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# Cognitive Frameworks that Enable South Carolina High School Principals to Implement Smaller Learning Communities

Leslie Jr. Gamble

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THE COGNITIVE FRAMEWORKS THAT ENABLE SOUTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL  
PRINCIPALS TO IMPLEMENT  
SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES

by

LESLIE GAMBLE, JR.

(Under the Direction of Charles Reavis)

ABSTRACT

The demands of an ever-changing technological and diverse global society contribute to the need for systemic change in today's secondary schools. Faced with these realities, American high schools must set course on a new mission for education. Not only must high schools require differentiated instructions to accommodate students' needs, high school personnel must also be held accountable for student learning by producing a high quality education. Because of the variety of these diverse issues, high school principals are faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles that confront high school reforms.

The research regarding smaller learning communities is well-documented and encouraging. While the practice can become the focus for producing higher achievement, educators must create new paradigms of operations. In many cases, traditional standards and procedures must be abandoned in order to increase school-wide success.

Little is known of South Carolina's high school administrators as they attempt to find solutions to meet the needs of rapidly growing and diverse student populations. Little is also known of the experiences of South Carolina high school principals as they implement smaller learning communities, or the forces confronting those transitions. Therefore, the researcher examined the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. In addition, the researcher analyzed the

strategies used by administrators to overcome the forces, using Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames: human resources, political, structural, and symbolic.

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with administrators in seven South Carolina high schools located in five school districts. The researcher analyzed the forces as well as strategies used by administrators to overcome the forces at work. The researcher categorized the strategies used by administrators to deal with the forces into four frames: human resources, political, structural, and symbolic.

In analyzing the cognitive frameworks commonly used by administrators in implementing smaller learning communities, the researcher found that the majority of cognitive frames fell within the human resource framework. The second largest group of responses fell within the structural framework followed by the symbolic framework and then the political framework.

**INDEX WORDS:** Smaller learning communities, SLCs, High school restructuring, School improvement, School climate, Improving student achievement, Reframing organizations

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PRINCIPALS TO IMPLEMENT  
SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES

by

LESLIE GAMBLE, JR.

B.A., University South Alabama, 1991

M.Ed., Cambridge College, 2000

Ed.S., Cambridge College, 2001

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia South University in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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LESLIE GAMBLE, JR.

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Charles Reavis  
COMMITTEE: Linda Arthur  
Russell Mays

Electronic Version Approved:  
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## DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this dissertation in the memory of my fore-fathers whose names may never be known. Through their faithful and enduring commitment to life and the betterment of their children, I am here as a living witness and testimony of the power of persistence and steadfast love.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Nothing is more realistic today than the global changes experienced in government, industry, and finance. As society is reshaped by change so is the concept of public education. For the past 50 years, national and international events such as Sputnik, *A Nation at Risk*, and most recently, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* have substantially influenced the American educational system.

Stimulated by *A Nation at Risk*, the government, legislators, and educators began to focus on the need for change in America's public schools (Gardner, 1983). In response to the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, federal and state legislators pressured educators and other stakeholders to improve the quality of education in America. Nonetheless, 25 years later, research from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2007) reported the general level of achievement in U. S. high schools:

- Only 61% of high school seniors could read and understand material such as that typically presented at the high school level, and only 23% could synthesize and learn from specialized reading materials;
- Fewer than 25% of high school seniors could evaluate the procedures or results of a scientific experiment, draw conclusions, make inferences, and describe abstract themes;
- Only 16% of high school seniors could calculate, compare, and identify two and three dimensional figures and solve simple problems using coordinate geometry;

To improve results on a variety of accountability measures currently placed on high schools, the principal is frequently encouraged to be a catalyst for change and reform (Zimmerman, 2005).

Several researchers have linked the leadership and reform efforts of principals to improved school culture and instructional methods (Short & Greer, 2002; Stover, 2005; Trump, 1970). According to Trump, three basic concepts exist concerning school reform: (1) past programs are meaningless; (2) procedures have not been adopted systemically; and (3) change must take on a personal importance. Further, the systemic change process needs to begin with the school principal implementing second order change. Fullan (2001) referred to basic operation and procedural changes as first-order change. Levy (1986) stated that minor adjustments and modifications that do not affect fundamental aspects of the organization are first order changes. These changes occur naturally with the growth of the organization. First order changes in a school may be changes in the bell schedule, methods of communication such as the implementation of an intranet, or scheduled curricular or textbook updates. There is usually minimal resistance to first order change. Second-order change, on the other hand, “transforms an organization's culture by redesigning the established structures, roles, basic beliefs, values, vision, and ways of doing things” (McDonald, 2005, p. 2). More resistance results when second order change is attempted. Because first order change and second order change are very different, leaders must approach them with different strategies. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) propose two different strategies: technical change and adaptive change. “Technical solutions are those that can be understood and addressed with current, available knowledge. Adaptive solutions are more challenging because the solutions lie outside the current way of operating” (McDonald, p. 2). Technical change, which employs strategies that already exist within the organization are effective in dealing with first order change. Adaptive change, which employs strategies such as increased or different systems of communication, risk-taking, and learning new ways of operating, are applied when making second order change. The initiation of smaller



learning communities is clearly second order change therefore requiring the more complex strategies and opening the organization to increased resistance.

Smaller learning communities, as a way to redesign schools, have been documented to produce reform. Research conducted over the past decade has indicated that smaller learning community schools are superior to large traditional schools (Barton, 2004; Cotton, 1996a, 1996b, 2001, 2004; Klonsky, 1995a; 1995b, 2002; Klonsky & Klonsky, 1999; Lee & Smith, 1994, 1995; Meier, 1995b; Oxley, 1989, 1994, 1996, 2001, 2004; Raywid, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999). Small school researcher Raywid (1999) wrote that smaller learning community schools are significantly better than larger educational organizations. The preceding findings produce substantial evidence that small schools provide a means to narrow the achievement gap between white, middle class, affluent students and ethnic minority and poor students. Research regarding the success of smaller learning community schools has led to the creation of hundreds of smaller learning community schools across the United States (Cotton, 2001; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002; Raywid, 1999).

