway, 2002; South & Haynie, 2004). Research studies have identified a variety of negative outcomes of student mobility, including lower academic achievement, higher rates of suspension, and difficulty in creating a new peer group.

This study investigated the dynamics underlying the findings that mobile students are less successful academically than their peers (Dunn, Kadane, & Garrow, 2003; Wildeman & Western, 2010), have higher rates of suspension (Engec, 2006; Haynie & South, 2005), and struggle with socialization (Norford & Medway, 2002; South & Haynie, 2004). The research elicited the essence of student’ experience through their descriptions of their academic, personal/social, and career needs. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile students at the high school under study.

I facilitated in-depth individual interviews with six mobile high school students, interviewing them twice for a total of twelve interviews. After analyzing the data, the
research team identified five themes. The first theme was assimilating into a different academic curriculum as the mobile students described challenges pertaining to the fast pace instruction and increased amount of homework. The second theme was peer support in the school community as the participants noted a peer would combat their feelings of being isolated, alone, invisible, and lost. The third theme was the size of the school due to the expressed intimidation and overwhelming factors contributing to their stressful transition. The fourth theme was the socioeconomic status of the new community because of the participants’ struggle adjusting to a different socioeconomic status than they were accustomed to. The fifth theme was accessing resources on career and college exploration because of the students’ lack of familiarity with colleges and their programs of study in their new state of residence.

Discussion of Research Findings

Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, the theoretical framework utilized in the study, illuminated mobile students’ experiences within their environment. The premise of this approach is that students’ cultural, family, and community contexts influence their academic, personal/social, and career development. In particular, the ecological systems model provides a framework for examining how societal values and policies may perpetuate the injustice and oppression faced by mobile students who are also members of marginalized groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The participants described the challenges they faced pertaining to their immediate environment (the microsystem) as well as the challenges pertaining to the integration/relation between family and school or family and community (the mesosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The participants also described their struggles in
the macrosystem, which encompasses the relationship between the exosystem—a social setting in which the student does not have an active role, yet which impacts the student—and the attitudes and values of the culture in which the student resides (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

**Microsystem**

The participants described how the peer and school microsystems, the setting or immediate environment in which the student lives, were impacted during their transition. Mobile students often struggle to break into a new peer group and create a peer support system in their new school (Marlett, 1993; Norford & Medway, 2002; South, Haynie, & Bose, 2007). During high school adolescents attempt to discover who they are, relying in large part on a support system of peers who provide interaction and offer acceptance (Muller & Hartman, 1998). Adolescents often cling to their peer group, drawing on perceived similarities to help develop a sense of identity (Erikson, 1963). Adolescents create self-efficacy appraisals, particularly in aspects of their lives such as friendship and dating, by assessing their strengths and weaknesses based upon their behaviors and the resulting environmental responses (Bandura, 1986). Social interaction thus contributes to adolescents’ emotional development as they continuously observe others’ behaviors, imitate selected behaviors, and internally assess areas of efficacy. This process is interrupted for mobile students, and the data illustrate that leaving friends behind and seeking a place in a new social network can cause a great deal of stress.

All of the study participants expressed feelings of being isolated, alone, invisible, and overwhelmed as mobile students; even the participants who had siblings at the new school identified with those feelings. The participants emphasized their desire to receive
support from a peer on their first week of school. This peer would help them navigate the school building as well as answer questions pertaining to the bell system, curriculum, lockers, or any other aspect of the school that caused confusion. Most importantly, the participants repeatedly noted that the major benefit of having a peer assigned to help them upon their arrival would be to have someone accompany them during the most dreaded hurdle of a mobile student’s day: lunch.

Mobile students described how another microsystem, their school experience, was impacted in their transition. The participants specifically detailed the difficulty of adjusting to a new curriculum. Previous studies have identified how the inconsistency of the curriculum from school to school negatively impacts mobile students’ comprehension of the coursework, causing gaps in knowledge and skills that may result in lower academic achievement compared to non-mobile peers (Dunn, Kadane, & Garrow, 2003; Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Prout, 2009; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). The participants shared the challenges they faced in assimilating to a different curriculum. One challenge was the feeling of starting out behind, because the students entered the classroom after the school year had already begun. This feeling of being behind and overwhelmed was exacerbated by the students’ struggles with the extensive amount of homework assigned and the fast-paced curriculum at their new school. Participants also reported feeling lost as a result of the inconsistent curriculum; they were unsure which concepts had been taught before they arrived in their new classes and how these compared to what they had learned at their previous school. However, this study cannot determine whether these challenges resulted in lower academic achievement, as previous literature has suggested,
because the participants have not attended the current high school long enough to receive grades.

