

ABSTRACT

KRADEL JR, ROBERT L. High Schools Restructuring to Smaller Schools Within Schools in North Carolina: Challenges and Obstacles. (Under the direction of Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli).

With the demands on schools to prepare its students to be globally competitive in the 21st century, schools are forced to examine new ways to meet those demands. One of the new reform ideas is that of restructuring traditional high schools into small schools within schools. Through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the North Carolina Schools Project, school systems in North Carolina can apply for grants to convert their traditional high schools with a themed curriculum based on the needs of the students. These converted high schools design a curriculum to help prepare students for college and the work force after high school graduation. The purpose of this study is to examine three rural high schools in North Carolina that have restructured into smaller schools within schools with a themed curriculum for its students. This study looked at challenges that arise at the school level that may prohibit these schools from meeting their stated goals and objectives and from meeting the needs of their students. Using a qualitative case study design, the researcher interviewed the building level administrators and the teachers. The administrators also completed a closed-ended survey and the researcher recorded observational field notes. This data revealed challenges and obstacles that face these high schools that have restructured. This study will help those in these school systems and other districts similar to it when it comes to the issue of restructuring their high schools as an option to school reform to meet the needs of their students to be globally competitive in the 21st century.

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High Schools That Have Restructured to Smaller Schools Within Schools in North Carolina:
What Have Been The Challenges and Obstacles

by
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BIOGRAPHY

Robert Kradel was born in Western, Pennsylvania in 1970. He graduated from Franklin High School in 1989. He then went onto Slippery Rock University where he graduated with a degree in Elementary Education in 1994. After spending a year as a substitute teacher in the Franklin Area School District, he moved to North Carolina. Robert has served the North Carolina Public Schools for the past 18 years as an elementary school teacher and building level administrator for 3 different school systems. Robert is currently teaching 5th grade for the Wake County Public School System.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in a small rural northwestern Pennsylvania town, I knew all of my neighbors and they definitely knew me. We were a close-knit town that centered around family, church, and our schools. Our town had six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school with about 900 students. We saw our teachers in church, at the grocery store, and at sporting events. Relationships were formed that help strengthen our community and support systems were in place for all of us to have the opportunity to succeed. The idea of being part of a huge high school and being just a number and not a person seemed like a foreign concept.

In the past, mega-high schools of more than 3,000 or more students were built on the promise of the latest technology and a wide variety of courses to challenge our students to be competitive in the 21st century. However, with the increasing demands placed on our students to pass standardized tests, dropout rates on the rise, and an increase in school discipline and safety issues, a movement to recreate small schools and break down the large comprehensive high school has gained momentum and captured the attention of researchers and reformers (Bryk & Smith, 1993). Redesigned high schools are traditional high schools converted into small, autonomous high schools with a curriculum focus that attempts to connect academics to the working world by preparing students for college, careers, and life. These redesigned high schools are often referred to as schools within schools as they are divided into sub-units of the traditional school housed on one campus. Some of the redesigned schools receive

funding from the Gates Foundation and the North Carolina New Schools Project for professional development, instructional materials, computer equipment, and other implementation expenses. The concept of converting these large schools into sub-units or schools within schools is now being done in an effort to recreate small, intimate settings where students feel safer and have a stronger sense of belonging that will hopefully lead to higher student achievement.

Educational reforms abound as issues of accountability press schools and educators to find ways to improve student achievement. These accountability issues are not only pressing in urban school systems but in rural systems as well. With rural systems competing for dollars in areas where there is less money and resources to pull from, they are looking at ways to best meet the needs of their students while still addressing concerns such as rising dropout rates, attendance issues, school safety, and low test scores. To combat these issues, rural systems are looking into downsizing or restructuring their existing high schools to smaller schools within schools.

This movement to restructure traditional high schools into sub-units or schools within schools is due in large part to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Bill Gates believes that breaking large high schools into smaller schools within schools is the solution for increasingly poor performance rates (Shaw, 2008). Schools that enter into this idea of restructuring receive money on a six year cycle from the Gates Foundation to establish these smaller schools. The first year is the planning stage. The grant received permits school systems to fund a local core planning team in charge of engaging educators and the

community in devising a clear plan and vision for this endeavor. The money is also provided over the next five years for professional development, materials, and other implementation expenses. It is believed that creating smaller learning environments produces happier, safer, and higher achieving students (Oxley, 2001). These smaller environments are believed to promote lower dropout rates, higher attendance rates, decrease discipline problems, and improve school safety. Small schools within schools, it is believed, will enhance teacher and student relationships that create a sense of being connected and belonging (Geenleaf, 1995). This belonging will motivate students to work hard and hopefully stay in school.

The mission at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is that every life has equal value and each individual should have the opportunity to live up to his or her potential. In the United States, the key to opportunity is education. Education is the great equalizer. It enriches our lives, informs our choices, and prepares us for meaningful employment and to contribute to the communities in which we live (www.gatesfoundation.org). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have invested nearly \$4 billion to transform the levels of college-readiness and success for America's young people, particularly for low income and minority youth. Some of the successes of the Foundation to date are: small schools in New York City had a graduation rate that exceeded 70 percent in 2007 which doubled the posted rate of the schools they replaced and was significantly higher than the district average. The Gates Millennium Scholars program has awarded 12,000 scholarships to exceptionally talented low-income students of color since 2000, with nearly 8 in 10 scholarship recipients graduating from college in five years (gatesfoundation.org).

As of 2008, the Gates Foundation has focused on ensuring greater opportunity for Americans through public education. The Foundation's work in new and redesigned high schools has reached over 781,000 students in 45 states and the District of Columbia. As the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation moves forward, it will continue to work on student attendance and dropout rates, improve school climate, and improve student achievement. The Foundation will also look at ways to improve classroom instruction, teaching practices, and learning inside the classroom to prepare young Americans for the demands of a global economy (gatesfoundation.org).

In North Carolina, Governor Mike Easley announced a partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in August of 2003 to create high schools in North Carolina to better prepare students for college, work, and life after high school. On February 5th 2004, Governor Easley announced the first round of grants from the North Carolina New Schools Project to reform high schools in order to increase academic achievement, increase graduation rates, reduce dropout rates, and better prepare students for college, workforce, and life (NewSchoolsProject.org).

As North Carolina schools head into the 21st century, they are challenged with meeting the demands and preparing students for an economy and work force unlike that found in the 20th century. In the 20th century high school dropouts could earn a living by working in tobacco, textiles, and farming in North Carolina. As we move into a global economy in the 21st century, the majority of the workforce needs at least some education beyond high school (NCNSP.org). North Carolina, in the last five years, has lost almost

185,000 manufacturing jobs and 1,000 farms. (NCNSP.org). Industries in North Carolina are projected to lose another 20 percent of their jobs in the next ten years. At the same time, the thousands of new jobs coming into North Carolina are in knowledge-based industries such as: innovation in aerospace, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, financial services, and information technology. These are the jobs and industries North Carolina will need to have a globally competitive workforce in the 21st century. This requires our students to be prepared to pursue post- secondary education which demands our high schools meet that need to better prepare those students.

One of the approaches North Carolina is pursuing to meet these demands is that of redesigning high schools into smaller schools within schools. This approach uses teaching that stresses inquiry and critical thinking. Restructuring is small by design, not more than 400 students, to allow for a different kind of teaching and learning (NCNSP.org). These smaller sub-units or smaller high schools adopt a common theme and a common way of teaching that will give the students a knowledge base that better prepares them for life after graduation. It is also believed that the redesigned high schools promote a sense of community and build better relationships between teachers and students that in turn improves attendance and graduation rates, reduces dropout rates, and improves student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine administrator and teacher perceptions of the challenges and obstacles that arise in restructuring rural traditional high schools into schools-within- a-school. Through a qualitative case study analysis of three high school campuses in

rural school systems that have a population of about 1,000 students that have restructured into smaller schools within a school, the researcher will determine how administrators and teachers navigate through this maze of multiple high schools on one campus. Characteristics of the restructuring itself, along with courses, demographics, and school climate, were analyzed. The researcher also gained perspectives from the administrators and teachers on grade level assignments, number of teachers, issues of autonomy, and scheduling issues. Looking at these areas will help researchers and school leaders develop a better understanding of how restructured high schools work and if they are indeed accomplishing their intended goals.

Research Questions

The primary research question is: What were the challenges and obstacles that have faced administrators and teachers when they restructured traditional high schools to small schools-within-schools model in rural school systems in North Carolina? In answering this question, several additional organizational issues, many of them significant, arise including: what issues with scheduling arise that prevent students from getting the courses they need? Who is in charge of the campus? With multiple high schools come multiple principals and building level administrators. What is the process for the students to choose their high school? What if they want to change after two years? How is scheduling approached in these schools? Subsequently, have these challenges and obstacles prevented these schools from accomplishing their stated goals to lower dropout rates, increase attendance, promote a

sense of community, improve student achievement, and provide students with the fundamental academic structure to be ready for college, workforce, and life after graduation?

Definition of Terms

The following are a list of terms that will be used throughout the research.

North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP): An organization that works in conjunction with the Gates Foundation to fund school systems over a six year period to redesign traditional high schools into smaller schools within schools. The NCNSP works to accelerate systemic, sustainable innovation in secondary schools across the state so that, in time, every high school in North Carolina graduates every student ready for college, careers, and the life in the society and economy of the 21st century (NCNSP.Org)

Schools-Within-a-School (SWS) or Redesigned Schools: Traditional high schools converted into small autonomous high schools with a curriculum focus that attempts to connect academics to the working world.

Traditional High Schools: A public school offering a regular program of instruction operating for ten consecutive months.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC): A collegial group of administrators, teachers, and staff who are united in their commitment to student learning. The group focuses on five attributes in their commitment to an outcome. Those attributes are: supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (Hord, 1997).

Socioeconomic Status (SES): A family's SES is based on family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and the community's perception of the family (Demarest, Reisner, Anderson, Humphrey, Farquhar, & Stein, 1993).

Significance of the Study

Some research has demonstrated that small schools within schools help reduce dropout rates, increase attendance, lower discipline and suspension rates, and promote student achievement (Oxley, 2001). The Gates Foundation has also found from their funded schools that new, small schools can improve climate, grade progression, and student attendance. Their work has also raised awareness of the dropout problem and encouraged states to increase high school standards (gatesfoundation.org). Research also has examined the question of what "smaller" means and about what school size may be optimum, since comparative studies have examined different size ranges. Some researchers recommend a maximum of 500 (Sergiovanni, 1994; Wasley et al., 2000) to 1,000 students (Lee & Smith, 1997; Oxley & McCabe, 1990). Some analysts suggest that optimum size varies with the socioeconomic status of the community, with 1,000 probably the upper limit for schools serving affluent students and substantially smaller sizes for schools serving low-income students (Howley & Bickel, 1999). However, there is limited research of how high schools in rural school systems are affected by this restructuring. This study looked at three redesigned high schools in rural school systems in North Carolina where the population was about 1,000 students prior to the restructuring. This study examined the challenges and obstacles that administrators and teachers face at the school level that make it difficult to

offer everything the redesigned schools promise. This study provides a knowledge base from the administrators' and teachers' perspectives as to the complexity of redesigning high schools using the school within a school model in rural school systems and offer practical advice to leaders of other rural school systems and state policy makers who might be considering this reform.

Overall Approach of the Study

The research on the New Schools Project and schools within schools has produced literature abounding with positive outcomes of small schools. However, much of this research conducted has been in urban areas. There is limited research on how rural school systems are affected by restructuring their traditional high schools into small school within schools. Through a qualitative case study design, using surveys, open-ended interviews, and onsite observations, the researcher analyzed the data on the effectiveness of the restructured design of three rural high schools. The standardized semi-structured interviews allowed the respondents to answer the same questions, thus increasing comparability of responses. This approach also reduces interviewer effects and bias. This also helped facilitate organization and analysis of the data (Patton, 2002). This study also surveyed the building level administrators at these three rural high school campuses that have restructured. These surveys provided general demographic information about the school and community that might not come out in the interviews. The researcher also visited the campuses to do observations and take field notes. The researcher looked at scheduling, number of teachers,

traffic patterns within the same school and campus wide settings, and any interactions between students and teachers to gain some insight as to whether or not the school is running effectively and meeting the goals as established by working with the North Carolina New Schools Project.

Organization of the Study

In chapter two, I provided a review of the literature to offer background information on what the North Carolina New Schools Project and Schools- Within-a- School concepts are and why they are being done in school districts across the country. The literature showed the advantages and disadvantages of restructuring using the school within a school model. Chapter three describes how I plan to conduct the study and how many participants were included in the study. I used a qualitative narrative case study approach to gather stories from building level administrators and teachers in three rural high schools that have gone through the restructuring process in North Carolina. Chapter 4, 5, and 6 will provide an overall snapshot of the three schools chosen along with quotes from the teacher focus groups and principal interview sessions. Chapter seven presents the findings of the study. In chapter eight, I summarized these key findings, compared them to existing research, and discussed the implications of the findings for research and practice.

Summary

North Carolinians understand that high schools need to be different than they were in the 20th century and even as late as fifteen to twenty years ago. The work force and jobs of

the past have shifted from manufacturing, textiles, and farming to biotechnology, financial, and information technology. To compete, North Carolina must have the work force ready to receive these new knowledge-based industries in order to compete globally. One reform that North Carolina has considered and is implementing in some counties is that of restructuring its high schools to smaller schools within a school providing a themed curriculum to smaller groups of students. This restructuring may promote more effective teaching and learning which lays the groundwork for graduates to prepare for college or any post-secondary education to be better prepared for the demands of any career they may choose to be competitive in the 21st century.

This chapter has presented the purpose of the study, introduced the research questions, defined the terminology used in the research, and explained the significance of the study. In Chapter two, the existing research on small school-within-a-schools model will be reviewed for the purpose of highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of these reform efforts.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For much of the 20th century, the trend had been to build big, mega high schools on the promise of the latest technology and a wide variety of courses to challenge our students to be competitive (Powell, 1985). However, with the increasing demands placed on students to pass standardized tests, dropout rates on the rise, and an increase in school discipline and safety issues, a look at smaller schools and breaking down those “mega” schools into small schools has been a topic of reform and received much media attention in recent years. The effort to convert these large schools into sub-units or schools-within-schools is now being done in an attempt to bring back small, intimate settings where students feel safer and have a stronger sense of belonging that may lead to improved student achievement.

Today’s high schools were conceived at the beginning of the twentieth century to prepare students for work in an industrial economy that looked very different from the economy we have today. As a result, in an effort to serve all students efficiently, our high schools serve few students well (Tom Vander Ark, in *Philanthropy News Digest*, 2003). In 2001, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation began to narrow their focus to high schools and more specifically high school graduation rates and increase the number of students graduating ready for college, especially low-income students and students of color (Gates Foundation, 2003).

The small schools research began with large-scale quantitative studies conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s that found small schools to be more productive and effective

than large ones. These studies, involving large numbers of students, schools, and districts, confirmed that students learn more and better in small schools (Lee & Smith, 1995). Students make more rapid progress toward graduation (McMullan, Sipe, & Wolf, 1994). They are more satisfied in small schools, and fewer of them drop out than in larger schools (Pittman & Haughwout, 1987). Students behave better in smaller schools, and thus experience fewer instances of both minor and serious infractions (Stockard & Mayberry, 1992). All of this is particularly true for disadvantaged students, who improve more significantly in smaller schools than do other subgroups (Lee & Smith, 1995). A number of studies have also found that major problems such as violence, vandalism, truancy, substance abuse, and disorderly behavior are much less prevalent in smaller schools than in large schools where students tend to feel more alienated (Garbarino, 1978; Gottfredson, 1985; Haller, 1992; Heaviside et al., 1998; Page, 1991).

Many studies have found that smaller schools appear to promote more attachment to school and more participation in school activities. Studies conducted as early as the 1960's have indicated that, on average, students participate in fewer activities in large schools than they do in smaller schools (Barker & Gump, 1964; also Barker & Hall, 1964). Large, comprehensive high schools have greater competition for spots on an athletic team or in other activities. Students also tend to specialize in activities in which they have above average ability, with fewer students participating in a fewer range of activities. Smaller schools provide a greater opportunity for students to participate in activities and sports regardless of

their ability. In smaller schools, a greater percentage of students participate in extra-curricular activities, and they join a wider variety of such activities on average (Campbell, Cottrell, Robinson, & Sadler, 1981; Fowler, 1992; Green & Stevens, 1998; Gump, 1978; Howley & Huang, 1991; Lindsay, 1982, 1984; Stevens & Peltier, 1994).

In an age of reform and restructuring, educators are seeking new models to improve their schools. One approach is to replicate the qualities and the advantages of a small school by creating a “school-within-a-school.” This approach establishes within the school a smaller educational unit with a separate educational program, its own staff and students, and its own budget. In a redesigned high school, the design is changed to permit more effective teaching and learning. The teachers adopt a theme or common way of teaching; these themes connect to the knowledge-based economy into which students will graduate such as: global communications, health and life science, engineering, etc. The goal is to transform these traditional high schools to better enable the students to be prepared for college and any career they may choose (NCNSP.org). These findings, together with strong evidence that smaller schools can narrow the achievement gap between white/middle class/affluent students and ethnic minority and poor students, has led to the creation of hundreds of small schools in several large urban areas including New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago (Raywid, 1995).

A great deal of research suggests that smaller schools contribute to improved student achievement, attainment, and sense of well-being (Cotton, 1996; Fowler, 1995; Howley, 1994; Howley & Bickel, 2000; Lee & Smith, 1995; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Rutter, 1988). This is particularly true for inner city kids, especially African-American and Latino

students and students from low-income families, when they are a part of a smaller, more intimate learning community (Klonsky, cited in Robinson, 2004). These studies, along with Holland and Andre's (1987) review of research on extra-curricular participation and adolescent development, found that lower ability and lower socio-economic students (SES) were more likely to be involved in school life in smaller schools. They also found that the greater extra-curricular participation of students in smaller schools has important developmental implications. Students also reported satisfaction from direct participation, which led them to feel needed, challenged, and more self confident. To capture some of the benefits of small-scale schooling, educators are increasingly looking for ways to downsize, including dividing large schools into sub schools or sub-units. This approach is especially useful given the large number of schools built on the premise that "bigger is better." The school-within-a-school model has the greatest levels of autonomy, separateness, and distinctiveness (Deweese, 1999). Students follow a separate education program, have their own faculty, and identify with their sub-school unit. Because the school-within-a-school model replicates a small school more closely than the other forms of downsizing, it is most likely to produce the positive effects of small scale educational organization (Deweese, 1999). A growing body of research suggests that downsized school models can have a positive impact on students, including improved attendance rates, improved behavior, greater satisfaction with school, and greater self-esteem (Aschbacher, 1991; Corcoran, 1989; Fouts, 1994; Gordon, 1992; Raywid, 1996a; Robinson-Lewis, 1991; Tompkins, 1988).

Additionally, there is a positive impact on teachers, who have reported enhanced morale (Fouts, 1994; Robinson-Lewis, 1991).