### **Smaller Learning Communities**

#### **Background**

A growing body of evidence supports that smaller learning community schools have advantages over larger schools. Some of the advantages suggest that;

- smaller learning community schools support the improvement of climate and student performance,
- smaller learning community schools have higher attendance rates,
- smaller learning community schools have lower frequency of disciplinary issues,

- smaller learning community schools have a higher satisfaction rate with teachers, students, and parents, and
- smaller learning community schools have higher graduation rates.

(Cotton, 1996a; Dewees, 1999; Howley, 1994, 1996; Klonsky, 1995a; Oxley, 2001, 2004; Raywid, 1996, 1999).

Based on this evidence, one strategy for improving the academic performance of students is likely the establishment of smaller learning communities (SLCs) as components of comprehensive high school improvement and reform plans. These subunits of larger schools operate as separate entities; running their own budgets and planning their own programs (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). Recently, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP, 2001) endorsed the restructuring of large high schools into smaller learning communities, stating many benefits of high school restructuring including improved school cultures, increased accountability, and personalization. Some researchers claim that the positive test results associated with smaller learning community schools come from the increased potential of a smaller school to create interpersonal relationships in which teachers can work collaboratively in the learning environment (Gruenert, 2005; Howley, Strange, & Bickel, 2000; Legters, 1999; Oxley, 1996, 2004). Because of smaller teacher to student ratios, small schools and smaller learning communities can focus on long-term relationships (Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000).

### **Support for Smaller Learning Communities**

Researchers have concluded that smaller learning community school settings increase students' perceptions, that is, how students feel about schools, both socially and academically, as well as foster a more aware and involved faculty which promote positive student attitudes

(Cotton, 1996a; Dewees, 1999; Howley, 1994, 1996; Klonsky, 1995a; McPartland & Jordan, 2001; Oxley, 2001, 2004; Raywid, 1999). Therefore, smaller learning communities generally have fewer discipline problems than larger schools (Oxley, 2001, 2004; Williams, 1990).

Researchers further suggest the following:

- Smaller learning community schools support the improvement of climate and student performance (Capps & Maxwell, 1999; Cotton, 2001; Gladden, 1998; NASSP, 2004; Oxley, 2004).
- The average range of an effective size of a SLC secondary school is 300-900 students (Gregory, 1992, 2000; Rotherham, 1999; Williams, 1990).
- Smaller learning environments support the increase of student achievement (Cotton, 1996b; Dewees, 1999; Howley, 1994, 1996; Klonsky, 1995a; McPartland & Jordan, 2001; Oxley, 2001, 2004; Raywid, 1995, 1998; Williams, 1990).
- Smaller learning community school has positive effects on students' attendance rates, lower frequencies of disciplinary action, school loyalty, lower usage of alcohol or drugs, satisfaction with school and higher self-esteem (Klonsky, 1995a; Noguera, 2002; Raywid, 1995; Visher, Teitelbaum, & Emmanuel, 1999).
- The smaller learning community has a stronger effect on learning of poor and minority children than traditional schools (Bickel, 1999; DeCesare, 2002; Deutsch, 2003; Howley, Strange, & Bickel, 2000).
- The smaller learning community administrative arrangement provides more for collaboration with faculty and staff to better serve students needs (Cushman, 1995).

- Research confirms that smaller learning community schools are safer, more nurtured, and more connected to caring adults; also teachers feel more empowered and connected to their students (Cotton, 2004; Gregory, 1992; Haller, 1992; Oxley, 2001, 2004).

### **Concerns about Smaller Learning Communities**

Not all researchers see smaller learning communities as positive. One researcher has been highly critical of schools-within-schools, insisting that they create division and chaos within the educational organization (Winokur, 2001). A report on one school indicated that the establishment of the smaller learning community:

(1) challenged the status of the mainstream high school; (2) set up divisions between schools-within-a-school (SWAS) teams and mainstream teachers; (3) introduced practices that were viewed as counter to those supported in the mainstream; (4) yielded allegations that SWAS teachers got favored treatment and undeserved visibility; (5) produced isolation of the SWAS faculty; and (6) made it very difficult to schedule and staff the SWAS program while meeting the needs of the mainstream program. (Neufeld, 1993, as cited in Raywid, 1996, p. 39)

DeCesare (2002) concluded that smaller learning communities are not the overall answer to high school reform efforts. School personnel cannot offer services and support to students when schools are broken down into sub units. The success of smaller learning environments depends on the school leadership's ability to overcome different adversities and difficulties.

### **Cognitive Frameworks**

Cognitive frameworks are multiple frames or lenses that leaders use in viewing challenges and situations (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The best leaders use multiple frames or lenses,

each offering a different perspective on given challenges. Bolman and Deal have identified four frames that are commonly used by teachers as well as administrators:

The structural frame or view focuses on designing the organization to fit the organizational goals and tasks. This frame resembles the role of an architect whose primary function is to build a structure using the blueprints displayed in the organizational goals and objectives. The leader who sees and operates in the structural framework is analogous to one who becomes a master builder.

The human resource frame or view focuses on the relationship between the organization and human nature. An effective leader must be able to balance the needs of both the organization and those who work in the organization. If the leader puts too much emphasis on the organization, the people suffer which, in turn, affects the organization. If the leader puts too much emphasis on the people, and not enough on the organization, the organization again suffers. The leader must be able to effectively maximize the efforts and talents of the workers for the well-being of the organization as well as maximize the organization for the benefits and well-being of the workers.

The political framework or view focuses on the conflicts and personal interests that arise with human beings in organizations. As long as there are people working together in organizations, conflicting interests and power struggles to gain advantages are inevitable. The leaders must understand that organizations including schools are arenas for negotiations, politics, jockeying of power, and bargaining. The leader must know how to work effectively in this political arena of fierce competition. The leader who sees and operates in the political framework is analogous with one who becomes a skillful politician.

Lastly, the symbolic frame or view focuses on symbols as a means to impact the culture of an organization. Symbols capture the heart, spirit, and soul of an organization. Just as the majestic American eagle arouses bravery, strength, courage, pride, and freedom as the national emblem or icon of the United States, symbols have the power to bring out of individuals the strength and fortitude that mere words alone cannot. The effective leader uses symbols to advance and rally the workers or troops together for a common purpose.