In addition to teaching specific academic content, school instruction promotes cognitive development by enabling adolescents to perform beyond their current level of thinking (Vygotsky, 1935). High school instruction helps adolescents obtain such skills as increased proficiency in internal reflection, the capacity to participate in hypothetical discussions, and enhanced problem solving abilities (Conley, 2008; Dzubak, 2010; Schleicher & Stewart, 2008). Mobile students moving from one high school to another may miss various opportunities to flourish in one or more of these areas.

As the primary researcher, I noted in chapter three my bias, assumptions, and personal experience pertaining to mobile students. I am a practicing school counselor and facilitate the New Student Group offered to mobile students at the high school under study. I have witnessed previous mobile students share their socialization challenges and I am also familiar with the high academic expectations at the high school under study. Therefore, I expected the participants to describe the challenges that impacted their microsystems such as struggles creating a peer system and assimilating into a different curriculum.

Mesosystem

While the mobile students are not directly involved with the mesosystem, relation between family and school or family and community, they are affected by it (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The participants identified distinct changes in their environment that hindered their acclimation process: assimilating into a different curriculum; the lack of peer support; the size of the school—referring to both the building itself and the school
population; the socioeconomic status of their new community; and confusion and unfamiliarity with colleges and their programs of study in their new state of residence. The participants considered these changes intimidating, overwhelming, and stressful for them to adjust to. These mobile students therefore need someone to: help them process entering a world with a different socioeconomic status than they are accustomed to; help them figure out how to assimilate into the new, larger community; provide academic resources to aid in the assimilation into a different curriculum; coordinate peer support system; and provide access to career and college exploration.

School personnel, and school counselors in particular, can help mobile students adapt to the challenging environmental changes they face. The American School Counselors Association Model (ASCA, 2004b) requires school counselors to facilitate academic success for all students and to collaborate with parents, teachers, and administrators to diminish the impact of societal and institutional barriers that hinder such success (The Education Trust, 2009). Existing literature specifically outlines the role of the school counselor in delivering services that yield student progress in three areas: academic, personal/social, and career development (ASCA, 2004b). School counselors are qualified to support mobile students as they transition to a new, larger environment and enter a community with a different socioeconomic status than they are accustomed to. School counselors can provide support for such students by facilitating small groups and providing individual counseling sessions for mobile students. The school counselor can also develop a peer mentor/support program and provide access to resources for career and college exploration, as the participants in this study requested.
While I expected the participants’ challenges described within the microsystem, I was surprised by how various changes in their physical environment impacted their transition. Before this study I was unaware of the level of stress that the size of the school, the building itself, and the student population, had on the mobile students. The participants detailed feelings of being overwhelmed and lost when they described their experience in their new school. I did not expect the participants to unite in this aspect of their experience. However, I was pleased to outline a role for school counselors in mobile students’ transition and fulfilling their academic, personal/social, and career needs.

**Exosystem**

The exosystem, a larger social system, was affected due to the students’ relocation. Parents may uproot their children as a result of divorce or for financial reasons, such as the loss of a job, foreclosure on a home, or the inability to pay the rent (Hartman, 2006; Kerbow, 1996; Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1997; Norford & Medway, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). These and other causes of parental relocation may require children to change schools during the school year.

Researchers found that a high percentage of mobile students come from minority groups, economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and/or single parent homes (Rumberger & Larson, 1998; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010; Xu, Hannaway, & D’Souza, 2009). The participants in this study do not mirror the sociodemographics that the previous researchers described. Of the six participants in this study, two are eligible to participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch program. While that
number represents only one-third of the participants, the participants unanimously expressed feeling intimidated and out of place because of the high socioeconomic status of their new community. The literature review also noted that low socioeconomic status mobile students scored lower on state-mandated tests than their non-mobile peers (Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1997; Wildeman & Western, 2010). In this study, the participants described struggling to adjust to their new high socioeconomic status community, but they have not attended the new school long enough to participate in state-mandated tests.

As a practicing school counselor at the high school under study, I was interested to find if the sociodemographics of the participants in this study resembled those that the researchers described. I expected the participants of this study to deviate from the findings of the researchers because the sociodemographics of the school and majority of entering mobile students are mostly White and affluent.

**Macrosystem**

As the participants discussed their experience as a mobile student, they detailed struggles adjusting to the high socioeconomic status of their new community. This change in their macrosystem, relations between exosystem and attitudes and values of the culture in which the student resides, resulted in feelings of astonishment and uncertainty. The participants’ perception of the “business-like, corporate” environment of their new community consisted of educated, wealthy families with large homes and expensive cars and clothing. The participants also shared challenges with determining how they fit into their new community because of the value their non-mobile peers placed on money; the participants were unaccustomed to this lifestyle. Similar to the mesosystem, school
counselors can assist the mobile students during their transition into a different and unfamiliar socioeconomic status (macrosystem).