Some case studies suggest that a school-within-a-school can contribute to a greater feeling of community among participants which facilitates student attainment. These small school structures allow students to feel a greater sense of belonging and attachment. Small schools can use those feelings to provide a closeness of contact and knowledge of the student that builds positive relationships to help keep kids in school. These relationships increase attendance rates, have lower rates of violence, greater parent and student participation, lower drop-out rates, and produce higher graduation rates, despite the fact that the students come from lower income families and entered school performing below average (Wasley et al, 2000).

What Are Schools Within a School?

Small schools and the small school within a school reform is an effort to combat drop-out rates, increase attendance, and improve student achievement. These efforts are spearheaded by Bill and Melinda Gates and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to urge American governors and leaders in education to redesign high schools to raise graduation rates, prepare students for college, and train a workforce facing growing global competition. Bill Gates believes that the traditional high school is designed to meet the needs of another age and must be redesigned to meet the needs and challenges of the 21st century and better prepare our students for college and today's jobs (people.com). These redesigned or innovative high schools break up anonymous traditional high schools into smaller schools

that give students real world connections to their learning using academic themes such as health science, international studies, information technology, or engineering (NCNSP.org).

Schools within schools are large public schools that have been divided into smaller autonomous sub-units that report directly to superintendents and school boards (Lee & Ready, 2007). The National Association of Elementary School Principals officially recognizes a school within a school as a “separate entity, running its own budget and planning its own programs. However, school safety and building operation remain vested with the principal of the larger school, and use of shared space is negotiated” (NAESP, 2001). The key organizational characteristic of the school within a school is that the program and individual classes remain small (Sicoli, 2000).

Much of the research is inconsistent with regards to how small a school should be and how large the school needs to be before it is divided into subunits. Looking at size, different writers have different opinions about the proper size for a small high school. Some put the maximum at 500 students, but most assert that an upward limit of 400 students is best (Cotton, 2001). Others argue that enrollments should be between 200 and 400 students (Raywid, 1999). Tom Vander Ark, former Executive Director, Education, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, suggests that a good size is roughly 400 students (Philanthropy News Digest, 2003). Regardless of size, however, the most accurate definition of a school within a school is: a separate and autonomous unit formally authorized by the board of education and/or superintendent. It plans and runs its own program, has its own staff and students, and receives its own separate budget. Although it must negotiate the use of common space (gym,

auditorium, playground, etc.) with a host school and defer to the building principal on matters of safety and building operation, the school within a school reports to a district official instead of being responsible to the building principal. Both its teachers and students are affiliated with the school within a school as a matter of choice (Raywid, 1995).

Large schools have implemented a myriad of programs to downsize or downscale: house plans, mini-schools, learning communities, clusters, charters, and schools within schools. Each model differs from the others on a range of factors including how separate the subunits are from the larger institution and how much autonomy it receives to manage its own educational program. The models also differ in terms of programs, organizational structure, and practice (Raywid, 1995). Some simply group cohorts of students together while maintaining a symbolic administrative identification with the larger school. The school-within-a-school model has the greatest levels of autonomy, separateness, and distinctiveness. Students follow a separate education program, have their own faculty, and identify with their sub-school unit. The school-within-a-school is the closest representation to a small school and therefore is most likely to produce the positive effects of small-scale educational organization.

After reviewing the research to this point, implementing the school-within-a-school model has met with varying degrees of success in different settings. The most critical factor for success is a commitment to implementing the program fully, allowing for complete administrative separation of the sub-school, and the creation of a separate identity (McCabe

& Oxley, 1989; McMullen, Sipe, & Wolfe, 1994; Raywid, 1996). Without full implementation and support, the benefits of small scale schooling can never be fully recognized (Deweese, 1999). It is also important to have the support from the staff, students, superintendent, school board, and the principal.

Researchers who study small-school restructuring agree that autonomy is vital to its success (Cotton, 2001). Small schools must be able to create a vision and administrators must have the authority and flexibility to see that vision through. Small schools must be given the authority to make decisions in all aspects such as: space, scheduling, budget, curriculum, instruction, and personnel (Cotton, 2001). Rick Lear (2001b) writes:

Autonomy is critical. To be successful, a small school needs autonomy in terms of budget, staffing, curricular, scheduling, and focus. In designing a set of small schools that will occupy the same building, imagine the autonomy each school would have if it were located three blocks away from the others. Take that as the starting point and work backwards. (p. 2)

Benefits of the School-Within-A-School Model

Although there are few studies on the school-within-a-school model itself, proponents infer that the benefits of a school-within-a-school closely parallel those of small schools, which have been studied extensively. In 1996, a report from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recommended smaller schools and smaller classes as essential for improved student achievement. Research shows that smaller learning environments create happier, safer,

higher achieving students (Oxley, 2001). Some of the advantages of small schools identified by researchers are: academic benefits, social benefits, attendance and graduation increases, safety and discipline benefits, higher student achievement, and a stronger sense of community (Cotton, 2001).

Student Achievement

While many Gates Foundation-sponsored new schools are still young, the results are promising. Students have demonstrated high levels of engagement (high attendance and retention rates), and teachers and leaders have built a school based culture that supports high expectations and good results based on test scores and graduation rates (Vander Ark, 2005).

Many studies have examined the influences of school size on student achievement. Roger Barker and Paul Gump (1964) closely observed five schools in Kansas, ranging from 83 to 2,287 students. They concluded that students in the smaller schools excelled on all social and psychological attributes observed. The work of Barker and Gump showed that, all things being equal, students generally learn more in small schools (Fowler, 1992). Werblow, 2007, found that the relationship between high school size and math learning is curvilinear with greatest average gains in math achievement found in schools with less than 673 students. Other recent studies have found that students in schools with about 100 students per grade generally score higher on tests, pass more courses, and are more likely to stay in school, graduate, and go onto college (Vander Ark, 2005). Large high schools may have some advantages. They may, for example, offer a greater variety of courses and activities as well as more resources, although that is by no means guaranteed (Bryk, et al., 1993; Monk,

1987). The differences in diversity or depth of subject offerings in large and small schools are not as great as commonly believed. Rather, large schools generally offer more basic courses in what some have called “a shopping mall curriculum” (Klonsky, 1995). The trade off for greater course offerings has been a sacrifice of coherence, depth, intimacy, security, student choice, and teacher autonomy. These factors are vital to successful learning in today’s urban environment. Small schools are able to offer curriculum that compares favorably with that of a large school, while maintaining communality.

Test scores of students in small schools are consistently higher than those in larger schools (Jacobson, 2001; McComb, 2000). Administrators of small schools are also better able to reform their curricula and teaching strategies (McComb, 2000). Smaller class sizes and interdisciplinary methods allow greater contact between students and teachers. Because teachers in smaller schools tend to be more aware of student performance, student accountability is increased. Research shows that those attending small schools achieve at higher levels than do students in large schools both on standardized achievement tests and on other measures. Speaking of one “teacher-director” in a school-within-a-school, Cushman (1999) writes:

While test scores at Muscota come in above the district average, Menken sets more store by the students’ year-end written reflections, which the school maintains as part of their records. “Kids here write about their work in a very personal way,” she says. “They have clearly internalized our expectations about the importance of math, reading, and learning about the world. These

things are not testable, but in a small school, they are certainly observable.”

(p. 3)

Researchers observe that the effects of smallness on achievement are indirect, being mediated through other small-school features such as quality of the social environment and students' sense of attachment to the school. Mitchell (2001) reminds us that in the studies conducted by Howley and others, school size had such a powerful positive effect on the achievement of poor students that it even trumped the beneficial effects of class size.

In summary, on measures such as grades, test scores, honor roll membership, subject area achievement, and assessment of higher order thinking skills, research has shown that small schools perform as well or better than larger comprehensive schools when other variables, such as SES, are held constant. In addition, the positive effects of small schools are especially significant for the most disadvantaged students, those who are minority and/or of low socioeconomic status (Cotton, 1996).

Lower Dropout Rates/Higher Attendance and Graduation Rates

Today, only 71 percent of American students earn a high school diploma, a figure that drops to 58 percent for Hispanic students and 55 percent for African Americans. And far too many of those who do graduate from high school are unprepared for the rigors of college. A study of the class of 2002 found that only 23 percent of African American and 20 percent of Hispanic young people were ready to succeed in a four year college, a fact that has tremendous costs for these students and our society (Gates Foundation Report, 2009).

A 2004 report from Achieve Inc.'s American Diploma Project found that the employers of high school graduates want the same high level skills that colleges demand for admission, yet studies from ACT Inc. and the Manhattan Institute suggest that only one-third of our 9th graders will graduate from high school with college-ready and work-ready skills. We cannot sustain our nation's competitiveness and civic well-being if we continue to allow most of our young people to leave high school without the skills they need for long-term success (Vander Ark, 2005).

An individual's educational attainment is one of the most important determinants of their life chances in terms of employment, income, health status, housing, and many other amenities. In the United States we share a common expectation that all citizens will have access to high quality education that will reduce considerably the likelihood of later lifetime inequalities. Yet, large differences in educational quality and attainment persist across income, race, and religion. Even with similar schooling resources, educational inequalities endure because children from educationally and economically disadvantaged populations are less prepared to start school. They are unlikely to catch up without major educational interventions on their behalf (NCNSP.org).

The North Carolina New Schools Project also reports that graduation rates are low in absolute terms. On time public high school graduation rates are approximately 66%-70%, meaning that at least three out of ten students do not graduate through the regular school system within the conventional time allotted. Graduation rates also vary by gender and ethnicity. On time public high school graduation rates for black males are as low as 43%.

This compares to 48% for Hispanic males and 71% for white males. Female rates vary similarly across ethnicities, but with higher graduation rates overall. Thus, although a large proportion of each cohort meets conventional educational expectations, a significant number have not received an excellent or even adequate education (NCNSP.org).

The fact is that out of 100 students who start 9th grade in North Carolina, no more than 70 will graduate in five years. That is the equivalent of 131 students dropping out for every day schools are open each year. The consequence for poorly prepared students, and those who drop out, cost themselves and the state billions over the course of their lives (NCNSP.org).

Table 2.1 demonstrates the earning power for educational attainment.

Table 2.1 Level of Education and Earning Power

Education Level	Average Annual Earnings	Average Lifetime Earnings
High School Dropout	\$22,000	\$1.1 million
High School Diploma	\$31,000	\$1.4 million
Associate Degree	\$38,000	\$1.8 million
Bachelor's Degree	\$50,000	\$2.5 million

Source: (NCNSP.org)

For North Carolina, this means smaller tax contributions over a dropout's working life. Dropouts tend to incur higher costs for health care, public assistance, and law

enforcement. A dropout costs society \$127,000 more than a high school graduate over his working years. So, North Carolina's dropouts are costing \$2.9 billion that the state will pay over the next 40 years. In response to this, many systems including Los Angeles and Chicago have started to break up their big schools into smaller sub-units or schools-within-a-school (Robinson, 2004).

School attendance and graduation rates are higher in small schools generally and better still in deliberately small schools. These findings, as Gladden (1998) observes, are at the heart of the educational enterprise:

The ultimate test of a school is its ability to graduate students in a timely manner and provide them with the opportunity to go to college or to find a better job than they would without a high school degree. Students attending smaller high schools are more likely to pass their courses, accumulate credits, and attain a higher level of education than students who attend larger schools.
(p. 127)

The average national dropout rate for high schools with more than 1,000 students is 6.39 percent, whereas schools with fewer than 200 students have an average dropout rate of 3.47 percent (McComb, 2000). Research shows that students in small schools have higher rates of attendance than those attending large schools (Gewertz, 2001). A recent study showed that for student dropout rate, a linear relationship with school size was observed where student dropout rate increases as school size increase (Werblow, 2007). These variations may be due to the relative ease of staff members at the small-school-within-a-

school level to recognize students and hold them accountable. In North Carolina, the annual dropout rate in redesigned high schools was 2.8 percent, about half of the state's 5.24 percent. If North Carolina's dropout rate had mirrored that of the redesigned high schools, the state would have had 11,000 fewer dropouts. More than four out of ten redesigned high schools reported no dropouts (NCNSP.org).

As equally important as the dropout rate, the achievement gap between white students and their low-income, minority counterparts on tests has received a great deal of attention, the gap in high school graduation rates is even more critical. Nearly half of our nation's African-American and Hispanic students drop out of high school, and fewer than a fifth graduate ready for college. This graduation gap is the most important economic, civic, and social problem of our time (Vander Ark, 2005).

Safety and Discipline

Small schools are safer than large comprehensive schools (Wasley et al., 2000). In small schools, everyone knows each other. Students are less likely to feel like outsiders. There are dramatic reductions in the incidents of fighting, vandalism, theft, and substance abuse (Wasley et al., 2000). The safer, caring environment created by small schools promotes academic and personal development of students. Students who attend small schools feel better connected to their teachers and to one another and as a result, are less likely to engage in risky behavior such as drug abuse, violence, or early sexual activity (Fletcher, 2002).

Small schools generally have fewer discipline problems than larger schools. The strong parental support and adult connections present in small schools create a safer environment for students. Strangers can be spotted more easily in small schools, which further promotes safety. (McComb, 2000).

Decades of research suggest that safe and comfortable communities grow from personal relationships. When people share space, be it school or neighborhood, know each other personally, and hold each other accountable, there is less bad behavior. When young people are treated with respect and guided toward meaningful academic work by adults who believe in them, they tend to behave regardless of their environment outside of school. When districts in cities like Chicago and Boston create small, personal school communities, there is less violence, better attendance, more academic rigor, and higher graduation rates (Bass, 2005).

Not only do studies show a decrease in dropout rates in smaller schools, but there is a lessening of other problems such as drugs, alcoholism, and violence. Based on his study of high school violence, Jackson Toby (1993) concluded that the first step in ending school violence must be to “break through the anonymous, impersonal atmosphere of jumbo high schools and junior highs by creating smaller communities of learning within the larger structures, where teachers and students can come to know each other well” (p. 46).

Similar conclusions were drawn by James Garbarino, director of the Family Life Development Center at Cornell University. When asked what he would do about the scourge of violence among juveniles, Garbarino said, “At the adolescent level, if I could do one

single thing it would be to ensure that teenagers are not in a high school bigger than 400 to 500 students” (*New York Times*, Dec. 30, 1994, p. A24).

An obvious benefit of student affiliation and belonging is increased order and safety. The full range of negative social behavior from classroom disruption to assault and even murder is far less common in small schools, traditional or new, than it is in large schools. Regarding classroom discipline problems, Cocklin (1999) quotes an Australian student commenting on the way that classroom misbehavior at his large high school interferes with learning, something that had not occurred at his small elementary school:

Some of the kids don't want to learn and they muck up so the teachers pay most of the attention to them to try and get them to work. But, the kids that really need the attention because they're stuck on something, they won't give it to them because they're busy with the bad kids. (p. 9)

Regarding more dangerous student behavior, Raywid and Oshiyams's (2000) article on school safety issues in the aftermath of the Columbine shootings reminds us that “there is overwhelming evidence that violence is much less likely to occur in small schools than large ones” (p. 445). Gladden's (1998) research review identifies, among the benefits of small schools, that students feel safer, no doubt because there is a lower incidence of drug use, assault, vandalism, victimization, violence, suspensions, and expulsions.

Community and Sense of Belonging

One area of almost universal agreement is that, compared with traditional comprehensive high schools, social relations in SWS high schools are more positive;

relationships among subunit members are more often built upon notions of trust (AIR & SRI, 2004). Social relations improve because students are likely to encounter teachers in multiple courses across several years, thereby increasing opportunities to deepen positive social bonds (Oxley, 1989). Compared with teachers in traditional high schools, those working in SWS high schools report improved social and learning environments (Jordan et al., 2000). There is also increased opportunities for staff to share information about their students and a greater willingness to take responsibility for student learning (Wallach & Lear, 2005). Students also discussed the importance and the benefit of knowing the same group of teachers, and having those teachers discuss and advocate for students (Rayyes, 2009).

Sergiovanni (1995, 1996) has called for the development of more caring learning communities in schools and argues that creating such communities is easier in smaller schools. Smaller schools are more intellectually oriented, have more caring teachers, and report greater parent and student satisfaction (Goodlad, 1984). The greater sense of belonging that students feel in small schools fosters greater caring through interpersonal relationships (Capps & Mitchell, 1999). Small school settings have been shown to enhance students' self-perceptions, both socially and academically (Jordan & McPartland, 2001). Small schools also foster a more aware and involved faculty, which promotes positive student attitudes (Jordan & McPartland, 2001). Additionally, in small schools there is more opportunity for student involvement in school activities because of less competition for membership on athletic teams and in clubs and student government (McComb, 2000).

It is not size alone that creates benefits in small schools. It is the personalization, responsiveness, and the sense of community that smallness and less formal structures permit (Raywid, 1997). These are the qualities and features rendering small schools far more user friendly to all of their constituents than other contemporary public schools. Smallness has benefits that combine in intricate ways to make these schools more successful. For instance, the schools' friendliness yields increased parent involvement and hence support the positive climate yields more student engagement combined, the two enhance teacher efficacy which in turn enhances teacher effort (Raywid, 1997).

Some case studies suggest that a school-within-a-school model can contribute to a greater feeling of community engagement among participants, which facilitates student attainment. Creating learning communities for young people increases their social commitment to one another and to their teachers, thereby increasing their personal investment in school (Greenleaf, 1995). Small schools are more likely to create the sense of connectedness among students and teachers; the sense of being known and valued that motivates people to work hard. But, at root, the benefits all rest on the capacity of small schools and schools-within-a-school to generate a strong sense of identification and affiliation on the part of everyone associated with them. Unless this happens, unless the identification potential is fulfilled, the gains will not be realized (Raywid, 1997).

Promoting greater equality of educational attainment has been a major educational policy initiative for several decades. Research in the early 1980s reported that Catholic high schools were especially effective in this regard. The background characteristics that students

brought to Catholic schools, such as family income and parental education level, played much less of a role in subsequent achievement than they did in comparable public schools. Researchers Anthony Bryk, Peter Holland, and Valerie Lee chronicled the effectiveness of Catholic high schools and found them to be better organized than public schools (Bryk et al., 1993). Sergiovanni (1996) attributes much of the advantage of Catholic schools to their small size. The average Catholic high school enrolls 546 students; the average public school has 845 students. According to Bryk et al., (1993), smaller size provides: (1) a greater sense of community within the school; (2) better personal interactions among students and faculty; (3) more leadership experience for students; (4) a feeling by students that teachers are more interested in them; (5) students in turn are more interested in their school work; and (6) teachers are more likely to feel satisfied about their work and are then willing to expend greater personal effort. Bryk also says:

As we move to decentralize the public school system into a system of publicly supported schools, there is more space for new schools organized like Catholic schools to emerge. Specifically in the context of current efforts to break up large public high schools into smaller schools-with-a-school, there are opportunities now to create more schools that combine strong social engagement with the traditional academic program typically found in Catholic high schools. (p. 77)

Sizer (1984) argues that effective teaching occurs when teachers know their students well. Sizer (1985) also maintains that education of adolescents can only be done by teachers

who can “move” them; to move them, one needs to know them. When students and teachers are able to build relationships, both are motivated to work and to make a success of the schooling enterprise. Teachers, moreover, can become knowledgeable about students’ learning strengths and needs and identify ways to respond to them in a way that is not possible in the typical large high school. Lear (2001) regards knowing students well as being second only to autonomy among critical elements for success:

High personalization follows closely after autonomy as a key requirement. Schools are filled with particular, individual kids, and only real, particular knowledge of each of those kids and the freedom to act on that knowledge can make a school truly successful. (p. 2)

Of the small schools in Chicago they have helped to start and maintain, Klonsky and Klonsky (1999) observe that “each has a commitment to knowing each student as an individual”. (p. 38) As a practical matter, what this means to the Small Schools Project people in Washington is that every student is known well by more than one adult in the school and has an advisor/advocate who works closely with the student and their family to plan a personalized program (Klonsky & Klonsky, 2001).