### **Rationale for Utilizing Bolman and Deal's Cognitive Framework**

Due to the fact that leadership challenges have been increasing in recent years, leaders need frameworks to see new possibilities and become more versatile and effective in their responses to situations, decisions, and conflicts (Bolman & Deal, 2002). The researcher has chosen the cognitive frames by Bolman and Deal (2008) because they are powerful and memorable tools. Their framework offers powerful and provocative ways of thinking about opportunities and pitfalls. The Bolman and Deal (2008) framework teaches one how to use multiple lenses to get a better sense of what one is up against and what one might do. Their framework helps leaders see things they once overlooked and come to grips with what is really going on. The cognitive framework is unique in that it works effectively in a changing environment, enabling leaders to organize and structure groups to get better results. In addition, this cognitive framework enables leaders to:

- Obtain results by organizing and providing structure for groups and teams,
- Improve human resources by meeting needs of the staff and , building strong relationships,
- deal with issues of politics, power and conflict in the external and internal environments, and

- Build organizational culture, give increased meaning to work, develop camaraderie by developing and honoring rituals and traditions of the organization. (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The cognitive framework is an effective way to analyze data and meet the on-going challenges in organizations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The demands of an ever-changing technological and diverse global society contribute to the need for systemic change in today's secondary schools. Faced with these realities, American high schools must set course on a new mission for education. Not only must high schools require differentiated instruction to accommodate students' needs, high school personnel must also be held accountable for student learning by producing a high quality education. Because of these diverse issues, high school principals are faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles that confront high school reforms.

The research on smaller learning communities (SLCs) is well documented and compelling. The benefits created by smaller learning communities offer comprehensive high schools an opportunity to improve student achievement. However, change can be uncomfortable and threatening, and the process of restructuring and implementing smaller learning communities is no exception.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Little is known of South Carolina's high school administrators as they attempt to find solutions to meet the needs of rapidly growing and diverse student populations. Likewise, little is known of the experiences of South Carolina high school principals as they implement smaller

learning communities, nor of the forces confronting those transitions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to discover the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. In addition, the researcher documented and analyzed the strategies used by administrators to overcome the forces, using Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames for reframing organizations.

### **Research Questions**

The researcher designed the study to address the following over-arching research question. How do South Carolina high school principals successfully implement smaller learning communities? In addition, the following supporting questions were addressed.

1. What are the supporting forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities?
2. What are the impeding forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities?
3. What strategies do South Carolina high school principals use in dealing with impeding forces?
4. How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being the leading facilitator of their schools?
5. How do South Carolina high school principals describe the culture and structure of their schools before implementing smaller learning communities?
6. How do South Carolina high school principals describe the culture and structure of their schools after implementing smaller learning communities?
7. How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being the change-agent of their schools?



8. How effective are smaller learning communities as viewed by South Carolina high school principals?

### **Significance of the Study**

Due to the ever-increasing achievement gaps in South Carolina between disadvantaged and minority students compared to their non-disadvantaged and non-minority counterparts, as well as pressure from the U.S. Department of Education and NCLB, high schools are strongly encouraged to change their paradigm in order to provide academic support and high-quality instruction for all students. High school administrators are, therefore, faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles to reform their educational environments. The results of the current study provide insights into personal experiences of the subjects of this research concerning the forces confronting the transitions to smaller learning communities (SLCs). Thus, readers have the opportunity to benefit from knowledge of the cognitive frames that high school principals use in dealing with these forces, providing future administrators a valuable resource for implementing smaller learning communities.

### **Procedures**

#### **Design**

According to Fine and Weis (2000), qualitative research provides accounts and descriptions and social interactions in natural settings based upon observation and interviewing of participants in order to understand their points of view. Emphases are placed on meanings and processes rather than variables and outcomes. Therefore, this study utilized a qualitative design to identify the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities. The researcher provided a description of the

processes used by administrators in dealing with the forces confronting the implementation of smaller learning communities by utilizing the four cognitive frameworks: structural framework, human resources framework, political framework, and symbolic framework (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

### **Population**

The study was limited to the state of South Carolina. South Carolina has a total student enrollment of over 701,749 students (South Carolina Department of Education, 2006). The state of South Carolina has 46 counties and 335 cities that contain 191 high schools. Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, the U.S. Department of Education (U.S.DOE) began awarding federal grants to schools with enrollments of 1,000 students or more in which smaller learning communities were implemented. There are 85 school districts with 58 restructured high schools using smaller learning communities in the state of South Carolina (U.S. DOE, 2006). Of the 58 restructured high schools, only seven high schools, located in five districts in South Carolina, received federal grant funding for the 2008-2009 school year. For the purpose of this study, the researcher made use of a purposeful sample of one administrator from each of the seven schools receiving federal funds for the 2008-2009 school year. The researcher interviewed seven administrators involved with smaller learning communities, one from each of the seven restructured high schools in South Carolina that received federal grant funds during the 2008-2009 school year. All of the administrators had at least two years of administrative experience.

### **Data Collection**

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data collection took place by conducting interviews, tape recording the interviews, and maintaining descriptive and reflective notes. The interviews, in a form of a

discourse, were the major source for data collection. The researcher then engaged in a complex and extensive analysis, sorting through large amounts of data, and reducing them to relevant themes and categories.

### **Trustworthiness and Triangulation**

The researcher attempted to establish trustworthiness by utilizing triangulation in data gathering which included interviews, document review, and observation. Semi-structured questions were asked in the interviews. The interview questions were created based on the forces experienced by principals who have already implemented smaller learning communities in their schools as well as data found in the literature review. Principals not involved in the study who have already established smaller learning communities critiqued the research questions to determine accuracy and content validity of questions.

A second data source was the Smaller Learning Community Grant manual. This federally-mandated manual represents the seven school districts' data source in implementing remediation, career development initiatives, personalization strategies, and instructional reform. Due to common features that existed in each participating district such as wide achievement gaps, low graduation rates, and high drop-out rates, the manual acted as a compass to guide each district in achieving common goals. The seven school districts act as a consortium in which each district must adhere to the condition of the grant in order to receive compensation. The 87 page manual also served as an additional data source for the researcher in assuring trustworthiness.

All SLC district grant coordinators and the building principals were mandated as a condition of the grant to attend monthly SLC consortium meetings in support of accountability. Those meetings served as the third data source for the study. Consortium meeting minutes were maintained. In addition, current documentation and evidence that smaller learning communities

were being implemented in each school district was maintained. In each meeting, the consortium discussed the forces that impede the implementation of smaller learning communities as well as the supporting forces that fostered the development of smaller learning communities. What made this consortium unique was that these combined districts, the only beneficiaries of federal SLC funds in the state of South Carolina for 2008-2009, were experiencing the same common forces such as high dropout rates, low graduation rates, and wide academic achievements gaps between whites and minorities.