My personal bias, assumptions, and experience pertaining to mobile students never included the socioeconomic status of the community and its impact on mobile students’ transition. This was an unexpected finding that caught me by surprise. Throughout each interview, the participants continuously described their perception of their new community’s values—high educational attainment and wealth—and their uncertainty as to where they belonged within the community. By utilizing Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, allowed the primary researcher the opportunity to explore the community’s impact on the mobile students transition.

From the microsystem to the macrosystem, the mobile students participating in this study described experiences that affected the various systems of the ecological model. The participants acknowledged the impact that their new community, school, and peers had on them and their transition by describing feelings of being isolated, overwhelmed, lost, and alone. In light of mobile students’ need for assistance in assimilating into their new community and school, Bronfenbrenner’s theory helps identify the systems that are impacted during mobility and describe the student’s adjustment process.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations based on the number of participants, data collection method, and participants’ demographics. The number of participants, six, meets the suggested criteria for phenomenological research but is unquestionably a small pool of participants. By nature the findings of the qualitative approach cannot be
generalized. Regarding the data collection method, initially students were asked to participate in two individual interviews and a focus group consisting of all the participants. However, the participants were reluctant and unwilling to participate in the focus group portion of the study. They stated that they would be embarrassed to discuss their unhappiness in front of other students and did not want other students to be aware of their positive or negative experiences in transitioning to the high school; they were also apprehensive that confidentiality could not be guaranteed. With the participants disinclined to participate in the focus group, that data collection method was removed from the study. While the unwillingness of the mobile students’ participation in a focus group is a limitation, it is also a finding. The mobile students’ reluctance to meet in a group setting highlights that group counseling is not an appropriate method of support for all mobile students.

The participants’ race was also a limitation of the study. Of the six participants (two students from each grade: tenth, eleventh, and twelfth), five identified as White and one identified as Latino. The White mobile students’ experience may not be representative of other ethnicities. Another limitation pertaining to the participants’ demographics was that two of the six mobile students are eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch program, a federal program that provides free and reduced-price lunches to students from low-income families. Even though the socioeconomic status of their new community was a challenge for all the participants to adjust to, only two students actually participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch program; therefore, socioeconomic status of the other four participants is undetermined.
Implications for Future Research and Practice

The findings of this study suggest a number of directions for future research and recommendations for practice. In the study by Norford and Medway (2002), mobile students reported that leaving their friends was the worst thing about moving, echoing Martlett (1993) conclusion that mobile students worried most about peer relations during the switch to a new school. These studies and others reveal the significance of peer relationships for adolescent students. Similarly, the participants in the present study expressed their wish to have another student to assist them throughout their first days. In practice, this would provide school counselors with an opportunity to establish a peer mentor/support system. School counselors would need to address logistical concerns, such as identifying non-mobile students recommended by their teachers who are interested in participating in this program, teaching the non-mobile students about their role and the expectations for assisting the mobile student, and linking the mobile students with their non-mobile peer upon their arrival.

It is important to recall the comments of Marcus, a participant who changed high schools three times, stressing the need for authenticity in a peer mentor/support system. Marcus noted that based on his experience, the non-mobile student must genuinely want to participate in the program or it will not be a successful pairing. The participants noted that having another student willing to assist them throughout the day would not only provide someone to answer questions regarding class locations, the bell system, the curriculum, lockers, or any other aspect of the school that caused confusion, but would also provide the major benefit of having peer support during lunchtime, the most stressful and lonely segment of a mobile student’s day.
An additional implication that resonated in the discussions with these participants involves assimilating to a different curriculum. Ou and Reynolds (2008) found that a higher frequency of changing schools predicted significantly lower levels of educational attainment, as well as lower grade point averages and scores on standardized assessments. Prout (2009) concluded that changing from one curriculum to another results in gaps in learning specific skills. While the participants in this study had not received grades that would determine the impact of the new curriculum, they expressed concerns regarding their difficulty in adjusting to the new curriculum.

Such concerns could be addressed in the classroom by pairing the mobile student with an excelling non-mobile student, who could help the mobile student catch up on content that was previously taught as well as helping with current material. One participant, Olga, noted that one of her teachers had paired her with another student to help her catch up with the class; Olga wished every teacher had done that. Even if teachers are unable to coordinate such classroom pairings, school counselors can provide mobile students with a list of student tutors willing to assist incoming students. This would provide mobile students with the necessary academic support to hopefully prevent their mobility from negatively impacting their academic achievement.