From the students’ perspective, these personalized small school settings promote improved relationships with teachers and increased student engagement and attachment to school (Bryk et al., 1993, Wasley et al., 2000). As a student commented, “the teachers always give you attention. They really care about us. My teacher knows when I’m doing

good or not” (Wasley et al., 2000, p. 37). Another small school student noted, “school should not be mass production. It needs to be loving and close. That is what kids need” (Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Ort, 2002, p. 654). Particularly in the high poverty urban environments in which these particular schools operate, close relationships between students and adults may be particularly important to supporting student success.

Teacher Satisfaction

Many researchers have identified the collaboration associated with teacher professional community as a key element of successful schools (Little, 1982; McLaughlin & Talbot, 2001). Bryk, Camburn, and Louis (1999) found that smaller school size facilitates the development of professional community, which they define as teachers’ focus on student learning, collective responsibility for school improvement, deprivatized practice (e.g., observing others’ teaching and receiving meaningful feedback on their practice from colleagues), reflective dialogue (e.g., discussing the goals of the school with colleagues), and staff collegiality and collaboration. Lee and Loeb (2000) found that this sense of collective responsibility in small schools positively influences student learning. Other outcomes reported by teachers was increased collaboration, increased collective responsibility for student learning, increased knowledge of students, and increased care about the students (Lee & Ready, 2007).

Teachers welcome the opportunity to work in the small school-within-a-school environment. Findings from earlier Gates Foundation reports show gains in the area of

relationships. Teachers report closer relationships with students and more collaborative working environments with other teachers (Vander Ark, 2005). It provides opportunities to know their students and to work with colleagues on planning effective instructional practices to meet the needs of their students. Smaller schools also can create fertile soil for teaching innovations initiated by teachers themselves. After extensive field research to study innovations over a five year period in two Vermont high schools, Robert Larson (1991) found that their small size (400-500 students) set in motion many different types of “inside-out” innovations. These are innovations that come directly out of the teaching experience rather than from top-down decisions or big changes in organization structures.

School size research usually finds that teachers in small learning environments feel they are in a better position to make a real difference in students’ learning and general quality of life than do teachers in large schools (Wasley et al., 2000). They have closer relationships with students and other staff, experience fewer discipline problems, and are better able to adapt instruction to students’ individual needs. Add to this the fact that teachers in most of the recently established small schools are there by choice and have more decision making authority, and those teachers tend to have higher morale. Teachers in small school have felt more committed and more efficacious, tended to report being members of or included in a stronger professional community, are far more satisfied, are more likely to collaborate with colleagues, are more likely to engage in professional development that they find valuable, have greater sense of responsibility for ongoing student learning, and provide a more focused learning environment for their students (Wasley, et al., 2000).

Flexible Scheduling

Many researchers have pointed out that rigid scheduling of teacher and student time in the typical comprehensive high school has more to do with controlling students' behavior than with providing meaningful learning experiences for them. By way of contrast, Gregory (2000) points out that:

Issues of control seem to disappear in these small schools; teachers tend to have equalitarian relationships with their students; and change is a familiar quality of their lives; they seem to be able to respond much more flexibly to new circumstances. (p. 10)

Schools- within- a-school allow for flexibility in scheduling to support things such as: curriculum integration, common planning time, sustained blocks of learning time, and community based learning experiences for students. Flexible scheduling and faculty teamwork allow for a level of depth and an interdisciplinary approach that provides students with a much richer educational experience (Fine & Sommerville, 1998a).

Funding

Shifting from large to small student bodies requires planning, resources, and restructuring. The U.S. Department of Education has funded grants used for such transitions through its Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. Smaller Learning Communities, another USDOE grant program, saw its budget nearly triple last year to \$125 million. Through various grants, the Department of Education offers administrators the

opportunity to study the strategic feasibility or organizational methods and systems that facilitate smaller learning communities. The grants can also be used to implement the outlined strategies for developing schools-within-schools, all without drawing on already stretched local budgets. In 2003, the Gates Foundation awarded \$11 million to establish the New Schools Project (NSP). This came with a challenge to the states that if \$10 million of public and private funds were identified, the Foundation would then award an additional \$10 million (New Schools Project.org).

In the private sector, the Annenberg Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trust, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have offered more than \$1 billion for the planning and implementation of smaller learning communities. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has pledged more than \$240 million over the next several years to help districts restructure their schools (Jacobson, October 3, 2001a). In the past five years, the Gates Foundation has invested \$733 million to restructure more than 1,500 high schools nationwide (people.com).

In North Carolina, the New Schools Project will issue a series of Requests for Proposals over the next few years so that all communities that possess a strong desire to redesign the high school experience will have the opportunity to compete for funding. Districts selected for the creation of High School Innovation Projects will be considered for both planning grants and implementation grants. The selection process is conducted by an independent selection committee which uses a series of scoring rubrics and which identifies follow up questions to be addressed by districts. Typically, follow up interviews and other research also affects the final selection (NCNSP.org).

Drawbacks of Small Schools

In 2000, the Gates Foundation came up with the small schools initiative in belief that it would boost graduation rates, especially in urban districts. There was limited research on small school redesign and what research existed, was written by advocates of small schools (Ravitch, 2010). The work of the Gates Foundation and other wealthy advocates of school reform focused primarily on urban schools, breaking up large, impersonal urban high schools. There is little research available to study the effects of small school redesign in small rural areas. The work of Lyle Shaw looked at the positives and negative characteristics of small schools through the principals' lens. However, her work looked at the size of schools at the elementary level and not high school redesign. The research that did exist on schools-within-schools, promoted social stratification with motivated students enrolling in small schools, and the unmotivated students falling into the "loser academy" (Lee and Smith, 1997). Lee and Smith (1997) also found that breaking schools into sub-units did not necessarily lead to instructional improvement.

The recent evaluation of Gates-supported SWS-conversion high schools (i.e., comprehensive high schools that adopted SWS designs) reported only slight improvement in reading achievement but none in math (AIR & SRI, 2005). Researchers that look at SWS conversion high schools face challenges replicating small-school social and academic climates that already stand alone small schools do not face. In this regard, research on small schools and on school size may not be relevant to SWS conversion high schools (Lee & Ready, 2007).

Some strategies to create schools-within-schools have created successful, equitable communities, while others have reinforced academic stratification, producing greater success for some students and less for others (Ready, Lee, & LoGerfo, 2000). The process of change in creating small learning communities has also been divisive, introducing contentions among staff and parents that are not readily resolved (Muncey & McQuillan, 1991). Issues of rivalries exist between sub-units for resources, lack of clarity around issues of space and autonomy, unclear lines of responsibility and accountability, teacher ambivalence over loyalty to the sub-unit or the whole school, and a lack of cultural changes to accompany the structural changes are problems that prevent small school reform from succeeding (Raywid, 1996). Lee and Ready (2004) found that when the school-within-a-school maintained elements of the comprehensive high school such as diversified curriculum and teacher assignments outside of the small school climate, they could not concentrate on a single shared group of students and felt mixed allegiance between the school-within-a-school and the larger school.

In addition to the differences in circumstances under which small schools or school units exist or are being created, there are differences in what goes on inside new, small schools-within-schools. Some restructured schools have paid scant attention to the purposes of their restructuring and have pursued new structures without changing their relationships or academic rigor (Croninger et al., 2000). Restructuring without focus on vision may not result in improved outcomes. The challenge in restructuring is not just to restructure, but to learn

how to use new structures to enhance faculty and student concern for learning of high intellectual quality (Newman, 1995).

Another problem identified with the small-schools-within-schools model is that of splitting teachers' time and obligations between the school-within-a-school and the larger school in ways that dilute the possibilities for personalized relationships between teachers and students (Raywid, 1996). This has also increased the divisiveness among groups and ideologies within schools, as the "alternative" school is viewed with suspicion by those in the "regular" school and clashes over resources, routines, and student recruitment often occur (Muncey & McQuillan, 1991). Students who are low achievers, classified as special education, or who have repeated a grade are less likely to be welcomed or assigned to high status schools-within-schools (Raywid, 1996). Higher achieving students tend to select schools-within-schools that have a reputation for rigor while lower achieving students chose schools with reputations for lower standards. This segregation fell along race and class lines (Lee and Ready, 2004).

With all the benefits of reduced classroom size and smaller schools, opponents believe small schools cannot provide a variety of courses to meet the needs of all students. There are not enough students or teachers to support and offer advanced courses in math, science, electives, and AP courses. There is also a belief that small schools do not have the resources to support English as Second Language learners or students with special needs. Small schools is not a wave of the future, but a revival of the rural schools of yesteryear, with strong relationships but limited curriculum (Ravitch, 2010). There is also a belief that small

schools operate on less money and are therefore not able to provide additional resources to meet the needs of their population. A survey by Public Agenda showed that parents and teachers chose reducing class size and improving discipline over making schools smaller as ways to improve the educational experience. A majority of teachers surveyed believe that smaller schools have less money for equipment and will be more difficult for students who have problems with teachers to transfer out of classes (Jacobson, 2001).

Several staffing issues arise when large schools are carved into smaller units. Some teachers worry that they may have to transfer from one school to another, may lose seniority, may have to teach out of their specialty in a school with fewer course offerings, or may not truly gain the autonomy they desire in the restructuring of schools (Gewertz, 2001). “Small, in and of itself, can be as silly as big,” said Michelle Fine, a professor of psychology at the City University of New York. “It will produce a sense of belonging almost immediately. But hugging is not the same as algebra. Rigor and care must be braided together, or we run the risk of creating small, nurturing environments that aren’t schools” (Fine, cited in Gewertz, 2001, p. 4).

Teacher relationships have been described as more incidental rather than making an authentic connection with their colleagues. In a recent study, interactions among teachers in restructured schools were described as minimal and superficial in nature and the collaboration was described as forced (Sikes, 2009). Teacher relationships and interactions were based on proximity and compatible personalities, as opposed to seeking and establishing intentional relationships (Sikes, 2009).

Restructuring poses challenges to site level administrators as well. Building principals must reorient their management priorities from coordinating and controlling in the interests of order and coherence to encouraging and supporting multiple, distinct learning communities, each with its own program. Where building principals fail to make this shift, the new small schools must struggle to sustain sufficient separateness, autonomy, and distinctiveness to succeed. Some fail and close when an enervated faculty simply gives up (Raywid, 1997).

Conclusion

Many researchers find instructional reform of virtually any sort to be contingent upon small school size (Roellke, 1996; Vuliamy & Webb, 1995). In some cities, small schools have also come to be associated with a powerful form of accountability, as large failing schools are phased out and replaced by several separate and independent small schools. Small schools and schools-within-a-school as reform strategies have been woven into many recent educational reforms. Interest in and examination of small schools appears to be thriving.

The school-within-a-school model may be an effective and affordable way to capture the benefits of smaller-scale schooling within larger school buildings. While research results are limited, the school-within-a-school model has the potential to contribute to a greater sense of student well-being, a sense of student community, and higher student achievement and educational attainment. This model seems to hold promise, especially for disadvantaged students who are affected positively by smaller schools but are more likely to attend larger

schools (Jewell, 1989; Lee & Smith, 1996). Because a sub-school model can be adopted in an existing building structure, it is a cost-effective approach to school reform; however, the challenge lies in successful implementation. As Raywid (1985) observes, “The major challenge to schools-within-schools has been obtaining sufficient separateness and autonomy to permit staff members to generate a distinctive environment and to carry out their own vision of schooling.” (p. 455)

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Educational reforms abound as issues of accountability press schools and educators to find ways to more positively impact student achievement. These issues are not only pressing in urban school systems but in rural systems as well. Rural school systems are struggling to find dollars to implement policies and put structures in place to provide for their students to be globally competitive in the 21st century. These rural school systems are also combating issues of school safety, discipline, poor attendance and high dropout rates, and low test scores. One way to confront these challenges is to restructure high schools into small schools using a school-within-a-school model.

Research Design

Qualitative research is appropriate when examining perceptions and conditions within a social setting. Educational settings are particularly appropriate for qualitative studies in that natural settings provide the backdrop for studies as opposed to laboratory-style experiments (Hatch, 2002). In this way, “fields of study are not artificial situations in the laboratory but the practices and interactions of the subjects in everyday life” (Flick, 2002, p. 5), which promises data rich with impressions and interpretations of the people involved. Researchers also are able to become actively involved in these studies not only as observers but through interviews. The qualitative approach “is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives” (Creswell, 2003, p. 18). A

constructivist view will provide readers with good raw material for their own generalizing. This constructivist perspective requires extensive narrative description in the final report (Stake, 1995).

A qualitative case study is the best approach when examining a setting or single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin 1989). The case study would be used because the researcher wanted to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompasses important contextual conditions because they were highly pertinent to the phenomenon of study (Yin & Davis, 2007). The researcher examined three high schools that have restructured into small-schools-within-a-school and have devised themed curricula for each small school. These restructured high schools were in rural school systems of North Carolina. The researcher collected data by conducting interviews, collected field notes from observations, and has transcribed those interviews. The researcher has gained insight and perspectives from building level administrators and teachers in the school community. Semi-structured interviews offered insight and provided stories of school level administrators and teachers that offered an understanding of their lived experience and the meaning they make from that experience (Seidman, 2006). The administrators also filled out closed-ended written surveys that provided a foundation for more in-depth analysis of those schools that have restructured.

The researcher is studying rural school systems in North Carolina that have restructured using the small schools-within-a-school model. Using the North Carolina New Schools Project website, the researcher has identified those school systems that have

restructured and are also considered rural. The researcher sent letters to those superintendents explaining the research and purpose of the study and invited them to participate. From those that responded yes, the researcher narrowed it down to two school systems based on location and proximity to the researcher.

The interviews took place on the location of the three high school campuses chosen to be studied. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, selected purposefully (Patton, 2002). The power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. The schools in the sample were purposely chosen by the researcher to provide information rich cases to learn a great deal about the issues of importance and illuminated the questions under study (Patton, 2002). Those interviewed were chosen from the existing building level administrators at those three campuses that have restructured. Teachers were chosen from those three campuses by purposeful sampling across grade levels from the list of those responding that they would like to participate. The researcher sent out invitations and an explanation of what the study is about and the value of their participation in the study. From the respondents who agreed to participate, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with 2-4 building level administrators and three focus groups of 5-7 teachers from each of the restructured schools. Through these interviews, textual data was generated and transcribed to ascertain any patterns and emerging themes reflecting the challenges faced by those involved in the redesigned high schools.

The researcher visited the three campuses of the redesigned high schools for an entire day observing the interactions of the students, staff, administrators, and custodians to get a

picture of the overall setting of these redesigned schools. The researcher also observed the procedures and processes of the redesigned schools. The researcher analyzed school documents such as drop-out rates, graduation rates, school report cards, teacher working conditions survey, school improvement plans, and other relevant documents. The researcher paid close attention to the interaction between students within their cohort and with those in the other themed high schools, while also observing the relationship and interaction with the teachers in those redesigned high schools. The responses from the interviews were a major source of data, however, there are limitations. To understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method (Patton, 2002).

Research Question

The following research question was used to guide the study: What were the challenges and obstacles that have faced administrators and teachers when they restructured traditional high schools using the small schools-within-schools model in rural school systems in North Carolina? Sub questions include: have these challenges and obstacles prevented these schools from accomplishing their stated goals to lower dropout rates, increase attendance, promote a sense of community, improve student achievement, and provide the students with the fundamental academic structure to be ready for college, workforce, and life after graduation?

Discussion of Qualitative Research and Case Study Methodology

To address the research question, this study used a qualitative case study approach. The researcher was the primary instrument of data collection. The researcher used interviews, observations, surveys, and school documents to examine obstacles that arise in restructuring traditional high schools to schools-within-a-school. Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption as possible (Merriam, 1998). More specifically, the researcher employed a case study method by looking at a bounded system over time through detailed, in-depth, data collection involving observations, interviews, documents, and surveys (Creswell, 2007).

Case study is not sampling research. We do not study a case to understand other cases. A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. Yin (2008), defines case study in terms of the research process. “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Stake (2005), however, focuses on trying to pinpoint the unit of study, the case. Our first obligation is to understand this one case (Stake, 1995). Case studies are of value in refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability. Case study can also be a disciplined force in setting public policy and in reflecting on human experience (Stake, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of

potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). The insights gained from case study research can be looked at as a tentative hypothesis that helps future research; hence case studies play an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base (Merriam, 1998).

More specifically, intrinsic case study design was used to focus on those particular schools that have restructured into schools-within-a-school. The intrinsic case study research design will provide data to help districts in examining whether or not to consider downsizing or continue the reform in schools that have already restructured. Intrinsic case study is not necessary to generalize findings to broader populations (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Case study research is conducting an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). Because of its strengths, case study is a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study such as education. Educational process, problems, and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that can effect and improve practice. Case study has proven to be useful studying educational innovations, for evaluating programs, and informing policy (Merriam, 1998).

A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, or one particular event (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1989; & Stake, 1994). The data collection in case study research is typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, documents, and audio visual material and reports case description

and case based themes. Yin (2003), espouses both quantitative and qualitative approaches to case study development and discusses explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive qualitative case studies.

Site Selection

Research sites were chosen from rural school districts in North Carolina where the traditional school population was less than 1,000 students before restructuring to small-schools-within-a-school. Each site provided approximately 2-4 building level administrators to choose from for interviews. Invitations explaining this study were mailed to the administrators. Once they responded, the researcher arranged the interviews at their site.

Choosing these sites also provided the researcher with a population of teachers to invite as possible participants in the study. Invitations were also sent to these teachers explaining the nature of the study and the importance of their participation. From those, the researcher created a pool of respondents who agree to participate in a focus group interview. The selection of those teachers was based on equal representation of each of the redesigned themed high schools. The teachers were also be chosen based on equal representation based on experience both in traditional and redesigned schools, grade levels, subject matter, and whether or not they were hired before, during, or after the transition process had begun. The rationale for choosing these teachers is that they are a great source of the day-to-day happenings on a school campus. As with individual interviewing, purposeful sampling should be used to include people who know the most about the topic (Merriam, 2009). When policies are implemented from the top, issues arise in the classroom. The selection of the

building level administrators reflects their involvement as the instructional leaders and constitutes a valuable source of information for discussing all aspects of their school. The building level administrators are the face of the school and ultimately the ones charged with the success of the school. They interact with parents, the community, students, and faculty members and consequently would know first-hand of the obstacles and challenges, both in and out of the school.