Thus, the three data sources of triangulation for this research were interviews, the smaller learning community manual, and documents from the SLC site visit meetings. Triangulation increases the trustworthiness of research. The components of trustworthiness consist of credibility (truth value), transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency), and conformability (neutrality) (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Addressing credibility occurred when drafts of the interview transcripts were sent to the research subjects, enabling them to confirm the accuracy of the information. Transferability occurred when the researcher provides a detailed descriptive report that allows others to decide if the findings are applicable to other cases. Dependability was addressed in this study using detailed records of the data collection and analysis procedures.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using the data analysis spiral as described by Creswell (1998). The data analysis spiral represents the idea of thinking about collected data in which one may notice new concepts or information within the data. The new concepts or new information within the data may illuminate other new concepts or kinds of information in the data. They may also lead to the identification of information missing from the data.

The data analysis spiral includes four separate processes. The first process is data management or organizing the data. Data to be organized in this study included transcriptions of interviews, minutes of meetings, and appropriate sections of the SLC grant manual. The second process, perusal, or reading all of the data, followed. This was done in order to obtain an overall “sense” of the data. Preliminary impressions, notable concepts, and initial interpretations were noted at this time and the researcher reflected on the meaning of the data as a whole. Once all of the data were read, the researcher engaged in the third process, categorization. This process involved grouping the data into categories, classifications, or themes in order to determine or find meaning in the data.

While the research questions guided the categorization process, the researcher noted additional information that built upon or added to information as well as information not anticipated during data gathering. A coding plan was developed to assign data to categories based upon the four frames as presented by Bolman and Deal (2008): human resource, political, structural, and symbolic.

The first three processes enabled the researcher to deconstruct the data, to begin detailed analysis, to reflect, and to truly understand the data. The fourth process, synthesis, is the reconstruction of the data and may include development of a matrix, tables, or other representation of the data presented within the categories. Using those representations, the researcher constructed the presentation of the data. Data analysis was also used to identify the cognitive frameworks used by principals to increase the supporting forces and diminish the impeding forces that were encountered.

### **Delimitations**

This study was delimited to South Carolina high school principals with at least two years of administrative experience who received federal grant funds to assist in implementing smaller learning communities during the 2009 – 2010 school year.

### **Limitations**

Limitations included the administrators' willingness to commit to completion of the interview, and the degree to which responses were accurate.

### **Qualitative Research Bias**

In qualitative research, bias affects the validity and reliability of findings. The researcher's personal beliefs and values may be reflected in the choice of methodology and interpretation of findings, as well as the choice of a research topic. In other words, researcher perceptions and beliefs may influence the findings of the study. Human nature, which represents a person's feelings and emotions, makes being unbiased virtually impossible. In the qualitative research paradigm, the researcher is an important part of the process. The researcher cannot separate himself or herself from the topic/people he or she is studying, (Creswell, 1994).

A point to emphasize with respect to the current research is that the researcher was the participating district's smaller learning community coordinator. This vested interest may have influenced the findings, although efforts were made to maintain objectivity. Qualitative research represents the interaction between the researcher and the subjects. Therefore, bias enters into the research even if the researcher tries to avoid it. For example, even the way the researcher asks question can create bias in questioning. The researcher's personal interest in the research also creates bias. Further, the qualitative researcher ultimately interprets and presents the findings and conclusions, which in itself represents qualitative research bias (Mehra, 2001). However, the

researcher in the current study made every attempt to reduce the influence of bias and self reported data in this research by utilizing the aid of principals who have already gone through the implementation of smaller learning communities in their schools.

### **Definition of Terms**

- Cognitive framework – For the purpose of this study, a cognitive framework is a mental model or set of ideas that help leaders see things they once overlooked, see new possibilities, and become more versatile and effective in their response within the organization (Bolman and Deal, 2008).
- Impeding forces – For the purpose of this study, impeding forces refer to issues of change which would provide barriers against an individual or organization in the change process.
- Small learning communities (SLC) – For the purpose of the study, small learning communities are a separate individualized unit within a larger school setting (Sammon, 2000).
- Supporting forces – For the purpose of this study, supporting forces refer to issues of change which would provide benefit to an individual or organization in the change process.

### **Summary**

A growing body of evidence supports the idea that smaller learning community schools provide advantages over larger schools. Some of the advantages include that smaller learning communities result in the improvement of climate and student performance, lower frequency of disciplinary issues, and result in higher graduation rates. Based on this evidence, one strategy for improving the academic performance of students is likely the establishment of smaller learning communities as components of comprehensive high school improvement and reform plans.

Not all researchers, however, see smaller learning communities as positive. Some researchers have been highly critical of schools-within-schools, insisting that they create division and chaos within the educational organization (Winokur, 2001). Others have concluded that smaller learning communities are not the overall answer to high school reform efforts, stating that school personnel cannot offer services and support to students when schools are divided into sub units. The success of smaller learning environments depends on the school leaders' abilities to overcome adversities and difficulties (DeCesare, 2002).

To further add to the adversities and difficulties that high school administrators face, there are unknown factors that exist in South Carolina's high schools as administrators attempt to find procedures and operations to meet the needs of fast growing and diverse student populations. First, little is known about the experiences of South Carolina high school principals implementing small learning communities and the forces confronting the transitional change. Second, little is known of the cognitive frameworks that guide administrators as they deal with the forces confronting high school restructuring with respect to smaller learning communities. Due to the ever-increasing achievement gaps between disadvantaged and minority students in South Carolina when compared to their non-disadvantaged and non-minority counterparts, as well as pressure from the U.S. Department of Education and NCLB, high schools leaders have been strongly encouraged to change their paradigm in order to provide academic support and high-quality instruction for all students. High school administrators are, therefore, faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles to reform their educational environments. The significance of this study is to have the opportunity to learn from the personal experiences of the subjects of this research concerning the forces confronting the transitions to smaller learning communities (SLCs) and how the use of cognitive frameworks may support this change. By



utilizing a framework for analyzing these forces, the research may provide future administrators with a valuable resource for implementing smaller learning communities.