The final implication for practice from this study is the recognition of the school counselor’s vital role in helping mobile students transition and assimilate to their new school and community. The American School Counselors Association (2006) outlined the role of school counselors in supporting the academic, personal/social, and career development of all students. The participants in this study discussed several concerns pertaining to their transition, including the challenges assimilating into a different
curriculum, the large student population and size of the school building, the struggle to adjust to the unfamiliar socioeconomic status of their new community, the need for peer support, and the need for access to resources for career and college exploration. School counselors are uniquely qualified to facilitate group and individual counseling sessions to process mobile students’ apprehension and identify obstacles to their successful assimilation into a new school and community.

The school counselor can also coordinate a peer mentor/support system so mobile students have someone to assist them throughout the day, including during lunch. The non-mobile student can also provide academic support by helping the mobile student catch up to the current curriculum. Moreover, the school counselor can provide access to resources for career and college exploration. This can be accomplished in a small group or classroom guidance setting, allowing the mobile students to explore computer software available to them for career inventories and college searches. At this time, mobile students can learn about various colleges in their new state of residence and about the programs they offer. College representatives from diverse schools (including technical schools; two- and four-year schools; large and small schools; and schools located in rural, college town, and urban areas) could answer mobile students’ questions regarding how their high school mobility may impact college admission, while also helping mobile students learn about local colleges and the programs of study they offer.

This study aimed to understand the experience of mobile students as they transition to a new high school and community. The mobile students were asked to describe the academic, personal/social, and career resources necessary to help them acclimate to a new environment. Whereas previous literature has detailed the effects of
student mobility, this study elicited what mobile students identify as the most crucial needs to aid in their transition. Understanding how to effectively support mobile students based on the perspectives of mobile students themselves was a critical place to begin. Having gleaned this initial understanding of mobile students’ academic, personal/social, and career needs, a further study with a different methodology may provide stronger, more generalizable conclusions. A mixed methods approach that incorporates statistical assessment of an intervention or program designed to assist mobile students would provide evidence of its effectiveness and outcome.

Furthermore, this study was performed at one high school, and all participants underwent similar changes in moving to a larger, faster-paced school where the students’ overall socioeconomic status was higher than that of the students at their previous schools. However, when mobile students transition to a new school they may experience change in a variety of directions: they may encounter a larger or smaller building or student population, improved or decreased academic resources, a more or less challenging school curriculum, a slower or faster pace of instruction, and a student body and community with a higher or lower socioeconomic status than they experienced at their previous school. Thus, additional research is necessary to explore the experiences and needs of students who confront different types of social and academic changes from those explored in this study. Understanding the needs of mobile students undergoing various types and directions of change is a necessary step to developing programs that could translate locally or even nationally. However, such a goal requires both further qualitative research, to determine when mobile students’ needs are similar and when they vary, as well as quantitative research that will allow for the generalization of findings.
Conclusion

This study examined the academic, personal/social, and career needs of mobile students at the high school under study. It elicited mobile students’ descriptions of their own experiences and presented, in their own words, their views of the types of support needed to aid their transition and assimilation into a new environment. Unlike the existing literature that outlines the effects of student mobility, this study contributes to the student mobility literature by exploring and identifying mobile students’ needs. The study found that mobile students struggle with a variety of environmental changes, including a different curriculum, the size of their new school, feelings of loneliness and isolation due to the lack of peer support, discomfort with the socioeconomic status of the new community, and a lack of knowledge about the post-secondary options in their new state of residence. Based upon the academic, personal/social, and career needs expressed by participants in this study, there is a vital need for school counselors to support mobile students by addressing their academic, personal/social, and career needs as they transition and assimilate into the new school and community.
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**Appendix A**

**Interview Questions**
1. When did you enroll?

2. Where did you move from?

3. Tell me about your experience as a new student.

**Personal History Questions**

Community

4. Tell me about the previous community where you lived.

5. How does it compare to your new community?

School

6. Tell me about your previous high school.

7. How does it compare to your new school?

Family

8. How would you describe your family? Tell me about the members of your family.

9. Why did your family move?

10. How did you feel about moving to this area?

11. How do you think the move has affected your family?

Individual

12. How would you describe your overall experience of being a new student here at your new school?

13. How would you describe your first few weeks here at your new school?

14. Who was the biggest help to your transition, if anyone was? What did they do?

15. How would you describe the teachers here at your new school? The staff? The students?

**Domain Exploration Questions**
16. How would you describe the academic experience of being a new student here at your new school?

17. What has been the biggest challenge academically here at your new school?

18. Tell me about your social experience here at your new school.

19. How easy or challenging has it been to make new friends here?

20. What are your plans after high school graduation?

21. How has the move to this school changed your post high school plans, if it has?

22. What could someone here at this school do to help you in college or career exploration?

**Making Meaning**

23. How has your transition been similar to what you expected it to be? Different?

24. What suggestions do you have to make this transition easier for future new students?

25. Do you have anything else you would like to share?