Choosing these three rural school campuses that have restructured would provide them information as they move forward in the current six year cycle. The data collected in this study will help district level administrators, building level administrators, teachers, and the community as they decide whether or not to move forward with school restructuring after this initial six year cycle is complete.

Data Collection

Interviews

Interviews were the primary source of data for this study. Face-to-face standardized semi-structured interviews of 2-4 administrators were conducted on the site of the participants or at a location of their choice. Personal interviews are advantageous for the researcher to see the expressions and interpret body language that could not be seen through a phone interview. The interview questions for the principals (see Appendix B), and the focus group questions, (see Appendix C) were open-ended so the participants can respond freely in their own words (Patton, 2002). Standardized open-ended interviews also allowed for increasing comparability of responses. This also reduced interviewer effects and bias. The estimated

length of the interviews were approximately 60-90 minutes long. According to Seidman (2006), this is a generally accepted amount of time to complete an interview.

The first part of each interview included general background or demographic type questions. The second part of the interview contained questions pertaining to issues and characteristics of the restructured school. Some of these questions pertain to scheduling, discipline, teacher recruitment, and parent and community concerns. These questions were open-ended to allow respondents to tell their story. By checking through the tapes and hand written notes, the interviewer can verify the interview session while still fresh in his mind. This period after the interview is critical to rigor and validity in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002).

Some of the interview questions for the principals, (see Appendix B), and the teachers, (see Appendix C), were adapted from the work of Shaw (2008), and her study of the small school design. Those questions were then practiced in an exercise to consider whether or not they would be beneficial to this study. Other questions were developed through the exercise and conversations with those individuals that were a part of the exercise. The researcher wanted the questions to flow and allow for conversation. Some of the responses given in the exercise allowed for changing the question as needed to fit the purpose of this study. These questions will stimulate responses from the focus groups that will provide data rich information of interest to the researcher.

Focus Groups

As a method of qualitative research data collection, a focus group is an interview on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic (Krueger, 2008; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2006). The purpose of conducting a focus group is to listen and gather qualitative data from a homogeneous people in a group situation through a focused discussion. It is a better way to understand how people feel or think about an issue or service. Focus groups are used to gather opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Participants are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group. The researcher creates a permissive environment in the focus group that encourages participants to share perceptions and points of view without pressuring participants to vote or reach consensus (Kreuger & Casey, 2009).

The researcher conducted 3 focus group interview sessions with teachers, 1 per school. A focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. Krueger and Casey (2009) suggest to not have focus groups of more than 10 participants because large groups are difficult to control and they limit each person's opportunity to share insights and observations. Focus groups typically are 6-10 people with similar backgrounds who participate in the interview for about 90 minutes and are structured to foster talk among participants about particular issues. In a given study, focus groups will be conducted to get a variety of perspectives and increase confidence in whatever themes or patterns emerge (Patton, 2002). Unlike a series of one-on-one interviews, focus group participants hear each other's responses. The purpose is to either stimulate talk from

multiple perspectives from the group of participants so that the researcher can learn what the range of views are or to promote talk on a topic that might not be able to talk so thoughtfully about in individual interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The goal is not to agree or disagree with the other's responses, but to get high quality data in a social context where people can consider their views in the context of the views of others (Patton, 2002).

Focus group interviews have several advantages for qualitative inquiry. For one, the data collection is cost effective. In 60-90 minutes the researcher can gather information from 6-10 people instead of one, increasing sample size. Another advantage of a focus group is that it promotes interaction among participants, enhancing data quality. Focus groups also tend to be more enjoyable to the participants (Patton, 2002).

Observations

Another data source will be direct observations. These observations allowed the researcher to "paint a picture" of the setting for the reader. Being at each of the three campuses that have restructured offered the researcher an opportunity to gain aspects of the school setting that would not have otherwise been available by interviews and surveys alone. Observations can be distinguished from interviews in two ways. First, observations take place in the setting where the phenomenon of interest naturally occurs instead of the interview location; second, observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview (Merriam, 2009).

Direct observations also gave the researcher an opportunity to capture the environment where interactions take place. Direct observations gave the researcher first-hand experience within the setting to learn things that participants might be unwilling to talk about in an interview. It was necessary to describe the physical setting, the participants, activities, interactions, conversations, subtle factors, and the researcher's own behavior (Merriam, 1998). Lastly, observations allow the researcher to get close to the people in the environment through first-hand experience that permits the researcher to draw on personal knowledge during the formal interpretation stage of analysis (Patton, 2002). The researcher observed classroom settings, classroom size, movement, behaviors, and interactions of the students throughout the day. The researcher was on site the entire school day and made the judgment that three visits were necessary to conduct adequate observations.

Because there is so much that can be observed and no one can observe everything, Merriam (2009), suggest that the researcher document the physical setting or environment of the place observed. Describing the people and their roles and how they interact will be very important in detailing what is bringing these people together. Detailing the activities and interactions amongst the various groups of people will also be beneficial to see how the people interact with each other. The researcher also observed conversations and what is being communicated and to whom the communication is with. These observations will help witness how smooth the school-within-a school flows on a daily basis.

Surveys

Surveys were distributed to all administrators at the three campuses (See Appendix A). These surveys were close-ended and written. The participants chose answers to questions from a pre-existing set of answers, such as yes/no, true/false, or multiple choice with an option for “other” to be filled in (Barribeau et. al, 2005). These surveys will provide general background knowledge of the school and community that might not come out in interviews or be seen in an observation. These surveys provided data on parent involvement, discipline, and school demographics. This data was used to compare and interpret data ascertained from the open-ended interviews. Triangulation was attained by combining the interview transcriptions, field notes from observations, and close-ended surveys.

Data Analysis

Data from multiple sources offers rich potential for theory formation. Analyzing the various styles of data is a continuous process. It is a reflective process involving researcher and participants (Creswell, 2003). The interviews were analyzed after transcription to look for patterns or categories that might arise from the interview. This process of coding will help organize and facilitate the data that comes from the interviews. Coding is assigning some sort of short hand designation to various aspects of your data so that the researcher can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data (Merriam, 1998). Coding is also used to classify whole episodes, interviews, or documents, making them more appropriately retrievable at a later time (Stake, 1995). The interview transcriptions, field notes, and documents need

identifying notations so that the researcher can access them as needed in the analysis and in the write-up stage of the findings.

Developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis. Without it, there is chaos and confusion. The researcher analyzed, identified, coded, categorized, classified, and labeled the primary patterns that emerge from the data. Analyzing the content of the interviews and observations will help determine what is significant to the findings (Patton, 2002).

In addition, the observations brought out themes or add to categories or characteristics of the interviews from the participants. Using the data from these three sources along with comparing that information with the existing research will help triangulate themes that arise to determine if there are obstacles that exist in these restructured schools that prohibits them from reaching their goals and objectives.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability is the degree to which a study can be replicated. Internal validity refers to the extent of the researcher's version and interpretation of events that have occurred in the interviews and observations. External validity is the extent to which the findings can be applied to another group (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003). By using the research from these interviews, literature review, surveys, and observations, the researcher will be able to categorize themes which will enhance reliability and validity through triangulation of multiple data sources.

In conducting interviews, it was very important to make sure they are taped and quickly transcribed. This helped the researcher reflect and study what was said and not have to rely on notes or memory. To increase accuracy, the researcher also used a process called “member checking”. Member checking is presenting a recording or draft copy of an interview or observation to the persons providing the information and asking for correction and comment (Stake, 2010). The participants were given a copy of the rough drafts of the writing where the actions or words of the participants are featured. The participants were asked to review the material for accuracy and palatability (Stake, 1995). This will increase the study’s internal validity.

As for external validity, it will be more difficult to generalize the findings from this study. The researcher in this study has a relatively small sample size and the research is being done in three rural high school campuses that have restructured to small schools-within-a-school. These two factors make it extremely difficult to assume patterns in other school systems. However, if the same procedures are followed and are consistent, validity and reliability can be obtained and allow for generalization to other rural school systems that have restructured using the small school-within-a-school model.

Subjectivity Statement

The researcher grew up in a rural town in Western Pennsylvania about 45 minutes outside of Pittsburgh. My community was a small, hard-working, blue collar town built on a sense of community that promoted the “it takes a village to raise a child” mentality. Growing up, we all went to church, respected our elders, and believed we could accomplish anything

through hard work and education. Growing up in a small town has instilled in me both a value for relationships and a strong sense of community. This small town up-bringing has enabled me to understand the values of small rural communities and empathize with their desire to restructure to small schools-within-a-school to capture that sense of belonging and school community.

The high school that I graduated from was about the size of the three rural high school campuses that have restructured. While I understand their need to compete for limited dollars, I am not sure that dividing a school is the appropriate step. When I reflect back on my high school days, I felt safe, cared for, and I felt that my teachers knew me and understood my needs academically, emotionally, and socially. I always felt there was a strong sense of community. However, as I enter my 18th year in education as a teacher and administrator, I realize things are not the same as they were thirty years ago. I believe there is a lot more accountability placed on schools, teachers, and administrators to reach lofty goals and prepare our students for the 21st century global economy. In an era where parent involvement seems to be lacking, schools are being asked to do more by thinking outside the box and find different approaches to meet the needs of their students.

As I entered these schools and prepared to do my research, I am aware of the demands placed on them to produce results. To control for any bias or personal beliefs, I examined the data and through triangulation of interview responses, observational field notes, and written responses to the surveys. I, as objectively as possible, reported the findings

that arose from the data. I believe my research can add to the existing data to help rural school systems make wise decisions for the future of their students.

Institutional Review Board

I went through the Institutional Review Board process (Appendix D) at North Carolina State University to ensure safety and protection for the study's participants. Due to the sensitive nature of interviewing, the researcher followed strict guidelines as outlined in the Institutional Review Board to protect the participants. Before beginning the interview process, the participants were given their consent to the protocols as to what the purpose of the collection of data, who the information is for and how it will be used, how the responses will be handled, including confidentiality, and what risks or benefits are involved for the participants (Patton, 2002). The researcher also informed the participants where the data will be stored and for how long it will be maintained before it will be destroyed

Limitations of the Study

Due to the interviewees and sites being chosen from three rural school campuses that have restructured, there is a limited pool from which to choose participants. This could have posed a problem if all decline to participate in the study. With teacher and administrator turn-over rates, it was not easy to get those teachers and administrators who have gone through the entire restructuring process; thus they had limited knowledge of the transition.

The close-ended written surveys allowed for participants to expand on their answers. Also, the limited amount of teacher participants to interview limited the amount of information gathered, which in turn limits external validity. Also, the administrators

completing the surveys and interviews brought their biases to the responses. Teachers were apprehensive in answering for fear their responses might shed a negative light on them or their school. Teachers may also fear backlash from central office if the report comes across as too negative. Also, there may be pressure on the researcher to not have the study portray the participants in a negative manner. Finally, the researcher is a novice researcher with limited experience conducting case study research in this field of study.

Summary

Using three different methods of data collection, restructuring of traditional high schools to small-schools-within-a-school will be studied. Looking at the three rural high school campuses that have restructured, the researcher sent out surveys to building level administrators to gain background knowledge of the sites chosen. Interviews were conducted and transcribed from the building level administrators and the teachers chosen to participate in the study. On site observations provided a backdrop of the setting to paint a picture of the schools. The observations, surveys, interviews, and research literature was used to triangulate data to find themes and categories to determine obstacles that came up at the restructured high schools. Through comparisons of the data gathered at each of the three campuses that have restructured, the researcher offered guidance to the central office and to building level administrators as they look to move forward in restructuring using the small-schools-within-a-school model.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCTION

In preparing to research two different rural school systems that redesigned using the small schools within schools model, I had the expectation of studying one high school in each of the two districts for a total of two high schools. However, the one district was able to give me access to both of their redesigned high school campuses. So, I was able to work with and research three high schools in those two rural school systems.

In East County Schools, I was able to study Bengal High School. Bengal High School is a redesigned high school that is housed and shares space on the campus of Green High School. North County Schools is the district where I was able to access both of their redesigned high schools. The first school I studied was Raven High School. Raven High School is a redesigned school that is housed and shares space with White High School. The second school in North County Schools that I studied is Brown High School. Unlike Bengal and Raven High Schools, Brown is the main school, or what the principal and teachers refer to as “Big Brown” High School. Brown High School houses and shares their campus with Liberty High School, or often referred to as “Little Brown” High School.

In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I will present a snapshot of each of the three high schools that participated in this case study. The data collected for this study consisted of three sources: administrative surveys, researcher observations, and participant interviews, including; one-on-one with the school principals, and teacher focus groups from each of the participating high schools. The data collected from these four sources were used to answer the research question: What were the challenges and obstacles that have faced administrators and teachers

when they restructured their traditional high school to small schools-within-a-school model in rural school systems in North Carolina?

Bengal High School

Background

Bengal High School is located in a small rural town in Eastern North Carolina. Once a thriving community with an abundance of industry, the Bengal High School community has been depleted over the years with the closing and relocation of their factories and major businesses. This rural community has gone through set-backs over the years, but at the center were their schools.

Bengal High School is a small restructured high school that is in its 5th year of existence. It is housed on the campus of Green High School, which before restructuring was described by the principal as, “an academic and athletic powerhouse with more than 1500 students.” Green High School has since decreased to a student population of 530. With the population decrease, so did the test scores and graduation rate. Rated as one of the poorest performing schools in the state, Green High School restructured using the small school-within-a-school model and Bengal High School was born.

Demographics

Bengal High School has a student population of 311 students and 15 total teachers. Bengal High School is housed in one wing of Green High School with one entrance that is locked throughout the day. When teachers, students, and visitors arrive, they ring the door bell and then are buzzed in by the secretary. The student population has about a 50/50 male to female ratio. According to the principal, the population is 46.9% white, 30.6% black,

14.1% multi-racial, 6.7% Hispanic, and .6% Asian. Bengal High School has 15 classroom teachers, 2 secretaries, and 1 principal.

Enrollment/Application Process

For a student to be considered for enrollment at Bengal High School, 8th grade students throughout the county have to apply. The school will then take those applications and set up interviews with the student and their parents. The purpose of the interview is to allow parents and students to know exactly what the curriculum is and what their obligations are by being a student at Bengal High School. This interview also allows parents to back out of consideration for their children to be enrolled. After the application process and interview, the school personnel then number the applications and put them into a lottery. The purpose of the lottery is to insure there is no favoritism and to make sure they do not exceed 100 students per grade level.

Class Size

According to the North Carolina Schools Report Card, Bengal High School class sizes in core subjects for freshmen and sophomores, are higher than the other high schools class size in their district. However, at Bengal High School, the courses offered to juniors and seniors are smaller due to the fact those students are taking courses at the community college. When asked about class sizes, the principal responded by saying:

It depends. I try to keep my math classes very small, whereas my world history might be larger. The reason we do this is math seems to be the biggest

separator of kids from what we've noticed and so we want to make sure that we give those kids that hands-on or more individual approach.

According to the teachers, "most of our classes are small, not all, but most of our classes are small. Overall, class sizes seem to be comparable to non-restructured schools." The principal admits that the ratio is typically 22 to 1, but depending on classes or course offerings, some might rise to 29 to 1 or go as low as 10 to 1.

Course Offerings/Crossover

At Bengal High School, the students take the regular courses offered by the school such as math, science, history, and English. However, when courses are not offered by Bengal High School, the students take courses online through North Carolina Virtual Public Schools (NCVPS) or at the community college. Before the students can take the college course option, they must prove to the principal they are academically and socially ready. The principal stated:

If they are not academically and socially ready, then their only option is through NCVPS. But I do not allow crossover of courses with the traditional high school. Their philosophies do match ours and it's not fair for our kids to go over there and take courses and their kids not be allowed to come over here and take courses. We cannot be a self-supporting, self-sustaining school if we allow crossover, it's one of the biggest headaches that redesign schools have to endure.

Discipline

The principal and teachers of Bengal High School are very proud of the caring, nurturing, and safe environment that exists at their school. According to the principal, the discipline has gone down every year, “as we got bigger and grew, discipline went down.”

Table 4.1 demonstrates the number of discipline referrals over the first 5 years of existence at Bengal High School.

Table 4.1 Number of Discipline Referrals in the Past Five Years

Year	Students	Referrals
1	74	81
2	150	106
3	220	99
4	304	77
5	311	28

In year 4, 9th graders were 12 of shoes referrals, 28 referrals for 10th grade, 17 referrals for 11th grade, and 20 referrals for 12th graders. The principal also added that Bengal High School had 10 short-term suspensions and 1 long term suspension and zero expulsions for the 2011-2012 school year. According to the principal, the 2011-2012 school year, Bengal High School had 46 total days out of school suspensions and 35 total days in school suspensions.

Principal's Role

The principal at Bengal High School has been the principal for the entire five- year existence of the school. He was hired in March of the previous year and had the task of

setting up and designing the school-within-a-school on the campus of Green High School. The principal is very visible in his school and has the reputation of being a strong advocate for his students, teachers, and community. He is also proud that he can focus on the philosophies of the small schools design and on instruction. His main focus is to be the instructional leader of the school. He stated:

Here I get to focus 80% of my time on instruction, it's not management or discipline. So, I like that aspect that I can focus on improving instruction and not the mundane books, buses, and bad boys type of atmosphere that I dealt with at other schools

Redesigning traditional high schools and having more than one school on a campus poses some potential problems when it comes to leadership. Bengal High School is housed on the campus of Green High School, a high school that has their own principal, teachers, staff, etc. So, I asked the principal at Bengal about his role as the principal and leader of his school in relation to the principal at the host school. He said:

If we see each other, we will say hello and we coordinate fire drills together. But for the most part, I go about my day and don't talk to her anymore than I would one who is down the road twenty miles. The traditional principals don't understand what we do so I can't call on them with an issue because they don't understand our side and what we are trying to accomplish. We are trying to think outside the box, to improve instructional practices.

The principal did also mention that the communication between he and the host school principal is very good in terms of keeping each other informed of daily issues or circumstances that might arise. The principal at Bengal High School never has to deal with any issues at Green High School and vice versa. They are truly autonomous in that regard.

Teacher Collaboration and Relationships

The Bengal High School day does not begin until 10:30 for students. This late start time allows for the teachers to have a common planning time from 9:15 to 10:15. This time is devoted entirely to team planning, it is not individual time. The teachers do get an additional planning time during the day. The common planning time is structured as follows:

Monday: Lesson tuning day using critical plans protocol. The lesson tuning consists of asking questions such as; what do we need to cover?, what is working and not working?, Is it rigorous?, were the standards addressed?, and were the students engaged throughout the lesson?

Tuesday: Lesson plan day within the department. The teachers follow an action plan to help increase rigor and work on strategies to meet the standards.

Wednesday: The teachers meet to look at assessments. They bring in student work to examine using the critical planning protocol to verify goals and standards are being met and if the work is rigorous. Assessment day also gives the whole staff opportunities to keep up with all students' work and to monitor how the students are performing.