## **CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The researcher reviewed the literature related to forces that exist in making the transition to smaller learning communities. This chapter is presented in six sections: a historical perspective of high school structures, the change process, the implementation of smaller learning communities, supporting forces, impeding forces, and the cognitive framework of Bolman and Deals, which are followed by a summary.

### **A Historical Perspective of High School Structures**

To better understand the structure of high schools in America, an explanation of how schools moved into the national spotlight was required. With the launching of Sputnik in 1957 (Cotton, 1996a), high schools in American began to increase in size. According to Cotton, James Bryant Conant, then president of Harvard University, was the major force behind the movement to increase schools' populations. In his 1967 book, *The Comprehensive High School: A Second Report to Interested Citizens*, Conant stated that large schools provided a rich variety of course offerings. He argued that high schools with less than 100 students per grade could not provide an adequate education for high school students. Conant stated that small schools were a major issue resulting in the decline of education in America. In 1930, there were more than 262,000 public schools in the United States. By 2002, that number had dropped to 93,000 (U.S. DOE, 2003). This decrease in number of schools occurred in spite of the increase in the U.S. population from 137, 008, 435 in 1930 to 281,421,906 in 200 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Since 1940, the number of public schools in the United States declined by 69% despite a 70% increase in the student population. The student population has grown from just under 24 million in 1947-48 to record 47.71 million in 2001(Gerald & Hussar, 2002). During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a continuous surge in school district consolidation as well as the construction of comprehensive

high schools (Cotton, 1996; Lee & Smith, 1997). More recently, national high school enrollments climbed from 12.5 million in 1990 to 14.8 million in 2000 (Sack, 2002). Between 1940 and 1997, the size of the average U.S. school district rose from 217 students to 2,627 students and the size of the average schools changed from 127 students to 653 students (Hussar, 1998). The primary reason for this increase was a rise in the number of births between 1977 and 1990 (Gerald & Hussar, 2002). Between 1990 and 2000, enrollments in grades 9-12 increased 18% from 12.5 million to 14.8 million students (Gerald & Hussar, 2002). In 2001, the average high school had 751 students (Gerald & Hussar, 2002).

### **The Change Process**

#### **The Change Agent**

Collins (2002) reported that one of the differences between organizations that excelled and organizations that remained simply “good,” was leaders who brought about change (Level 5 Leadership). Educational leaders must not only maintain what exists, they must constantly be aware of new trends and developments and must be willing to step forward to become a change agent within the organization. Someone who deliberately tries to bring about a change or innovation is known as a change agent (Havelock & Zlotolow, 1995). Change agents may perform many roles, including catalyst; an individual who may introduce the need for change and then motivate others to assist in beginning the process. A second role may be that of solution giver. A third role may be process helper, and the fourth may be resource linker. (Havelock & Zlotolow, 1995). Each of these roles is important to the process. They may be roles adopted by one individual at different times or in different situations or they may be roles adopted by several individuals in the organization. In either case, acting as a change agent is a critical task of the educational leader.

To be more effective in the role of change agent, (Imel, 2000) suggested four steps.

Pay attention to the context. Whether acting as a change agent in an organization or with individual students, understanding the context is critical to success.... Be prepared to be proactive. Underlying the change agent role is the assumption that the change agent will bring about change.... Attend to learning. Since learning and change are interconnected, an adult educator can assist those who are undergoing the change process in understanding the different kinds of learning as well as the learning cycle of the change process.... Build in action. Any change will not be complete unless it involves action.

(Adult Educators in the Change Process section, para. 2, 3, 4, 5)

### **Understanding Change**

In order to be an effective change agent, one must understand change. According to Zimbalist (2005), “leaders who successfully implement positive changes in their schools have a clear understanding of the guiding principles associated with organizational change” (p. 61). It is not a new thought that change is the only constant in our world. In fact Heraclitus of Ephesus (c 535 – 475 BCE) stated that it was not possible to step in the same river twice. More recent thinkers and writers acknowledge that, in order to be effective, change agents must understand change and the change process (Duke, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Heifetz, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kotter, J. P., 1996). Referring to the complexity of change, Fullan (2001) wrote, “Understanding the change process is less about innovation and more about innovativeness. It is less about strategy and more about strategizing” (p. 31). Duke stated that “understanding and achieving change are hardly simple and straightforward endeavors. They require a grasp of the complicated nature of change and the change process” (p. 31). In his analysis of several models of the change process, Duke identified four common elements:

- Discovery. The initial phase of the change process during which a need for change is identified.
- Design. The phase during which a new or improved way to address the need is created or chosen.
- Development. The phase during which planning related to implementing change is undertaken and support is secured.
- Implementation. The phase when the change is introduced and adapted to a particular setting. (p. 29)

It is critical that change agents understand and are able to communicate the model of the change process they choose to employ. Understanding change as a *process* and understanding the means through it will be implemented (the model) will enable them to more effectively bring about change.

### **The Difficulty of Change**

Change is an aspect of organizational and educational leadership that can result in both the proverbial peaks and valleys of life for the leader. There are many aspects of change that are difficult. According to Smith and Smith (as cited in Smith, 2008) change can disturb the continuity in individuals' lives; the bridge between the familiar and the comfortable, often resulting in fear and anxiety. Freid (2003) stated, "If anything is incontrovertible in the literature on educational reform, it is how difficult it is to get teachers to change their accustomed beliefs and practices....Their resistance to change should occasion no surprise" (p. 42). Many individuals are more comfortable with the pain they are experiencing, than to risk the pain associated with the unknown (Freid, 2003).

Barott and Raybould (1998) noted that the change process often results in tension and flare-ups between change agents and others within the organization. Similarly, Wagner et al. (as cited in Smith, 2008, p. 249), stated, “Reinventing schools and districts is awkward, hard, and messy work. Because there are no road maps, this work requires tolerance for ambiguity.” The tolerance for ambiguity was reinforced by Duke (2004), who pointed out that uncertainty affects everyone in the change process. For the change initiators, there may be some initial high hopes and a sense that things will work. However, moving from initiation to implementation will probably involve some unplanned and unpredictable elements, causing the initiators to question whether their efforts will work. Those impacted by the change will feel uncertainty in terms of what the change will mean and how it will affect their work and personal lives. Duke cautioned change agents to expect the unexpected. Agreeing that the unexpected may occur, James and Connally (2000) declared that change may set in motion other changes not anticipated at the beginning of the process. In simple terms, a school operates as a system of interrelated parts. When one part is changed, it ripples through the other parts of the system.

The human / emotional side of change was also noted by several writers, who pointed out that change is clearly linked to emotions (James & Connolly, 2000). The fact that change may provoke both positive and negative emotions among individuals was noted by (Leithwood, Steinbach, Jantzi , 2002). Sapolsky (2004) found that humans, unlike wild animals, do not require physical dangers to experience stress. We can, in fact, “experience strong and wild emotions (provoking their bodies into an accompanying uproar) linked to mere thoughts” (p. 5).

Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, and Beresford, (2000) conducted research with twelve headmasters in England as their subjects. Their purpose was to measure how these school leaders went about making change and how making change affected the headmasters in terms of stress.

They concluded that, while the headmasters “handled the stress in different ways, such as going to the gym, relying on family, pursuing and active social life outside of work, and becoming active in union activities, stress was a constant feature of their work” (as cited in Smith, 2008, p. 25).

### **Resistance to Aspects of Change**

Why do people firmly stay on their usual course, ignoring warning (or incentives) to do otherwise? Reich (2000) wrote about resisters in the corporate world, but these reactions to proposed change are also familiar to educators. In both the worlds of business and education, change involves moving people to a new place, and often they don't want to go there. The excuses people use include, “That seems risky...let's go back to basics...it worked before...we're just fine the way we are...there will be unforeseen consequences” (Reich, 2000, p. 150). Sarason (2002), examining educational reform, wrote that “Resistance to change is as predictable as death and taxes” (p.30). Conner (1995) outlined the main reasons for resisting change by noting that the initiation of change will be both rational and irrational, and the responses to it likewise will be rational and irrational: People do not trust impending change or those who initiate such change; they believe change is unnecessary or not feasible; they resent interference. There is fear of failure and threats to values and ideals. People are being asked to leave their comfort zones and naturally they will resist.

In order for organizations to survive, organizations must learn to adapt to changes within and from outside the organizations. However, resistance to change exists from all levels within the organization, from the individuals in the organization to the organization as a whole. There are three levels in organizations that may cause resistance in organizations:

- Individual – individual resistance may be easily recognized and may come in different forms such as absenteeism, being late for work, or non-productive behavior while at work. When individuals perceive that an organizational change threatens their normal mode of operation, many may respond through resistance.
- Group – When change disrupts common interests and shared behaviors of groups within organizations group opposition to change may occur.
- Organizational – The organization itself may resist change. If there is a perceived threat to the organizational power and political structure, especially if there are struggles between individuals losing and gaining power, organizational resistance may occur.

In addition, organizational change that affects the culture, values, or beliefs of the organization may also lead to resistance. It is the organizational leader's responsibility to recognize the nature of the resistance and find resolution before it impedes the growth and operation of the organization. Leaders must recognize that resistance left unchecked and unresolved may spread like a virus and can affect the life of the organization (George & Jones, 2008).

### **Managing change**

According to Lorenzi and Riley (2000), one of the most difficult problems facing organizations is change. An organization's ability to adapt to change in today's rapidly changing environment will be the determining factor in the success of the organization. Change involves loss. For example, to learn a company's new computer software may seem to be a loss of time and energy as well as an abandonment of the old computer software which may have been considered cutting-edge technology. In addition, organizational change involves changing habits



of individuals. In other words, changing how work is done in the organization can cause opposition and resistance in the organization.

Lorenzi and Riley (2000) wrote, “Change is a constant in both our professional and our private lives” (p. 117). Human beings are naturally resistant to change when change is imposed upon them. Change in an organization must begin with a vision for change and allow the workers within the organization to help facilitate change by becoming change-agents. The change agents become a vital part of the change process. The change process, which includes the change agents, must also include strategies and a well-developed plan to ensure that the vision becomes a reality.

### **The Implementation of Smaller Learning Communities**

Due to high school reform efforts induced by the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*, legislation promoted a strategy of Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) to assist with the mandates set forth by *NCLB*. The legislation was designed to implement President George W. Bush’s agenda to improve America’s public schools by: (1) ensuring accountability for results, (2) providing unprecedented flexibility in the use of Federal funds in implementing education programs, (3) focusing on proven educational methods, and (4) expanding educational choice for parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 9).

The Smaller Learning Communities Program was first funded in the Department of Education Fiscal Year 2000 Appropriations Act, which included \$45 million for the program. Since then, the U.S. Department of Education has awarded 146 three-year implementation grants and 173 one-year planning grants to large high schools, defined as schools including grades 11 and 12 and enrolling at least 1000 students in grades nine and above (D’Amico, 2003).

Many advocates of school reform cite school size as one of the most important educational reforms of the twentieth century (Overbay, 2003). Under the smaller learning community statute, grant funds may be used to redesign schools into structures such as academies, house-plans, schools-within-a-school, and magnet programs. Funds may also be used for personalization strategies that complement the advantage of smaller learning communities, such as freshmen transition activities, multi-year grouping, alternative scheduling, advisory or advocate systems, and academic training.

Many researchers identify class size reduction as another important alternative reform measure (Cotton, 1996; Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Ort, 2002; Deutsch, 2003; Iacovou, 2002; Lee & Smith, 1997; Oxley, 2001; Raywid, 1999). Over the past ten years, restructuring high schools into smaller subunits has led to a variety of arrangements, organizations, terms, and definitions.

The nomenclature for different kinds of small learning units is awkward and significant because the structures range in nature all the way from tentative, semi-units organizationally supplementing a high school's departments to totally separate schools that just happen to be located under the same roof. (Rayward, 1996, p.16)

### **Studies of Principals' Efforts to Implement SLCs**

An evaluative study of SLC implementation that included 18 schools was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, addressed three research questions.

- How are schools implementing SLC's?
- What are the factors facilitating and inhibiting implementation in SLC schools?
- What were the principals' strategies, models, and practices in implementing SLC's?

(U.S. DOE, 2003, p. 1).

The case study revealed that Freshman academies and career academies were the most frequently used organizational structures, and the highest participation came from freshman academies. Block scheduling and team teaching were the most frequently employed strategies. Motivation behind the majority of SLCs was to provide additional personalization for students. Levels of professional development directly related to SLC implementation was found to be lower than anticipated.