Thursday: This day is used for professional development. This could be broken down by department or whole staff depending on their needs as determined by the entire staff.

Friday: The teachers reflect on the positives from the week. The teachers have a spirit stick they pass around when recognizing the great work each other is doing.

The teachers at Bengal High School also have the opportunity to collaborate with teachers throughout the county on a couple of occasions such as workdays during the school year. However, the teachers found this to be difficult due to the fact that traditional high school teachers do not fully understand the philosophies and the goals set by the redesigned schools. The teachers at Bengal have found their time spent collaborating with the Early College teachers more beneficial. They share the same students and their schedules and philosophies are more in line with each other. In reference to collaborating with the teachers from Green High School, one teacher responded:

We are two separate entities. I never have any interaction with the teachers at Green. Those teachers do not like us being here and do not wish to speak to us. Speaking for myself, I do not feel welcome over there.

The teachers at Bengal High School feel very good about the opportunities they have to be leaders at their school. The teachers play a significant role in recruiting their freshman class. They travel to the districts' middle schools and meet the kids and inform them of the great opportunities at Bengal High School. The teachers also feel that they play a key role as leaders sharing best practices at staff development, workshops, and with visitors that are frequent to their classrooms. The teachers also feel respected by their principal as he encourages them to try new things in their classroom. One teacher stated:

Our principal allows us to do what we do in our classrooms. And I think if

you hire professionals to teach the curriculum and you allow them to do their job, they can make mistakes and say you know what, it didn't work quite the way I expected it to, okay try again. I think this is what makes our school different, the ability to be a leader in our classroom.

The teachers at Bengal also feel very good about the relationships they have built with their students and the safe environment created at Bengal High School. One teacher commented:

I think there is a mis-conception about our students, that we have the cream of the crop and the best of the best in everything and we don't. We have some live wires and a vast majority of struggling students and they come here because they think we can provide something different. We provide them a hands-on approach, inquiry, and collaboration that helps them excel.

Another teacher added:

I definitely think one of our strongest points here is our relationships with our students. The kids know we are just not here to get a paycheck. They are excited to come to school, they don't want to leave.

The teachers are proudest of the fact that they have created an environment where the kids feel safe. They have created a classroom environment where the kids can participate and not feel judged or that someone would make fun of them. The teachers feel they make a difference in the students' learning and in the quality of their life.

Parent/Community Involvement

According to the principal survey, the parents at Bengal High School are actively involved in the learning process. The community is also involved by volunteering, providing awards and incentives to students, and judging school projects. The principal feels that 95% of their parents are very satisfied with the quality of education their child is receiving at Bengal. He has also stated:

It is very personalized for the parents here as well. You know when you walk in the door you are known. We are not so big that we can't keep up with the grandmother and the aunts, you know who comes in that door.

Bengal High School also hosts open houses to give report cards to the parents. They don't just give them to the students or mail them to the house. The participation in those open houses is 85%. Bengal also hosts expos that give the parents opportunities to come out and see student's work and projects. According to the teachers, the turnout for those events is very high.

The principal and teachers agree that the parents seem very happy with the education their child is receiving at Bengal. The parents are the schools biggest advocate when it comes to the recruiting process. One teacher commented:

The parents are blown away with what we are doing and the things their children are learning. They are amazed that before students have hated school and now they wake up happy and love coming to school.

The community is also reaching out to Bengal High School by providing the students opportunities to volunteer. The students are being recognized for their help at soup kitchens, the library, The Boys and Girls Club etc. Bengal has now received requests and phone calls from other businesses and agencies asking for their students to help by getting involved with their efforts.

Funding

The North Carolina New Schools Project is no longer providing funds for redesigned schools in North Carolina. The schools that have restructured using the school-within-a-school model are funded just like any other high school in North Carolina. According to the principal, Bengal is no exception. Bengal High School is totally sustained by the Board of Education through state and local funding. They get the same ADM that any other school receives.

Summary

I enjoyed my visits and meetings with the principal and teachers at Bengal High School. The environment and culture was caring and nurturing. The students, parents, and family members were known by the staff as they entered the building. The positive relationships between the teachers, students, and the administration were evident throughout my conversations and visits. The teachers at Bengal feel that they play a significant role in the success of their students and their overall school program. The principal encourages his teachers to be leaders and helps them facilitate lessons that are relevant and rigorous. Bengal

High School works hard to be fully autonomous which is critical to small schools-within-a-school success.

CHAPTER FIVE

RAVEN HIGH SCHOOL

Background

Raven High School is located in a small rural town in north eastern North Carolina. Like most small communities, this high school is the center of the community, bringing everyone together on Friday nights to support and cheer the football team and every winter packing the gymnasium to support their basketball teams. Seven years ago, North County Schools entered the redesign process under the North Carolina New Schools Project. Through this process, Raven High School was born. As a NCNSP school, Raven High School received grant money through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Raven High School received that money for five years under the NCNSP. For the past two years, Raven High School has remained a redesigned high school housed on the campus of White High School. However, for the past two years, Raven High School has been operating under the guidelines of the NCNSP but without the extra grant money provided during its first five years.

Demographics

The principal describes her population as predominately female with 70% white and 30% African-American. Her school has 16 teachers, 1 counselor, 1 secretary, and 1 bookkeeper to serve 279 students.

Enrollment/Application Process

Raven High School does not have an application process to be considered for enrollment. The principal and her counselor will visit all the 8th graders in the district. At these meetings, the principal and the counselor discuss the differences between their school and the host school, White High School. Giving this presentation helps the students choose one school over the other. The principal said:

We want to explain to the kids the benefits of the curriculum in our school and to think about what best fits them as individuals and to not choose a school because of what their best friend chooses.

The students do not have to apply to get into Raven High School. After the informational session by the principal and the counselor, the students simply choose what school they want to enroll. After they begin at either school, they are allowed to switch schools one time throughout their four years of high school.

Class Size

According to the North Carolina School Report Card, Raven High School's class sizes are slightly larger than the other high schools in the district and across the state.

According to the principal, class sizes will vary depending on a given subject area. There might be 15 students in an English class, but then a science class might have 27-30. The principal remarked:

It depends on the schedule and how that works. In terms of Honors courses and advanced placement, those are shared with White High School. For

example, if we have only 10 students enrolled for AP English, rather than one teacher teach only 10 kids those students would just enroll in the AP English class at White High School to make one full class. Small schools does not always mean small class sizes.

Course Offerings/Crossover

Raven High School has their core courses in math, science, English, and history. They also have courses specific to their curriculum such as; health sciences I & II, and medical sciences I & II. Those specific courses are for Raven students only. Students from White High School cannot take courses that are specifically designed for the curriculum at Raven High School. Courses like art, P.E., band, and other electives are campus wide and can be taken by students enrolled at either school. Advanced Placement courses are also shared between the two schools.

The principal mentioned that there is a lot more cross-over taking place at her school than in other redesigned high schools. She stated:

Basically, my students, for the most part, take their core classes with my teachers. However, we believe here on this campus that we will do what is in the best interest of the child. So, if a student in my school needs Spanish I and it doesn't fit in their schedule with my Spanish teacher, they can take it at the other school. We do allow cross-enrolling if it works best for the student.

The teachers at Raven High School find this practice of cross-over very challenging. The teachers as a group are very frustrated that there seems to be no attempt to keep the kids separated into their own school. One teacher explained:

We have 90% of our students crossing over right now and it didn't used to be that way. Our guidance counselors are not even trying to enroll students by their own school. They are just scheduling kids wherever is most convenient, which is problematic for us to make a distinction between Raven High School and White High School students because of that cross enrollment.

Discipline

During the 2011-2012 school year, Raven High School had 36 short-term suspensions, 1 long term suspension, and zero expulsions. The principal mentioned that her biggest discipline issues are mis-use of computers. The teachers, on the other hand, had a little different perspective on discipline. Some of the teachers are confused on how to handle discipline issues due to the fact there is so much cross-over they do not know who to report discipline issues to. One teacher commented:

The biggest issue I have with discipline and our cross-over enrollment is that I never know who to talk to about a kid. I have not written a single referral this year because I teach at Raven, so my principal is my boss; but if I have a problem with Bobby who is a student at White High School, I will never hear anything back from their principal. I would never know what happened.

The teachers are not sure about the roles of the two campus-wide assistant principals. The teachers at Raven feel the two assistant principals serve the principal and teachers at White High School. This poses a problem for them when they have an issue with a student from the other school. The teachers are always feeling like they are given the “run-around” when they take a student to the office.

The teachers did comment that they have not had any serious or major discipline issues. A teacher said, “maybe we had one fight this year.” The main issue that seems to occur the most often and frustrates the teachers the most is the disrespect shown towards them, skipping classes, or being tardy. It is not uncommon to see 12-15 students in the hallways with no administrators or teacher supervision.

Principal Role

The principal of Raven High School has an interesting and unique role. She is the principal of her school, but not the principal nor is she in charge of the building or campus. The principal at White High School is the building level administrator and in charge of all facets of the campus. The principal at White High School oversees the budget, finances, transportation, books, custodians, athletics, the two assistant principals, and she is the point person in case of an emergency. When I asked the Raven principal how she felt about that arrangement she stated:

When I was hired as the principal here at Raven, it was hard for me to understand and I had to wrap my head around that, okay, I am principal of my school, but I’m really not the principal of my building. But as the years have

gone by, I understand that if an issue arises with maintenance, she will deal with it, she is the principal of the building. This has actually worked for me because I don't have to deal with all that building stuff. I can concentrate on my students and the curriculum.

The principal at Raven High School feels her main role is that of curriculum coach and instructional leader. On a daily basis she is able to get into the classrooms to observe and work with teachers to make sure her students are getting the best education they can give them. She also mentioned that she is in charge of handling 12th grade discipline. The principal also interviews teachers with the principal at White High School. She stated:

What the other principal and I have started doing is actually interviewing candidates together because if you are in my school, there is a chance that you might also teach a kid from her school.

Teacher Collaboration/Relationships

Math has been the designated subject that Raven and White High School are addressing campus wide. Because of that effort, the math teachers at both of those high schools have a common planning time and they do meet daily. The principal did mention that her core teachers have planning time together, but not with the other school. And according to the teachers, they prefer to not meet with the teachers from the other school.

The teachers at Raven have definitely felt a disconnect with their role in terms of working together. Before the cross-enrolling of students, the teachers felt there was a camaraderie with one another because there were only 12 of them and they all shared the

same students and could talk about their needs. They really enjoyed working with their students and knowing they would have them for four years. They believe that cross-enrolling students has put a strain on those relationships. The teachers have also felt a divide when it comes to relationships with their principal. As one teacher put it:

We do not even meet anymore. We have replaced meetings with virtual meetings through email.

In terms of being leaders, the teachers feel there are opportunities to be teacher-leaders in their school. However, the teachers do feel that the administration picks the same people all the time which leads to animosity and the appearance of favoritism. One teacher added:

There are opportunities especially with only 16 of us, to take on more leadership roles than in most schools. However, the formal leadership opportunities seem to be given to the same teachers over and over again. This leads to a negative perception of leadership roles and makes the rest of us not want to step up and lead.

The teachers at Raven High School have also felt, in recent years, that their role in the decision-making process has been limited. One teacher, who was at Raven during the initial transition from a traditional high school to a small redesigned high school, stated:

When we first became a small school, we made agendas for meetings, we led meetings, we decided what needed to be discussed, we had 100% input on

how to solve problems and now we got to meetings and we are just told what to do and what is going on.

The teachers also talked about Raven High School had their own schedule separate from White High School. White followed a bell schedule and Raven did not have a bell schedule. The teachers as a whole determined when their classes would end and they had flexibility with their classes. One teacher added:

This flexibility and respect led to team leadership and a willingness to go the extra mile.

The teachers as a whole spoke of how this flexibility and team leadership disappeared when they got a new principal. One teacher stated:

The new leadership did not know about the way things were, did not take the time to learn and get on board with that. I remember very clearly one of our first meetings that we had with our new principal. We tried to do it the way we always did; we came up with an agenda and things we wanted to talk about. We got to the meeting and she sat in front of us on a chair that was higher than us so she could look down at us and told us about the topics that are going to be discussed. Instead of it being a discussion, she told us this is how it is going to be and why it is that way and we were like okay then...

Parent/Community Involvement

According to the principal, when the school campus originally redesigned, it was not accepted by the parent community at all. The school is located in a very small, rural area of

North Carolina and their school was the center of this community. These same parents grew up in this community and graduated from White High School. So, the idea of splitting it up was very confusing and upsetting to the parents. When I asked the principal how the support from the parents is now, she stated:

I believe the parents are very supportive of how the other principal and myself are running the schools. Their perception is more accepting now but I would still like more support from a broader base of parents. Right now, we have a core group of parents that participate and head up most, if not all, of our activities.

Raven High School does also have support from the community and local businesses that volunteer with tutoring and providing technology for the school. The businesses are also very supportive in terms of the extra-curricular activities such as athletics and band.

Funding

When entering a relationship with the North Carolina New Schools Project to redesign traditional high schools to a small school-within-a-school, there is funding through grants for the first five years. Raven was no different. They did receive grant money from the NCNSP. However, for the past two years, they have been operating like any other high school in North Carolina, with state and local funds. The Raven High School principal also added that the school does receive money from band and athletics to help fund programs. However, that money does go to the principal at White High School and she determines how to divide it between the two schools.

Summary

Raven High School, on the surface, seems like any other redesigned high school. However, after meeting with the principal and teachers and on-site visits, it was clear that they operate very differently than the other two redesigned schools in this study. Raven High School does not have an application process for admission. The students can choose their own school. The principals operate as co-principals with the host school principal serving as the campus principal and in charge of every aspect of running the campus, including budgeting and staffing for the redesigned school. Raven allows full crossover which does lend itself to discipline issues and confusion for the teachers not knowing which administrator they should go to. Despite these issues, the teachers feel they are making a difference in the lives of their students

CHAPTER SIX

BROWN HIGH SCHOOL

Background

Unlike Bengal and Raven High Schools, which were the smaller of the two schools sharing a campus, Brown High School is considered to be the “main school,” or as the principal and teachers refer to it as “Big Brown” High School. Brown High, being the larger of the two schools, has a population of just over 700 students and their school building is over forty years old. Brown High School is located in a small rural town with a rich history and strong family ties. The principal makes reference to this history by saying:

We have a lot of rich history for a rural community. It’s the center of our community because most of the people in this town went to school here and they are very involved, so there is a lot of pride here.

Seven years ago, North County Schools became part of the North Carolina New Schools Project schools and agree to restructure and house two high schools on the campus of Brown High School. As a result, Brown High School restructured and their population of about 900 students decreased to little over 700. This plan created Liberty High School, or what the principal and teachers refer to as “Little Brown” High School, which has an enrollment of 126 students.

Demographics

Brown High School serves mostly low socio-economic students. According to the principal, “we serve mostly low income families and we are made up of about 70% males.”

He also added, “we are a minority male dominated school.” Brown high School has 2 assistant principals, 3 school counselors, 4 office assistants, 48 teachers and no psychologist on staff.

Enrollment/Application Process

There is not application process to be considered for enrollment at Brown High School. Being the main public high school in the district, if you live in the district, you attend Brown High School. However, there is an application process to be considered for enrollment at “Little Brown” High School. The administrators and teachers from “Little Brown” High School go out and visit the 8th grade students in their district and talk about their curriculum and how their school operates as a small school on the campus of Brown High School. This practice has been a point of contention for the principal at Brown High School. He shares

Our school hasn’t even been able to get to the table to present our school, you know. I told our administration that this is a problem, we need to present our school as a great place to be as well. We are trying to change this process, we’re trying

The application process allows “Little Brown” High School to select their students. The perception is that they are selecting better students who are smarter and who have parents that are more involved in their child’s education. The principal added:

The fact that they can select kids gives them a greater opportunity to get a better engaged student.

Class Size

The class sizes at Brown High School are between 25-28 students. The advanced placement courses have an average of 14-16 students per class. Those totals place Brown High School higher, in terms of enrollment, than the district and state averages.

Course Offerings/Crossover

The principal at Brown High School works very well with and is in communication with the principal at the other school when it comes to scheduling courses. Each school has their own core course offerings with no cross-enrollment. However, if a student at “Little Brown” High School needs a course at Brown, they can enroll in that class. Students at Brown High School however, cannot take any classes at “Little Brown.” The students at “Little Brown” do take their electives such as; chorus, band, P.E., CTE, etc at Brown High School. The principal stated, “scheduling has not been an issue, we’ve learned to live together and make it work for all our students.”

Discipline

According to the North Carolina School Report Card, Brown High School had 13 acts of crime or violence during the 2010-2011 school year. For the same school year, there 861 total days of short-term suspensions, which are 10 days or less. There were 14 total days of long-term suspensions, which are more than 10 days of out of school suspension and expulsions. The principal at Brown believes the discipline for this 2011-2012 school years has gotten better due to an increase in staff and administrative visibility. He said: I choose to be visible,

I choose to be in the hallway and require my teachers to be in the hallway. Being here for four years as an assistant principal and now principal, I know where the hangouts are and I make sure that myself and my staff are in those areas to prevent things from happening. This has cut down on our fights so we haven't had as many fights as we used to.

This year, the referrals for the smaller offenses, have been divided by the two assistant principals who have been assigned certain grade levels. This division of referrals by assistant principal has presented some problems for the teachers. One teacher saying:

I've been told, "Oh that child is not my problem, I do not do that grade level." And to me, that's not my job to try and track down the principal that is in charge of that student. My job is to get them to an administrator. If I have an issue going on in my room, then I should be able to get anyone, any administrator to come in and help with that issue. It shouldn't matter if the child is in a certain grade level or not.

Another teacher added:

We have typical high school boy/girl drama. The teachers are visible in the hallways throughout the day and they try to talk with the kids before those smaller things become serious discipline problems. And we are not afraid to just take them to the library and call their momma!

Principal's Role

The principal at Brown High School believes his number one role is to be the instructional leader at his school. He also feels that, although he has two assistant principals to handle discipline, he is in charge of discipline and keeping his school safe. The principal at Brown is also in charge of the entire campus in the event of an emergency, dealing with the funds and budget, band, and athletics. He stated:

I am the building or the campus principal. So, ultimately I make the decisions that effect this campus. Depending on the situation, I will seek input from my assistant principals or the principal at the other school, but ultimately the responsibility falls on me, the crisis falls on me.

The principal at Brown has also made it a priority to communicate with the principal at "Little Brown." He added:

Having two high schools on one campus is challenging. There are scheduling or cross-over situations, sharing of space, activities, testing, etc. to consider when operating these two schools.

The principal has committed to meet with the other principal twice as month. He continued:

The former principal at the other school and I did not always see eye-to-eye on certain issues. There were many conflicts with testing, scheduling, sharing of space, having dances, almost everything...lots of tension. But the new principal and I meet and discuss everything, we communicate on a more consistent basis and those conflicts are non-existent this year.

Teacher Collaboration/Relationships

The selection or admissions process has had a negative impact on the teachers at Brown High School. The teachers feel that with two high schools on one campus that there is a divide between the two staffs. One teacher said, “there is a negativity in my department, it’s awkward,” another saying, “it’s hard to even make friends with them.” The teachers at Brown also feel that their school has the reputation in the community as being the “bad school”. One teacher commented:

Someone is telling those incoming 9th graders that the teachers are better at “Little Brown” than they are here and that is unfair to the teachers here and it’s unfair to our reputation. I hate to say this, but someone is brainwashing those kids and their families to believe that they are better off in the small school than they are here at Brown.

This has led to animosity and negativity between the staffs at the two schools. This animosity and negativity has spilled over into the academics. The teacher PLC’s do not meet or communicate and the English teacher states:

The English teachers at the other school will hold books and not share, there is a whole library of books that we are denied access to.

The teachers at Brown feel they are constantly battling the perception that they are the inferior school. They are feeling animosity from the community, parents, students, and teachers from the other school. This constant battle has hindered their relationships with

their students. The students feel the other school has better teachers. One teacher sharing her frustration:

I have college bound students coming to me and saying, "I am moving to Little Brown next year." I look at them and ask why? The students reply, "the teachers are better, they care more." It is unfair for us teachers to have to fight that perception. It is hard to get to know them when they don't want to get to know us.

Despite those battles and negative perceptions, the morale at Brown is surprisingly pretty positive. They rely on each other. One teacher said, "because of the teachers I work with, I can say the morale at Brown High School is pretty dog-gone good!"

The teachers at Brown have stated that they love their principal. Their principal has given them more opportunities to serve on leadership teams such as; school improvement team and chair their department. The principal has given the teachers more of a say in planning, scheduling, and what needs to be on the agenda for staff meetings. One teacher felt truly inspired when asked by his principal to look into the administration program at the local university

Parent/Community Involvement

When asked about the parent involvement, the principal said, "it is not where I want it to be." There are 4 parents on the PTO and only one of those four is a parent of a student at Brown High School. However, when it comes to athletics, there is plenty of parental support. The principal added:

The athletics has provided a stronger turnout and is given much more support than the academics, which is really sad. Again though, athletics is campus wide and not just based on which of the two schools you attend.

Brown High School has tried to find different ways to get an increase in parent involvement. They host family nights where they invite parents to the school for dinner and provide them opportunities to tour the school and meet with the teachers. The principal even drives a school bus to provide transportation for those parents who might not otherwise be able to attend. He added:

Although those ideas such as parent night are great, they do not fix the long-term problem that we just don't get much support from our parents. Our community, on-the-other-hand, is great! We get a lot of support from our businesses, law-enforcement agencies, and church groups to try and help us educate our kids. So, their support has been really strong over the years.

Although the parent support is lacking, the principal does feel those parents perceive their child's school and the education they receive to be pretty positive. The principal has conducted surveys and goes out into the community and talks to the people and he says, "the parents feel their children are safe and being taught by teachers who really care."

The teachers, however, do not feel that there is a positive perception out in the community about them or Brown High School. The teachers at Brown feel they are in a constant battle in terms of being compared to the teachers at "Little Brown." One teacher stated:

I have heard from parents, flat out tell me, they do not want their child at Brown because the teachers are better at the other school. The parents feel the other school can better prepare their children for college. I even heard parent from outside the district say they would pay tuition to the county just to have their child attend “Little Brown.” That is what we deal with everyday and it is not fair.

The teachers at Brown feel they have excellent and wonderful teachers. One noting, “we just got to figure out how to erase that negativity so the parents feel comfortable sending their children to us.”

Funding

Just like Raven High School, Brown received funding from the NCNSP for their initial five year period of restructuring. For the past two years, Brown High School has only received state and local funds. The principal did mention that his budget was cut almost 40% this year. The money is pretty much for instructional supplies. There no longer are any funds available for staff development or textbooks.

There is money allocated to the teachers. Although that money has gotten less and less over the years, teachers are given money for classroom supplies. For example, the art teacher received \$2500 five years ago for art supplies. That money has been reduced to \$100 this past school year. This money is for her Brown High School students however, the art teacher mentioned there is a problem in terms of crossover students. She does not receive any money for those students at “Little Brown” who crossover and take her art class. Due to

the fact that the smaller school does not offer electives, those students have to take their electives at Brown. Brown however, does not receive any money for those students so those dollars need to be stretched further in those cases. The art teacher added:

The problem with the other school students' taking classes with our teachers, is that we don't get funding from them, but yet we have to give them supplies just as we do for our own students. You know it is not the students fault, but that does cause a problem especially when our budgets are getting cut.

Summary

Brown High School is different than the other two high schools in this study in that they are the host school on campus. As the host school, Brown High School has more teachers and more students. The students at Brown High School are there because they did not apply or did not get accepted into the small, redesigned high school. Hosting the redesigned school has been difficult for Brown High School. They have been dealing with the perception that their students are not as smart, they have the most difficult students most of whom do not have parental support, and teachers that aren't as good or do not care about their students. These perceptions were apparent and came through in my conversations with the principal and the teachers in this study. Through those negative perceptions, Brown High School administrators and their teachers work very hard for their students every day

CHAPTER SEVEN

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Through the data collection process, several themes emerged that are in-line with the research on redesigned schools. However, during the interview process, some contradictions of certain aspects of redesigned schools come to light. Characteristics of literature detailing the small schools design were woven throughout the interview process of both the teachers and principals.

The previous three chapters provided a profile of each of the three schools from the two rural districts that participated in this study. The profiles were derived from the analysis of the data collected through principal surveys, on-site observations, face-to-face interviews with principals, and focus group interviews of the teachers. The profile of the three schools studied, offered the reader a glimpse or snapshot of the sites to provide a background to enhance the discussion of the interviews and provide more detail to the on-site visits. The examination of the similarities and differences of the responses provides discussion and analysis of these interviews. Comparisons were validated with quotes from the interviews and organized around the central themes that emerged from those conversations. Some of the themes that emerged from those conversations with the principals and teachers were class size, course offerings, and discipline. Other themes arose from the data such as: principal, teacher, and parent roles and relationships along with the topic of funding are discussed.

Overview of the Surveys

The surveys were mailed to the building level principals in a self-addressed stamped envelope with instructions to complete and mail back to me. This data is to provide background and demographic data pertaining to the school campus. The questions offered the principals an opportunity to provide data to the researcher to determine how well redesigned schools in North Carolina matched the literature. The questions were written and designed with multiple answers to be chosen where the principal could choose more than one answer or mark all that apply. There was also an opportunity for the respondents to elaborate on certain questions. Introductory questions about the sites included number of students enrolled, number of teachers on staff, and other school personnel working at the site. Questions regarding principal tenure and time at that site were also included along with other questions pertaining to parent and community involvement, opportunities for teacher collaboration and communication among the two schools sharing one campus. Principals were also asked to provide information regarding a crisis situation on campus and who would be the administrator in charge of that situation. The buildings age and use for other activities used by the community were also part of the survey.

Overall, the principals had 3-5 years experience as the current principal and only one principal opened their redesigned high school. The other two principals had served as assistant principals before becoming the principal of their redesigned school. Two of the principals are serving at the smaller, redesigned high school while the other principal is the main, or host school principal. The host school principal also serves as the campus

administrator which means he is in charge of the total operations of the campus from busing to being the point person for the authorities in the event of a crisis situation on campus. The principals also noted on the surveys that their buildings are over 40 years old and are used by other organizations in the community for activities that are not school related.

Parent and Community Involvement

Parent and community involvement included serving on committees, providing awards or incentives to the students, volunteering for events, tutoring, and/or providing financial support to the school. According to the surveys, all three principals commented that parent involvement is extremely low outside of athletic or sports related activities. One principal elaborated that the parent involvement is low due to the age of the students, he believes that the parents feel that the older their child becomes, the less involved in school they need to be. Another reason for the low support, the principal felt, was due to the socio-economics of the community the school serves. Another principal noted that he has a core group of parents that were involved with most or all of the activities at the school.

However, all three principals marked a high level of support from the community. The biggest type of support came in the form of awards and incentives to the students. Businesses were also offering financial donations to help fund school activities. One principal elaborated that businesses in their community hire students and offer internships for students to receive job training.

Teacher Collaboration

The two smaller, redesigned high schools had 13-15 teachers while the main high school had 42 teachers. According to the survey, the principals listed department meetings, committees, sponsoring clubs, and serving as mentors as opportunities for teachers to participate and work together. However, collaboration between the two schools on one campus was not apparent according to any of the three surveys. One principal stated, “my teachers do not need to work or collaborate with the teachers over there, they do not share our philosophies and besides, they do not like the fact that we are here.”

On-site Observations

By agreeing to participate in the study, the principals agreed to allow me access to their campus on a few different occasions throughout the school year. The visits were on regularly scheduled school days to get a look at traffic patterns, interactions between the staff and students, and interactions, if any, between the students from the two different schools sharing one campus. On my visits, I would check in with the principal at the school. I would typically arrive between 8:30 -9:00 am and would stay until around 2:30 pm. The on-site visits were valuable in that it provided me a visual of the daily operations of the school. This backdrop was beneficial during the face-to-face interviews and later transcribing and analyzing those conversations.

Class Size

The classes that I visited at Raven and Bengal High Schools were the smaller redesigned high schools. The class size at Bengal was larger in the freshman and sophomore

classes. The junior and senior classes had 8-12 students while the 9th and 10th grade classes had 22- 24 students. I noticed throughout my visits the seniors would leave campus early or they would arrive later in the day due to the fact that they took classes at the college. Also the principal would allow students to take classes online through the North Carolina Virtual Public Schools (NCVPS). These two factors contribute to Bengal High School maintaining smaller class sizes. Bengal has no crossover of students taking classes in the other school.

Raven High School class sizes ranged from 24-32 students depending on the class. This is due, in large part, to the fact that Raven High School and their host school, White High School, have a high percentage of crossover. Raven allows students from the other school to take classes at their school and vice versa. Due to their high crossover rate, class sizes are typically higher than one would think for being a small redesigned school, “small schools does not necessarily mean small classes” (Principal, Raven).

Brown High School is unlike Raven and Bengal High Schools in that they are the larger, host school. For that reason, Brown’s class sizes are larger than redesigned high schools but in-line with other high schools their size (North Carolina School Report Card). Brown High School also allows students from the other school to take classes that are not offered in their school. This crossover also adds to an increase in class size. The classes I observed had between 28- 34 students per class with about 3-5 of those students coming from the other school. “Little Brown” High School does not allow any students from Brown to take any of their course offerings.

In analyzing these three redesigned campuses, I found that Bengal strived for full autonomy. Bengal High School did not allow any crossover of courses and rather than take classes at the host school, the principal had his students take classes at the college or online through NCVPS. Raven High School, on the other hand, allowed full two-way crossover with students taking courses at either high school as long as it fit their schedule. Brown High School had to allow students from the other school to enroll in their courses, but Brown students could not take any classes at the redesigned school.

Traffic Patterns

Bengal High School occupies a wing of their host school, Green High School. Bengal has one main entry point that is locked at all times throughout the day. Any visitors, including students leaving and returning from the classes at the college have to ring a doorbell and be buzzed in by the secretary. Bengal operates on a bell schedule and the students move from class to class along one main hallway. At the end of each hallway is a stairwell that goes upstairs to the second floor where a few classrooms and the principal's office are located. The students at Bengal do enter Green High School for two reasons, to use the media center and to eat lunch in the cafeteria. Their lunch time is later in the afternoon after all Green High students have eaten their lunch.

Another unique characteristic about Bengal is that they do not start school until 10:30. The late start is to help provide transportation for students who might live further out in the district. This later starting time also provides common planning time for the staff. Those meetings begin at 8:30 and end at 10:00 am. Each day the staff has a different focus for their

meetings ranging from creating and looking at common formative assessments to rigor in the lesson plans. On Fridays, they have a celebration day. That meeting is set aside to acknowledge hard work or positive things that happened that week in their classrooms.

Raven High School also is the redesigned school on their campus. Raven occupies the back quadrant of the building. However, the principal's office is located in the front of the building beside the main offices of the host school, White High School. There is no distinction between the two schools; the first time I entered the building I went to the offices of White High School by mistake. Raven also runs on a bell schedule. The movement of students from class to class is not as distinct or clear at Bengal High School. Raven students have classes in White High School and White High School students have classes in the wing designated as Raven High School. Due to the high percentage of crossover, it was hard to determine which students were Raven students and which students were from White High School. It was not uncommon to see students from both schools hanging out in common areas during class/instructional time. There was lack of staff supervision during transition time to monitor student movement.

Brown High School, being the host school, occupies the entire campus aside from the back two hallways where "Little Brown" High School is located. Unlike Raven, the entry to the redesigned school is clearly identified by big red signs posted on the entry doors and above each of the two hallways. The main office and principal's office of "Little Brown" is located and clearly identified in those back hallways in their section of the school. Brown High School offices are located at the main entrance and visitors must sign in and receive a

visitors badge before moving throughout the building. Visitors at “Little Brown” also have to sign in and receive a visitors badge from Brown High School’s main office.

Brown High School also operates on a bell schedule and the students were able to travel freely from class to class without entering the area designated for the redesigned school. Unlike the students at Bengal and Raven High Schools, students at Brown have access to a courtyard and a breezeway that connects different areas of the school. It is not uncommon to see students use the courtyard as a short-cut to getting to their classes that were in the other part of the building. Brown also has a very visible teacher presence in the hallways. Teachers were in the hallways monitoring student movement and making sure the students were in the classrooms for instruction to begin on time. When the bell rang, the hallways were empty. Neither Raven nor Bengal High Schools had a teacher presence in the hallways between classes.

Interactions

When observing students’ interaction with other students, I noticed at Bengal the students were a close-knit group and empathetic towards one another. In class, they were very supportive of each other and worked very well together. However, there was no interaction at all with the students or teachers from Green High School, the host school. The students had all of their classes at Bengal and only left their building to go to the cafeteria for lunch or to the college for class.

Due to the high percentage of crossover at Raven High School, the students had opportunities throughout the day to interact with each other. Throughout my visits, I had a

difficult time differentiating the students from Raven High School and White High School. Some students at White High School and Raven did not have classes every period of the day. During these “off” periods, the students were able to hang out at the Blue Bird Café. The Blue Bird Café was a common area in front of the cafeteria where students could talk or work or basically just hang out.

The students at Brown moved fluidly throughout the hallways and never entered the back two hallways where “Little Brown” was located. However, there were opportunities for the students at either school to socialize together. One of those opportunities was at lunch. The students from both high schools shared the cafeteria, but unlike Bengal High School which has its own designated time to eat, students from both high schools were able to eat together.

The relationship between the teachers and students at Bengal was very positive and nurturing. At Bengal, the teachers were very visible and greeted all of their students as they entered the classroom. Once in the classroom, I noticed the desks were set up in a circle and the teacher would sit at a desk as part of the circle. This provided more of a casual atmosphere and the students really enjoyed this style. On one of my visits to an English class, the teacher was having a follow up discussion with her class about the previous lesson on feelings. One of the students opened up about the recent loss of his mother. I was amazed at the support the student received from his classmates. I remember thinking this moment epitomized the caring, nurturing, and supportive environment that the teachers and students have created at Bengal High School.

On my visits to Raven High School, I did not get the same feeling or sense of nurturing that I felt on my visits to Bengal. At Raven, I did not see much teacher-student interaction in or out of the classroom. The classrooms were setup in traditional rows with the teacher lecturing from the front of the room. The lectures were teacher-led with little to no opportunities for interactive discussions about the topic. There seemed to be a dis-connect or a divide between the teachers and students. In the hallways, I did not observe any teacher/student discussions or interactions throughout my time there. Teachers would routinely walk by students without even saying hello.

At Brown High School, I observed teachers going out of their way to talk to their students. As an observer, I got a sense of positive relationships between the teachers and students. One potential discipline situation was avoided when a teacher pulled a student aside to talk to him. I saw a teacher handle this young man with compassion and genuine concern for him. She was able to calm the situation and prevent it from escalating to the level where it would have had to go to the office. In the cafeteria, I observed students sitting at a table set aside for the teachers who were on lunch duty. The students were working on homework and being tutored by a teacher who might not have even been that student's teacher. The teachers at Brown were in the hallways during transitions and it was not uncommon to see teachers and students engaged in conversation and laughing with one another.

Summary

The on-site observations and the data received from the principal surveys were valuable and offered great in-sight into the normal workings of each of these schools during a regular school day. I was able to see the similarities and differences of how each of these redesigned schools operated. I was able to witness the student/student, student/teacher, and teacher/teacher interactions for comparisons to existing data. Characteristics of the on-site observations and the principal surveys also tied into the principal interviews and the teacher focus groups and are further detailed in the interview data.

Interview Data

E-mails were sent to ten high school principals that had a redesigned high school on their campus. Two of those high schools switched back to a traditional high school and one high school separated from the main campus by occupying a separate space three miles from the original high school. So, from the seven remaining redesigned schools, only three principals responded agreeing to participate in the study. Two schools, Raven and Brown were located in North County Public School District and Bengal High School is located in East County. Having two schools from one district could be seen as a limitation to the study. However, each principal presented different perceptions of their school, how they are set up, and how they operate within the district.

Face-to-face interviews with the principals were set up through emails at a time convenient for them. The interviews took place in their office. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the interviewer. Once transcribed, a copy of the transcript

was then emailed to the principal for final approval. On the day of the interview, the principals at Raven and Bengal High School gave me a tour of their building before we began the formal interview. Each interview was 75-90 minutes long.

Once the interviews with the principal were concluded and transcribed, I sent out an email to the teachers at the participating schools asking for 6-9 teachers to participate in a focus group interview session. From those teachers that responded, I was actually able to get 5-6 to participate in the focus group. I chose teachers based on experience with a cross-section of courses and grade levels. The focus group sessions took place at the school of the participants at a time most convenient for them. The focus group interviews took 70-100 minutes to complete and those sessions were also recorded and later transcribed by the interviewer. A copy of the transcribed interview was emailed to each participant for final approval.

Themes

Recruiting

After reading and assessing the principal interviews and the teacher focus groups, I was able to gain insight as to how these organizations operated in the school-within-a-school, small school redesign. After reviewing the interviews, it was evident that the three schools had different approaches to recruiting students. Bengal High School accepts applications, which includes an essay, from 8th grade students across the school system. The school then takes those applications and has a strict interview process that includes the parents. Bengal High School caps their enrollment at 100 students per grade level. Raven High School does

not have an application process for consideration into their high school. Raven does have an open house for all 8th graders in their district. At the open house, Raven and their host, White High School, presents their curriculum to the students and parents. From that informational session, the students choose which high school they want to attend. “We encourage the students and parents to make their choice based on what they think will work best for them, not what their friends are choosing” (Principal, Raven).