Factors that facilitated implementation included focused professional development activities, providing teaching materials and other resources, and variables related to teachers such as expertise and willingness to make change. Factors that inhibited implementation included the need to maintain core academic staffing levels, the actual physical space of the existing facility, and other logistical issues. Support from the school district and effective local school leaders were also noted as factors that supported SLC implementation (U. S. DOE, 2003).

A second study of principals' efforts to implement smaller learning communities came from the New Visions for Public Schools, together with its partners, the School of Public Affairs at Baruch College and the New York City Department of Education. The New Visions for Public School piloted the Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model (SAM) as a way to determine the leadership efforts and practices used by principals in implementing SLCs. The researchers concluded that after two years of implementation, monitoring and support, there was evidence of

- School leaders more willing and better prepared to lead change. A number of administrative and instructional staff members actually obtained additional areas of certification during the study.
- More effective practices were evident such as making available embedded and differentiated professional development, an increased emphasis on using data and

formative evaluation, fewer teachers working in isolation and increased collaboration, consistently higher expectations of all students. (New Visions for Public Schools, 2005, pp. 3 – 4)

Additional studies were conducted by The Principals' Partnership sponsored by the Union Pacific Foundation. Union Pacific is a foundation that recognizes the vital role that high school principals play in our nation's education system. Their study was a case study of four schools and address several concerns that had been expressed by school principals including issues of tracking as a result of the implementation of SLCs, the inability to offer a complete curriculum for all students, ways in which faculty loads might change, and the impact of the changes on the culture and traditions of the school. Results indicated that while many of the issues did arise, the increased collaboration and the effective use of distributed leadership allowed many to be addressed effectively. In addition, other benefits were identified such as increased personalization for all students, increased use of collaborative planning, and more effective use of alternative forms of assessment such as performance-based and portfolio assessments. (Principals' Partnership, 2003).

Additional studies supported by the U. S. Department of Education, including the National Evaluation of the Smaller Learning Communities (2002) have resulted in similar findings. Most of these studies have been completed through contracts with the U. S. Department of Education and conducted by major research organizations such as Abt Associates and Rothstein Consulting.

## **Smaller Learning Communities Compared to Traditional High Schools**

Smaller learning communities are administered differently than traditional organized high schools. Here are some of the features of smaller learning communities compared to traditional high schools other than smaller classes:

- The delivery of instruction in smaller learning communities is deliberate and purposefully designed by a shared team of teachers as a mean to reinforce student learning. The delivery of instructions in traditional high schools is based solely on the classroom teacher (Cotton, 1996a; Oxley, 2001, 2004; Raywid, 1996).
- Smaller learning communities facilitate learner-instructor interaction and learner-learner familiarity promoting a sense of community versus traditional high schools where many students feel alienated, disconnected, disengaged, and lack of personal attention within the vast number of other students (Cotton, 1996a; Oxley, 2001, 2004; Raywid, 1996).
- Royal and Rossi (1996) suggested that the learners' sense of community is related to their engagement in school activities, with students who have a higher sense of community being less likely to experience class cutting behavior or thoughts of dropping out of school and more likely to report feeling bad when unprepared for classes.
- Collegiality among teachers, personalized teacher-student relationships, and less differentiation of instruction by ability are simply easier to implement in small learning communities than in traditional high schools. (Ancess, 1997; Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Cotton, 1996b; Oxley, 1994; Raywid, 1996).
- In smaller learning communities, students and teachers are scheduled together and frequently have a common area of the school in which to hold most or all of their classes

versus traditional high schools where students are randomly placed in classes throughout the school with a variety of teachers (Sammon, 2000).

- In smaller learning communities, teachers and staff are brought together by similar interests and common goals where people interact in a cohesive manner versus traditional high schools, where teachers and staff often work in isolation (Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000).
- In smaller learning communities, teamwork and collaboration are requirements in order to build effective teaching and learning cultures; however in traditional high schools; teachers feel little connection with, or responsibility toward, other teachers who share their students during the day. Professional isolation and the lack of agreement about expectations, standards, values and goals are the norm in most traditional high schools (Fine & Somerville, 1998).

### **Supporting Forces**

Researchers have documented several supporting forces that could possibly influence administrators to implement smaller learning communities, such as increased achievement, affiliation/belonging, cost, curriculum quality, parental involvement and satisfaction, preparation for higher education, safety and order, teacher attitude and satisfaction, truancy and dropouts.

According to Fine & Somerville (1998), smaller learning communities can improve the intelligence and social aspects of the student life of children by providing an environment where all students can achieve at maximum level. Some studies show that small learning communities' classes promote student engagement, positive teacher-student interaction, increased time given to instruction, fewer discipline incidences, and high teacher morale (Cotton, 1996a; Oxley, 2001, 2004; Raywid, 1996).

## **Achievement**

Some researchers have noted that there were no significant differences between student achievements in smaller learning communities' schools compared to large schools. Cotton (1996a), in her review of 31 studies, noted the relationship between small schools and academic achievement. Cotton (1996a) reported that about half the student achievement research finds no difference between the achievement levels of students in large and smaller learning communities' schools, including small alternative schools while the other half finds student achievement in small communities' schools to be superior to that in large schools. However, none of the research finds large schools superior to smaller communities' schools in their achievements effects (1996a).

There are additional researchers who share the same finding as Cotton. Other researchers have found increasing returns in academic achievement in larger schools and more efficient use of taxpayers' monies due to economics of scale (Ferguson & Ladd, 2000; Kenny, 2004; Magnuson, 2001). Research on the correlation between high school size and achievement has shown mixed results. Gewertz (2001) reported that some studies indicated no statistically significant difference in achievement as measured by standardized test scores, while other studies indicated higher test scores for students in low-income families in smaller learning communities' schools. However, according to the research findings, most of the research that argues that large schools perform better than smaller learning communities' schools has focused on high socio-economic districts with little diversity.

McAndrews & Anderson (2002), reported test scores of students in smaller learning communities' schools are consistently higher than those in larger schools. In addition to reporting on academic achievement, Cotton (2004) noted that the ability of small learning

communities' schools to retain students in high school was considerably greater than that of larger schools which ultimately affected the drop out and graduation rate. Mitchell (2000) also noted small schools have a powerful impact on the achievement of poor students regardless of the class size. In addition to reporting on academic achievement, Cotton (2004) noted that. "Measured either as dropout rate or graduation rate, the holding power of smaller learning communities schools is considerably greater than that of large schools" (p.4).