Brown High School is the main or host school on campus. Therefore, they do not recruit or visit 8th graders in the district. They receive all the students that are not chosen by “Little Brown” High School. This is a point of contention for the principal, “we are not even invited to the table to present our school, we are not in the discussion. That is a problem.” He also added, “we are the default school. In other words, after they get through selecting their students, the rest come here.” The principal at Brown High School believes the underlying issue with the application process is that the majority of his students are not able to fill out the application and/or do not have the parental support to help them with the application process. He stated, “by that fact alone, they are accepting applications from the better quality of students or by the students that have supportive parents to help their child get into that school.” One teacher added, “they get to hand pick their students, how fair is that?” This current process presents a perception problem in the community. One teacher stated, “I had a parent tell me they would put their child in a private high school if they were not accepted at the other school.” Another teacher added, “I had a student tell me they were hoping to get into “Little Brown” next year because the teachers are better.” Another teacher

said, “I hate to say it, but our kids are being brainwashed to think they are better off over there than they are here at Brown!” The principal is working hard with central office administrators to hopefully change the current recruitment and selection process adding, “we all know this is a problem, but again, we are trying to change it by next year.”

Crossover Courses/Scheduling

In analyzing the interview transcripts, another theme was each schools approach to course offerings and their thoughts on crossover, students enrolling in classes at the other school on campus. Bengal High School has set up their school to allow for zero cross-over of students taking classes at the host school. If a student needs a course not offered at Bengal, they take the class needed online through NCVPS or they go to the college. “I do not allow cross-over of courses with the traditional high school, their philosophies aren’t the same as ours” (Principal, Bengal). Raven High School, however, allows students to cross-enroll between the two schools. The principal at Raven stated, “we do what is in the best interest of the student. If they need a class and the other school is teaching it at a time that fits the students schedule, we will enroll them into that class.” Brown High School students cannot take any classes offered at “Little Brown”. However, students at “Little Brown” can take courses needed at Brown High School.

Discipline

The principals in all three schools feel good about where their discipline is this year. They all commented on the decline of incidents over the past two years. Bengal’s principal stated, “our discipline has actually gone down every year. We got bigger, discipline became

less and less.” The principal at Brown attributes their decline in referrals to an increase in teacher and administrative visibility in the halls and in the courtyard.

Discipline through the eyes of the teachers, however, paints an entirely different picture. They would also agree that referrals to the office are on a decline but for a different reason. The teachers have stopped sending as many students to the office because they do not always know who to send the student to when a discipline issue arises. “I brought a student to the office and the assistant principal told me to go to the other school’s principal because that student was not theirs” (Teacher, Raven). Another teacher at Brown said, “I had an issue with a child vandalizing work in my room. I took the student to the office only to be told that they don’t handle discipline in that grade level.”

The discipline, for the most part, at all three schools were minor offenses; loitering, tardy, skipping class, etc. The teachers were very frustrated because there seemed to be no consequences or inconsistent consequences for the actions of the students. The teachers were also frustrated because they felt they were getting passed on to the next administrator. They did not feel that they were getting any help or getting any support. This led to teachers overlooking issues and potential problems. “Why take a kid or send a student to the office if nothing is going to happen to them, it’s not worth it” (Teacher, Raven).

Relationships

All three principals interviewed for the study stated their primary role is to be the instructional leader of their school. In their own way, they have tried to create an atmosphere and a culture that is optimal for student success. Each of the principals talked about

removing barriers for their teachers and providing them with the tools necessary to give strong, rigorous, and relevant learning opportunities to their students. Each and every one of the teachers commended their principal for encouraging them to be leaders and to think outside the box with regards to instructional practices. “We are not to focus on test scores, I don’t push the test with our teachers. I am trying to change instructional practices” (Principal, Bengal).

Having two high schools on one campus needs to have administrators who are in constant communication to handle the logistics of operating both schools on one site. The principal at Brown speaks to the other principal on a daily basis and has set aside one day a month for the two of them to meet and go over events and schedule things on their calendar. The principal at Raven High School describes her relationship with the host school principal as more of a co-principal relationship. They handle most of the school’s decision making together. They interview candidates, communicate constantly, and share in the discipline. However, the host school principal is the campus-wide principal. All major decisions pertaining to the school or campus are made by the principal at White High School. The Raven principal commented, “it is really weird, I am the principal of my school, but not the principal of my building.”

The principal at Bengal has a minimal relationship, at best, with the host school principal. “We talk at principal meetings and we coordinate our fire drills together”(Principal, Bengal). The principal at Bengal has a stronger more consistent

relationship with the Early College principal. He added, “traditional principals do not understand what we do, so I can’t call them.”

The teachers expressed a genuine respect and appreciation for their principal. “We love our principal” (Teacher, Brown). Another teacher continued, “our principal is like a counselor, we can talk to him at any time about anything. He always has time for us and he has our back.” The principal’s at each of the three schools allow their staff to take risks when it comes to instruction. Some teachers did voice that they wished they had more input into the decision-making process; however, they were all encouraged with the direction of their leader.

The teachers at Bengal and Brown also spoke of the tension that exists on their campus. “The interaction with Green High School teachers is not so great, they don’t like us being here”(Teacher Bengal). The Brown High School teachers by design are secluded from “Little Brown” and their teachers. The teachers at Brown feel there is an animosity between the two staffs on campus. One teacher noted, “Brown used to be a great school, but since we’ve separated they think they are better than us.” The animosity and divide stems from the perceived disparity in the academics and the discipline between the two schools. There is also no sharing of resources or collaboration between the two staffs. One teacher said, “there is very much a divide and negativity, the relationship in our department is awkward.”

Funding

All three schools received grant money for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through the North Carolina New Schools Project. All three of the schools in the study

received that grant money for the first five years of their existence. Since then, the schools are totally sustained by the Board of Education through state and local funding. The schools receive the same amount of ADM as any other high school in the state. The principal at Brown added, “our budget has been cut 40% this year. North School District, which includes Brown and Raven High Schools, receive money for instructional supplies only. Their professional development money has been cut along with Fund 72 and text book money. The principal at Bengal High School stated, “the biggest mis-perception out there is that everyone thinks that because you are a redesigned school you get extra funds and that is just not true.”

Challenges

Only one of the three principals interviewed opened their redesigned school in the beginning. The one principal was at his high school during the transition serving as an assistant principal. The third principal joined the redesigned school in its fourth year and was the third principal since the transition. Those varied backgrounds offered unique insight in terms of challenges facing them as a campus supporting two high schools. One of the main challenges that all three principals spoke of was autonomy. However, they all had a different point of view as to what autonomy looked like on their campus. The principal at Bengal High School was a strong advocate for being a school totally separate from the host school. Autonomy drove his decision-making from locking the door to having his students take courses online or at the college, rather than walk across the quad to the host school. He felt that it was very important to maintain that mind-set to stick to their philosophies and beliefs as a small redesigned high school. The principal at Bengal felt autonomy was critical

in accomplishing their goals. “Autonomy is very difficult, but we must maintain that belief and stay the course” (Principal, Bengal).

The principal at Raven High School also spoke of autonomy as being “huge”. However, on her campus, they operate with full crossover of courses and she works with the host principal as a co-principal. The principal at Raven describes her campus as, “like two families living under one roof, we need to establish boundaries and rules under one roof, but we are a family.” The two principals on campus share in interviewing and hiring of teachers, share in the scheduling of their students courses, and share in handling the discipline. This way of operating does not promote autonomy.

The principal at Brown stated, “we are not totally separate, how can we be when they get to pick and choose?” At Brown, the students are forbidden from taking any classes at the redesigned school. However, the students at the redesigned school can take their electives and any other courses needed to fill their schedule. The principal at Brown said, “that is an issue of fairness. Their students can choose the best of both worlds, our students cannot.”

Another challenge for the redesigned school is that they have to deal with perceptions or misperceptions regarding their schools. Both the principal and teachers at Brown High School spoke of experiences where parents and/or students expressed concern with the quality of education they were receiving. “Some of our teachers have left because they didn’t want to be viewed as a bad teacher because of the kids in the classroom” (Principal, Brown). The teachers at Brown spoke in-depth with regards to how negatively their school is viewed in the public eye. “Overall, we have really good teachers, we just need to figure out

how to erase the negativity so parents feel comfortable sending their kids to us” (Teacher, Brown). He also added, “it starts with the recruiting process. We are not invited to speak about the great things here at our school. We need to get that changed.” The teachers at Bengal High School also spoke of battling perceptions that they had all the smart kids with strong supportive parents. One teacher added, “the common misperception about our students is that we have the cream of the crop and the best of the best in everything and we don’t.”

When sitting down and talking with the teachers the biggest challenges they faced was the lack of consistency in not only handling discipline, but also the lack of communication as to whom to send a student to in the event of a discipline situation. Every teacher at the two North County School District Schools interviewed vented this as a huge challenge and frustration. The teachers at Raven High School also felt there were no consequences for the students who were sent to the office. One teacher commented, “I saw a janitor getting verbally abused and had a rock thrown at him while cleaning and he and I went to the principal and nothing was done.” Another teacher added, “we are constantly being passed on to the next person and that’s not our job! I am supposed to report offenses to the office, not be told that is not a child from our school, go to the other principal.” The campus that hosts Raven and White High School has two assistant principals to serve the campus. The teachers at Raven are told to not go to them, they answer to the host or campus administrator.

Summary

Overall, I felt each of the principals and teachers reflected positive aspects of their redesigned high schools. Schools were staffed with dedicated administrators who encourage their staff to be leaders and encouraged strong instructional practices that are rigorous, challenging, and encouraging life- long learning. The teachers at the three sites commented that they love working with their students and respected their administrators, with one focus group saying, “we love our principal.”

Although data from the interviews pointed out some positives, negative characteristics were also identified in the study. The negative perceptions from the community, the lack of communications between administrators and teachers when it comes to handling discipline, and the recruiting process for two of the schools, came through during the principal interview and the teacher focus group session. The dedication and hard work from the principals and the teachers were enough to deal with those challenges. Although there was little to no interaction with teachers from the other school on campus, the teachers that worked at the redesigned school and those from Brown High School felt a sense of community and worked hard to build relationships to sustain these small school redesigns and enhance communities for their students and staff members.

CHAPTER EIGHT

INTRODUCTION

In rural school systems, you will typically find close knit communities that rally around their schools and who are active in the support of their children's education. What is it in these small, rural communities that they choose to restructure into even smaller educational sub-units? Is it for the money? Is it to change instructional practices? Do they believe that smaller is better? All three principals in this study spoke passionately with regards to being an instructional leader and making positive change in practices to better prepare their students. The teachers also spoke with great passion and desire to play a role in the development of young people. Many ideas expressed in this study from the observations and face-to-face interviews validated the positives of previous studies in terms of restructuring to small-schools-within-a-school model. However, the interviews also brought to light some negative aspects. The interviews provided great insight to those negatives and how they impact the education provided by small, redesigned high schools at these three rural high school campuses.

Discussion and Connections

The schools chosen for this study are in-line with the school-within-a-school model as outlined by the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP). These schools established a smaller educational unit with a separate program, its own staff and students, and its own budget. The school-within-a-school model has the greatest levels of autonomy, separateness, and distinctness (Deweese, 1999). Research supports the importance of autonomy and it is

critical to the success of restructuring small schools (Cotton, 2001). The redesigned schools must focus on running all aspects of the school as if it were in a separate building in a separate location. Lee and Ready (2004) found that when small schools-within-a-school maintain elements of the traditional comprehensive high school, they cannot concentrate on students. However, the principals in this study had various opinions as to what autonomy looked like on their campus. Only one principal strived for full autonomy and separateness and a creation of their own unique culture while the other two principals had a structure in place that allowed crossover and practices that did not promote their own identity. These two schools have not been able to match cultural change with the structural change of small school redesign. For redesigned schools to work, they need to establish their own identity. These schools need buy-in from the administration, teachers, students, and community. The stakeholders need to accept that their traditional, comprehensive high school is no longer in place and they need to embrace that change to help foster a new environment. Cross-over of classes and teachers teaching students from both schools does not provide the clarity needed to help identify the redesigned school as their own separate entity.

Some case studies of schools-within-a-school contribute to a strong feeling of community among staff and students which facilitate student attainment and builds positive relationships (Wasley et al, 2000). One of the schools that I studied embodied those feelings and built relationships that were successful and equitable. The other two sites encountered academic and social stratification. This restructuring process has divided those schools and

created tension between the two staffs, and the teachers at one of the high schools encounter negative perceptions about them and their school from the community.

Research also indicates that social relationships between teachers and students are improved and easier to obtain in small schools. However, one high school studied showed very little interaction or socialization between the staff and students. Traditionally, small school redesign allows for teachers to teach students 3 or 4 years and that helps foster those relationships. However, one high school in the study allowed a high degree of crossover to the point that teachers did not get to know the students in their own school. “With all of this crossover, I should have just stayed in a traditional high school” (Teacher, Raven). Another added, “it feels like we are traditional.” Crossover has played a role in hindering those relationships from being formed. “I remember when we first transitioned to a small school, there was no crossover. We could follow our students from 9th grade to graduation. That’s when we felt closer to our students and I knew I had a role in their growth” (Teacher, Raven).

The research indicates that small schools have a reduction in incidents of fighting, vandalism, theft, and substance abuse (Wasley et al, 2000). Small schools, in general, have fewer total overall discipline problems compared to larger high schools (McCabe, 2000). All three principals interviewed for this study indicated that they were pleased with the overall discipline at their school. One principal indicated that with each passing year, his population increases while his discipline issues have decreased. Another principal credits the increase of staff and administrative supervision to his decrease in referrals.

Collaboration has been found to be very important and a key element in successful schools (Little, 1982; McLaughlin & Talbot, 2001). The focus group of teachers at all three sites spoke of a strong relationship amongst themselves. The teachers describe an “us against the world” mentality. However, the relationships with teachers from the host school or other school were described as divisive and contentious. In a recent study, interactions among teachers in restructured schools were described as minimal and superficial in nature and the collaboration was described as forced (Sikes, 2009). Despite the non-existent or negative relationship with the teachers from the host school, the redesigned school teachers in this study welcome the opportunity to work in a small-school-within-a-school environment. The small schools teachers also spoke of a trusting relationship with their principal that allows them to be innovative and creative.

The recruiting and assignment of students to a particular school also comes into question. Higher achieving students tend to select schools that have a reputation for rigor while lower achieving students choose the schools with the reputation for lower standards (Lee & Ready, 2004). One of the three principals feels his students are discriminated against because they cannot fill out the application or they do not have parental support to help them get into the smaller, redesigned school. The teachers in this study are also dealing with the perception that they are the alternative school.

Implications for Practice

As schools have entered the 21st century, information and strategies with regards to how to best run our schools and navigate through our global economy are presented to our

schools at a rapid pace. The field of education needs practitioners who are informed of the wide array of strategies and best practices before making any decision concerning the direction of our schools. It is important that educators have access to the research on all aspects of these issues facing our education system today. We need to be well informed to avoid “knee-jerk” reactions that might set us back.

Our high schools are facing challenges that affect our society and our position in the global market place. Our high schools need to be cutting edge when it comes to instruction and using resources to prepare our kids for college and the work force. Our educational leaders need to look at redesigned high schools to determine whether or not restructuring to the small-school-within-a-school model is a viable option to meet those demands. Most of the research out there is on small schools and not necessarily on small schools-within-a-school. Due to this small body of literature, this study will bring the challenges and obstacles of redesigning to light and assist decision makers at the local level by presenting a different perspective on small school redesign.

This study has provided positive data that is in line with current research. However, the negative themes that emerged such as: perceptions from the community, lack of autonomy in two of the high schools studied, high percentage of crossover, and communication issues for teachers not knowing whom to report discipline problems have not been prominent findings in previous research on restructuring using the small schools-within-a-school model. This data is important for all stakeholders to have a complete picture before making any decisions regarding small school restructuring.

Despite these challenges, the principals and teachers interviewed in this study were positive and kept an open-mind in dealing with these obstacles. The principals are instructional leaders who encourage their teachers to be leaders and help them provide lessons that are rigorous and relevant. Bringing these challenges and obstacles to light, will help not only the systems in this study, but other districts that are currently restructuring or contemplating continuing to keep the small schools design. This study will help systems be aware of the potential pitfalls and develop strategies to help guide them as they move forward in the restructuring process.

In order to help districts ensure that the redesigned model works, they need to have clear and consistent communication with all stakeholders. They need to establish clear, identifiable goals and objectives along with a plan to reach those goals and objectives to establish buy-in from the entire community. It is critical that administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community understand that yesterdays answers do not solve the problems of tomorrow. Together they can promote the redesigned model and help ensure success for their schools and their students to compete in the 21st century global market.

Another element to help navigate through the challenges restructuring poses is having strong, unified support from the top down. The district leaders need to be visible and active on the campuses of the redesigned schools to show they are all in this together. The principals and teachers need to support each other and work together to help prevent perceptions that one school is better than the other school. The principals and teachers also need to focus on working with each other. Even though they are two different high schools,

they do share one campus and they do serve the same community. So, it would be in their best interest, as a community, to find a way to work together, collaborate, and share resources.

Another issue that arose, in this study, was the perception that redesigned schools have the better students. The district leaders need to get in front of this. One way would be to develop an application process that is fair, consistent, and has a focus on diversity when it comes to accepting students into their redesigned schools. Each of the focus groups mentioned a negative perception that they have the “cream of the crop”, or college bound students. This is an issue teacher’s face from other teachers and the community on a daily basis. I believe a uniform application process should be composed by district and school level leaders to help ensure a process that is fair and equitable for the host school and the redesigned school.

This research presented fragmented and inconsistent approaches to operating and implementing the small schools-within-a-school model. The small school redesign model can work. The schools in this study, along with any school contemplating a small school redesign, need to have a clear vision. They need leadership willing to, as the Bengal principal said, “stay the course.” These schools need leadership that can implement strategies to negate or minimize those obstacles in order for the redesign model to be successful.

Implication for Research

Much of the literature on small schools focuses on big, metropolitan areas where it is not uncommon to have high schools with 2,000, 3,000 or even 5,000 students. Those studies highlight the positive relationships between teachers and students, dropout rates, graduation rates, test scores, lower discipline, etc. when schools are broken down into smaller units. Like all redesigned schools, they also have an emphasis on a themed curriculum. This study examined the challenges and obstacles of restructuring already small high schools of less than 1,000 students in rural North Carolina. Although interviews and on-site visits did portray some of those positive attributes of larger redesigned schools, concerns arose from teacher focus groups and one-on-one interviews with the principals.

The body of research is plentiful when discussing the benefits of small schools. However, very little research exists on the small school-within-a-school redesign. Proponents suggest that the benefits of small school redesign are closely parallel to small schools. This study was intended to find the obstacles and challenges of three rural high schools in North Carolina that restructured their traditional high school using a small school-within-a-school model. Through the interview process and onsite visits, themes emerged that were consistent with the literature. However, with only three sites included in this study, the obstacles would be more valid if research could be conducted on more sites.

The sample size of this study is small when compared to all the schools not only in North Carolina, but across the country that have restructured using the small school-within-a-school redesign. Comparing more high schools of equal size or by studying larger schools of

more than 1,000 students would help determine if those obstacles also exist in larger school systems. If those studies revealed the same results, it would be difficult to say that these challenges and obstacles are due to being in a small rural school district. Another study should include interviewing parents and students to determine if their perceptions matched those of the principal and teachers. Interviewing the parents and students could also reveal if they encounter the same challenges and obstacles as their teachers.

Several of the high schools in North Carolina that restructured seven years ago are no longer redesigned high schools. They have transitioned back to traditional comprehensive high school campuses. An interesting study would be to interview those administrators and teachers to determine their reasoning for transitioning back to a traditional high school. Did they face the same challenges as those who participated in this study? And if so, were those challenges the reason for opting out of the NCNSP school redesign?

The latest attempt to strengthen our high schools and better prepare our students for their world is to establish Early College High Schools and STEM High Schools. Another study could be designed to analyze those schools to determine any similarities or differences to this study in terms of obstacles and challenges that those schools encounter. Researchers need to continue to study all forms of school redesign to determine how best to prepare our young people for college and/or the workforce to compete globally in the 21st century.

Conclusion

Our schools are faced with challenges today unlike any other time in our history. We live in a global community that did not exist in the last century. Our schools today need to

find ways to prepare our kids to compete in the global economy. According to the North Carolina New Schools Project, their goal is to design schools with programs to meet the demands of the 21st century by preparing students to be ready for college or the workforce after graduation and provide them the tools to compete for jobs in knowledge-based industries.

Based on the interviews of the principals and teachers in this study, there are challenges to redesigning traditional, comprehensive high schools using the small school-with-a-school model. The hard work and vision of the principals and the dedication of the teachers to their students help these schools deal with those challenges every day. Sharing space alone presents challenges that require each school to communicate in order to navigate through this process. The communication between principals was consistent enough to establish processes and protocols for operating each of their programs on one campus. However, communication between the teachers of the two schools was either not at all, inconsistent, or superficial at best. The teachers at two of the schools also mentioned inconsistent communication with principals leading to frustrations in dealing with discipline and feeling that they were left out of the decision-making process. This inconsistency helped perpetuate the perception that one school was elite over the other. Teachers spoke of negative attitudes from other teachers, parents, and in some cases the students. Those attitudes made it difficult for teachers to do their job effectively, and in some cases, hindered their relationships with their students. This perception has also played a role in the recruiting or admissions process. The feeling in the community is that all the smarter, college bound

kids are in the smaller, redesigned schools. This was a point that the teachers at redesigned schools disputed. However, the principal at the one host school raised this as a concern and noted that his administration was trying to change it.

Research has shown that autonomy is the most critical factor in a redesigned high school's success. The schools in this study had varied approaches to autonomy. One school's principal made autonomy his focus; he made his decisions about his school and the welfare of his students based on not allowing any crossover of courses for his students. There was a shared space, but not at a time when there were students from the host school in that space. One high school had a structure in place that allowed students from the redesigned school to take courses at the host school. However, the students at the host school were not allowed to take classes at the other school. The third high school in the study had what I would describe as a "free for all" approach. There was no application to enter either one of the high schools on the campus; the students could choose their own high school. Once enrolled at their chosen school, the students could take courses from either school as long as it fit their schedule and according to the principal, "was in the best interest of the student." The latter two approaches do not help these schools in terms of being autonomous.

Redesigned high schools are expected to set up a structure that is housed on part of a main high school that has their own themed curriculum, their own staff, and their own budget. The research in this study has found that while the framework to be a smaller redesigned school is in place, there are obstacles and challenges that are evident that prevent these schools or at least make it difficult for these schools to be successful and meet their

goals. Those challenges need to be addressed before they can move forward and be successful. All three of the schools in this study have hard working, passionate teachers and administrators that work very hard every day to help get past those barriers and meet the needs of their students. Restructuring traditional high schools using the small-schools-within-a-school model can work well but administrators shouldn't naively believe it will be seamless or without problems that need to be addressed and worked out in advance.

In 2000, the Gates Foundation came up with the small schools initiative to boost graduation rates and increase college entry rates. Although most, if not all, of the research is in urban areas such as, Chicago, New York, Seattle, Denver, and Philadelphia, that has not prevented other school systems from restructuring to a small-schools-within-a-school model. With the promise of money from the Gates Foundation, this reform has been "forced" upon building level administrators and the politics behind the involvement of the Gates Foundation, superintendents outside of these urban areas were encouraged to adopt the redesign model. Without any research pertaining to their needs, these systems entered this venture without knowing where they were going and how they were going to get there. In recent years, problems have arisen and money from the Foundation has dried up, many of these schools are forced to transition back to traditional schools. This redesign model is too expensive to sustain in these tight budget times.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Principal Survey Questions

Please read the following questions. Circle the response(s) that most accurately describe your school. Your responses will be for my purposes only and will not be looked at by any other person or persons. I can assure complete anonymity throughout this process with your responses. Upon completion, please put the survey in the addressed envelope and mail back to me. Thank you for your participation.

1. How many students are enrolled in your school?
 - 100-200
 - 201-499
 - 500-699
 - 700 +

2. How long have you been principal at this school?
 - 0-3 years
 - 3-6 years

3. How many classroom teachers do you have at each grade level?
 - 9th Grade number of teachers _____
 - 10th Grade number of teachers _____
 - 11th Grade number of teachers _____
 - 12th Grade number of teachers _____

4. Approximately how many students do you have at each grade level:
 - 9th Grade number of students _____
 - 10th Grade number of students _____
 - 11th Grade number of students _____
 - 12th Grade number of students _____

5. How old is your building?
 - _____ 0-5 years
 - _____ 6-10 years
 - _____ 11-15 years
 - _____ 16-20 years
 - _____ greater than 20 years

6. Is the building used for any activities other than school functions?
 - _____ Yes
 - _____ No

7. What opportunities do teachers have for working together? Check all that apply

- Department meetings
- School committees
- Student Clubs
- Serving as Mentors
- Other: _____

8. How would you rate your parent involvement?

- Many parents are actively involved
- Core parent group that participates in most of the activities
- Few parents involved or attend school functions

9. What are some types of community involvement available at your school?

- Serving on Committees
- Volunteering
- Providing financial support
- Providing awards and incentives to the students
- School projects
- Other: _____

10. If a concern arises with a student, what are the steps taken in trying to resolve it?
Check all that apply.

- Student sent to the office
- Student meets with guidance counselor
- Parents are called
- Parents meet with school personnel
- Student is placed on in-school or after school suspension
- Other: _____

11. Can students switch high schools after they started in another?

- yes
- no

12. What scheduling conflicts arise for students getting the courses they need?
- lack of teachers
 - lack of enrollment to support a course
 - Time
 - Sharing teachers with traditional high school
 - Sharing space with the traditional high school
 - Other: _____
13. If a crisis arises on campus, who is the point person in charge to coordinate with the authorities?
- Principal at school A
 - Principal at school B
 - Principal at school C
 - Counselor
 - Student Resource Officer
 - All three principals
 - Other: _____
14. Choose the following that best describes the communication amongst the schools on your campus?
- very consistent
 - consistent
 - moderate
 - not consistent
 - not at all

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Principals

1. How long have you been an administrator at this site? Tell me about your job.
2. What is the background of the school? How long has it been in existence?
What type of population do you serve?
3. What is the configuration of the faculty? For example, assistant principal?
How many teachers per grade level? How many art, music, P.E., language teachers?
4. Tell me about your staff. What opportunities are provided to work together?
5. What is the average class size? How does your class size compare to the other restructured high schools in the district?
6. Talk about teacher recruitment. What is your turnover rate? Are restructured schools an easy sell to new teachers? What systems are in place to help new teachers?
7. Talk about your parent community and their participation. How do you think parents perceive the school?
8. Tell me about the involvement between your school and the community. How is the community helpful to the school or students? Is the building used for other non-school related activities?
9. What funding sources do you have? Tell me a little about your budget.
10. Are there any scheduling conflicts with regards to classes or activities
between the two schools?
11. With regards to course offerings, can students from one school take courses in
the other school?

12. What happens if the students are not successful? What interventions are in place? Can they switch to one of the other high schools on your campus?
13. Describe any discipline issues at your school.
14. Tell me about the communication between you and the other campus level Principals.
15. Talk about who would be in charge if there was a crisis situation on campus.
16. What is the criteria or selection process to enter one of the high schools on your campus?
17. Rank in order the three hardest or most important challenges or the restructuring process?
18. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. How long have you been a teacher? At this school?
2. Talk to me about teaching in a redesigned high school?
3. What opportunities do you have to work within your grade level? Do you communicate with the teachers at the other school(s)?
4. Are there opportunities for teachers to be leaders? For example, to lead staff development sessions or present material from a workshop.
5. Are there opportunities to cross plan between the two schools? Is there a need to plan together? Would you like to?
6. Talk to me about the students you teach. Describe the relationship.
7. Being in a restructured school, do you feel you are in a good situation to make a real difference in your student's learning and in their quality of life?
8. How do you think the parents perceive this concept of redesigned high schools?
9. Tell me about parental support and involvement.
10. Are there discipline issues in your classroom? School?
11. What is your relationship with the building level administrators?
12. Describe any conflicts with scheduling courses. Do the students and parents feel the courses are available to them when they need them?
13. Do you have responsibilities in the other schools? If so, do those responsibilities affect your relationship with your students? If so, in what ways?
14. Describe the morale at your school.

15. Rank in order the three hardest or most important challenges of the restructuring process?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix D

IRB

North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research GUIDELINES FOR A PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

In your narrative, address each of the topics outlined below. Every application for IRB review must contain a proposal narrative, and failure to follow these directions will result in delays in reviewing/processing the protocol.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to provide information to rural school districts as they consider the idea of restructuring their already existing traditional high school to small schools within a school model. Literature exists and supports this effort in many urban school districts across the country that have thousands of students and the physical infrastructures in place to pull off the restructuring. This study will look at the challenges and obstacles that have faced rural school systems in North Carolina that have attempted restructuring and provide data to determine if these school systems have the resources to fulfill all the promises of the restructuring movement

2. If student research, indicate whether for a course, thesis, dissertation, or independent research.

Dissertation

B. SUBJECT POPULATION

1. How many subjects will be involved in the research?

There will be 4-6 administrators and 16-20 teachers that will participate in a focus group. A list of eligible schools will be created from publicly available information. School principals will be approached and their permission for the research will be sought. When principals provide permission, the district superintendent's permission for the research will be sought. Only then will recruitment for the research take place in the schools.

2. Describe how subjects will be recruited. Please provide the IRB with any recruitment materials that will be used.

Administrators will be asked to complete a survey. The researcher will mail those surveys to the administrators through the regular postal service and will be provided a self-addressed stamped envelope to return to the researcher. 4-6 administrators will also be invited to take part in an interview. The invitations will be mailed to those invited to participate and followed up with a phone call requesting their participation. 16-20 teachers from the chosen sites will also be mailed an invitation to participate in a focus group. Those mailed invitations will also be followed up by a phone call requesting their participation. The invitations will explain the nature of the study.

3. List specific eligibility requirements for subjects (or describe screening procedures), including those criteria that would exclude otherwise acceptable subjects.

Schools chosen for this study are rural school districts in North Carolina that had a traditional high school of 1000 students or less and restructured into small schools within a school model. The face-to-face interviews will consist of administrators (i.e., principals or assistant principals) that have gone through the restructuring process at their high school. The focus groups will consist of teachers across grade levels with various experience levels that have gone through the restructuring process.

4. Explain any sampling procedure that might exclude specific populations.

Larger school systems or urban school systems that are not considered rural in the state of North Carolina will be excluded. The high school population before restructuring will be about 1000 students or less. The school systems have to have also restructured their traditional high school campus into smaller sub-units or schools within schools.

5. Disclose any relationship between researcher and subjects - such as, teacher/student; employer/employee.

I am the primary researcher and I have no relationship with any of the potential participants that may participate in the study. I have a few contacts in schools that may help me gain access to principals in order to obtain permission for the research, but those contacts will not be involved in the research.

6. Check any vulnerable populations included in study: None

- minors (under age 18) - if so, have you included a line on the consent form for the parent/guardian signature
- fetuses
- pregnant women
- persons with mental, psychiatric or emotional disabilities
- persons with physical disabilities
- economically or educationally disadvantaged
- prisoners
- elderly
- students from a class taught by principal investigator
- other vulnerable population.

7. If any of the above are used, state the necessity for doing so. Please indicate the approximate age range of the minors to be involved.

N/A

C. PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

1. In lay language, describe completely all procedures to be followed during the course of the experimentation. Provide sufficient detail so that the Committee is able to assess potential risks to human subjects. In order for the IRB to completely understand the experience of the subjects in your project, please provide a detailed outline of everything subjects will experience as a result of participating in your project. Please be specific and include information on all aspects of the research, through subject recruitment and ending when the subject's role in the project is complete. All descriptions should include the informed consent process, interactions between the subjects and the researcher, and any tasks, tests, etc. that involve subjects. If the project involves more than one group

of subjects (e.g. teachers and students, employees and supervisors), please make sure to provide descriptions for each subject group.

The school systems in North Carolina that meet the criteria for this study, being rural and having a population of 1000 students or less before restructuring, will be sent a letter through the postal service describing the study and the importance of their participation. Once I receive positive responses to participate, I will choose two systems to complete the study. The administrators will then be sent the survey through U.S. mail and asked to complete and return. The administrators will not be identified by name or their site. Once those surveys are returned, they will be analyzed. Once those surveys are returned, a thank you note will be sent to those administrators.

To provide the researcher with more in-depth information concerning rural school systems in North Carolina that have restructured into small schools within schools, those administrators that completed the survey will be invited to participate in an interview. Those administrators will be sent an invitation through the U.S. mail with a follow-up phone call encouraging their participation. The interviews will take place on their campus at a date and time determined to work best for them and their schedule. Once a date and time is determined, a confirmation email will be sent to those participants. Those being interviewed will not be identified by name or work site. Interview participants will be provided with a copy of their interview transcript for “member checking.” Participants will receive the transcripts via email to their private account or U.S. mail. In the event correspondence is through U.S. mail, I will provide the participants with self addressed stamped envelopes. The participants will respond to me through my private email account or by U.S. mail. As mentioned, I will provide postage necessary to send anything back to me through the mail.

Letters will also be sent to the teachers at those chosen sites inviting their participation to a focus group session. Once letters are returned, the researcher will choose 6-10 teachers across restructured schools and experience levels to have a focus group interview session. Thank you notes will be sent to all the teachers, chosen for the focus group or not, thanking them for their interest in the study. Once identified, those chosen for the focus group will receive a letter informing them they were chosen and dates and times will be determined to have the focus group session. Once a date and time are confirmed, a follow up email will be sent to the participants. Those participating in the focus group will not be identified by name or work site. Observations will occur at each school. The researcher will simply record general impressions and not record any identifying information during observations.

Artifacts obtained from the school will be obtained without information that could identify any individuals.

2. How much time will be required of each subject?

The surveys to be completed by administrators should take less than fifteen minutes. The face-to-face interviews with the administrators should take no more than one hour each. The focus group sessions with the teachers should take up to two hours. The interviews and focus group sessions will take place on the site of the participants as to ensure no travel for the participants.

D. POTENTIAL RISKS

1. State the potential risks (physical, psychological, financial, social, legal or other) connected with the proposed procedures and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

There is minimal risk to participants from describing their work environment. Participants will be told that they are free to decline participation, and to skip any question that makes them uncomfortable. Additionally, focus group participants will be provided with the opportunity to decline participation in the focus group once they have arrived at the focus group session and seen who else is participating.

2. Will there be a request for information that subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive (e.g. private behavior, economic status, sexual issues, religious beliefs, or other matters that if made public might impair their self-esteem or reputation or could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability)?

No

- a. If yes, please describe and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

N/A

- b. Could any of the study procedures produce stress or anxiety, or be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading? If yes, please describe why they are important and what arrangements have been made for handling an emotional reaction from the subject.

No

3. How will data be recorded and stored?

The surveys will be returned and stored in a locked place designated by the researcher. The interviews of the administrators and the teacher focus groups will be taped and stored in a locked location designated by the researcher.

a. How will identifiers be used in study notes and other materials?

Administrators completing the survey are not required to put their names on them, but surveys will be linkable to participants' identities. The identifiers will help me know who completed the surveys, but their identity will not be known by a 3rd party. Administrators and teachers interviewed will not be identified by their name or site they work in the narrative description of the sites visited. They will be identified as school A and B. Pseudonyms will be assigned for interview subjects (administrators) but teachers participating in the focus group will be identified only as "teacher" with quotes from the focus group simply attributed to the aggregate "teacher" or "teachers".

b. How will reports will be written, in aggregate terms, or will individual responses be described?

The results of the survey will be recorded in aggregate terms. Field notes and transcriptions of the interview and focus group process will be used to analyze individual responses. Direct quotes will be presented in the final report, and participants identities will be protected through the use of masking.

4. If audio or videotaping is done how will the tapes be stored and how/when will the tapes be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Audiotapes will be used for the interview and focus group portion of the study. Those will be transcribed and destroyed after the study is completed. The transcriptions of those interviews and focus groups along with any notes will be shredded upon completion of the study. The data given from the results of the survey and the surveys themselves will also be shredded and destroyed 5 years after completion of the study.

5. Is there any deception of the human subjects involved in this study? If yes, please describe why it is necessary and describe the debriefing procedures that have been arranged.

No

E. POTENTIAL BENEFITS

This does not include any form of compensation for participation.

1. What, if any, direct benefit is to be gained by the subject? If no direct benefit is expected, but indirect benefit may be expected (knowledge may be gained that could help others), please explain.

This study will provide information regarding the challenges and obstacles of already small rural school systems restructuring into small schools within schools. The information will help these school systems as they move forward in this restructuring movement and evaluate those challenges and obstacles to determine if they need to go back to a traditional high school or use this data to help them move forward with the restructuring movement. This data can also be used to help other school systems who have not restructured but who might be considering it in the future.

F. COMPENSATION

Please keep in mind that the logistics of providing compensation to your subjects (e.g., if your business office requires names of subjects who received compensation) may compromise anonymity or complicate confidentiality protections. If, while arranging for subject compensation, you must make changes to the anonymity or confidentiality provisions for your research, you must contact the IRB office prior to implementing those changes.

1. Describe compensation

N/A

2. Explain compensation provisions if the subject withdraws prior to completion of the study.

N/A

3. If class credit will be given, list the amount and alternative ways to earn the same amount of credit.

N/A

G COLLABORATORS

1. If you anticipate that additional investigators (other than those named on **Cover Page**) may be involved in this research, list them here indicating their institution, department and phone number.

N/A

2. Will anyone besides the PI or the research team have access to the data (including completed surveys) from the moment they are collected until they are destroyed.

The participants will have the opportunity to review their interview transcriptions to verify accuracy.

H. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

1. Do you have a significant financial interest or other conflict of interest in the sponsor of this project? No

2. Does your current conflicts of interest management plan include this relationship and is it being properly followed? N/A

I. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used, attach a copy to this proposal.
2. Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this proposal.
3. Please provide any additional materials that may aid the IRB in making its decision.

J. HUMAN SUBJECT ETHICS TRAINING

*Please consider taking the [Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative](#) (CITI), a free, comprehensive ethics training program for researchers conducting research with human subjects. Just click on the underlined link.