### **Affiliation/Belonging**

Researchers consistently reported strong evidence that affiliation and belonging are an integral part of students from small school students to a greater extent than of students in large schools (Anness, 1997; Anness & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Cotton, 1996b; Oxley, 1994; Raywid, 1996). Teachers as well as students in smaller learning environments care about each other to a degree that is unparalleled in large schools. The Architecture Research Institute researchers (as cited in Anness & Ort, 1999) wrote that the attention that students receive in smaller learning communities' schools affords them greater positive educational, emotional, and social experiences.

### **Cost**

Most arguments against smaller learning communities' schools have to do with cost-effectiveness. In other words, larger schools would cost less based on lower per-student cost than in smaller learning environments. Even smaller learning communities-school proponents have conceded that smaller learning environments rarely cost less. Cotton (1996a) argued against this general idea. Cotton further reported that the required personnel to address disciplinary and administrative issues of large schools would increase cost more of large schools than in smaller learning communities' schools. Steifel, Berne, Iatarola, and Frucher (2000) stated that cost-



effectiveness should be measured in the form of the cost per student who graduates. With this as a measuring stick, they reported that smaller learning environments have much higher graduation rates and therefore are the most economical schools. They further concluded from a review of lifetime earnings that high school graduates become productive citizens whereas non-high school graduates more often become a burden on society. Steifel, Berne, Iatarola, and Frucher (2000) drew the conclusion that providing poor, disadvantaged, and minority students a good smaller learning communities' school education is an investment in society that will continue to pay dividends systemically.

### **Parent Involvement and Satisfaction**

According to Halsey (2004), parents whose children attend smaller learning communities' high schools are happier and more satisfied than parents of children in larger schools. The report indicated that parents are more likely to say that teachers are more willing to assist their child if they are struggling academically. In addition, smaller learning environments provide greater opportunities for communication between parents and teachers (Cotton, 1996a; Oxley, 1996, 2004). Several researchers reported a greater sense of parent satisfaction within schools that had implemented smaller learning communities (Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Bickel, 1999; Cotton, 1996; Cushman, 1995; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Haller, 1992, Mitchell, 2000; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1996,1999; Roellke, 1996; Wasley, et al., 2000; Wasley & Lear, 2001).

### **Preparation for Higher Education**

Research have demonstrated that the learning provided to students who attend smaller learning communities continue to serve them even after they graduate (Gladden, 1998; Raywid, 1999; Oxley, 2004). Ancess and Ort (1999) reported that two large failing New York City high

schools were dissolved into twelve smaller learning communities resulting in 89% of their students attending college after high school. Wasley, et al. (2000) also found significantly more college bound students among smaller learning school graduates than graduates of larger high schools.

### **Safety and Order**

Another benefit of smaller learning communities was safety and order (Cotton, 1996a; Oxley, 1989; Raywid, 1995). Classroom disruption and anti-social behavior was far less common in smaller learning environment than in larger schools (Cocklin, 1999; Gladden, 1998; Raywid, 1995). According to Stockard and Mayberry (1992), students behaved better in smaller high schools. A study of smaller learning communities' high schools in Chicago found that students made significant improvement in school behavior and achievement (Wasley, et al, 2000). The study compared smaller learning communities that had been created utilizing the school-within-a-school model within larger, traditional high schools. This research was mirrored by studies that revealed the negative effects of schools with high enrollments.

A report by the U.S. Department of Education (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998) investigated the number and types of crime in U.S. public schools. According to the study, schools over 1,000 students had a significantly higher percentage of incidents of crime and violence than small schools with less than 300 students. The study revealed that large schools had 825% more incidents of crime and violence, 270% more incidents of vandalism, 394% more physical fights or attacks, and 1,000% more weapons on campus (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998). Gladden's 1998 research review identified among the benefits of small schools that students feel safer. He also noted "there is a lower incident of drug use, assault, vandalism, victimization, violence, suspensions, and expulsion" (p. 16).

## **Teacher Attitudes and Satisfaction**

Ayers, Bracey, and Smith (2000) found that teachers in smaller learning communities' environments believed that they were in a position to make a difference in the lives of their students more often than teachers in large schools. In a study conducted by Walsey, et al. (2000), the researchers concluded the following about teachers in smaller learning communities' schools:

- They feel more committed and more efficacious;
- They tend to support a stronger professional community;
- They are far more satisfied;
- They are more likely to collaborate with colleagues;
- They are more likely to engage in professional development that they find valuable;
- They are more able to build a coherent educational program for students between discipline and across grade levels;
- They demonstrate a greater sense of responsibility for ongoing student learning;
- They provide a more focused learning environment for students; and
- They build a more varied instruction repertoire for working with students (pp. 38-49).

## **Truancy and Dropouts**

About 1.3 million students did not graduate from United States high schools in 2004. More than 12 million students will dropout over the next decade. It is estimated that close to 30% of all students who enter high school will not graduate in four years while roughly half of all African Americans and Latino will not graduate in four years (Greene & Winter, 2005). Students attending smaller learning communities were found more likely to accumulate credits and attain a higher level of education than students who attend larger schools (Gladden, 1998). The Cross City Campaign (2000) reported that dropout rates are consistently lower in smaller learning

communities' schools. Research has indicated that many students who dropped out of high school felt disengaged, disconnected, bored, uninterested, and unmotivated. Smaller learning communities address the needs of many high school students by building relationships and a sense of community.

### **Impeding Forces**

Despite the supporting forces for implementing smaller learning communities, researchers reported barriers and pitfalls (impeding forces) that could hinder the restructuring efforts of implementation of smaller learning communities. These forces include: cultural expectations, fiscal and physical constraints, laws, regulations, policies, and procedures (Anness & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Bickel, 1999; Cotton, 2001, 2004; Cushman, 1995; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Mitchell, 2000; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1995, 1996; Roellke, 1996; Wasley & Lear, 2001). A portion of the large comprehensive school mindset is the idea that it is important to provide a variety of courses and curricula. Mohr (2000), Gregory, (2000), and Wasley and Lear (2000) all concluded that a tremendous barrier to transitions into smaller learning communities would be the false perception of confusing curriculum choice with variety.

### **Cultural Expectations**

Wasley and Lear (2001) stated that schools want reform but schools are not willing to do things differently. Traditional values and the deeply rooted status quo are great barriers against change (Lear, 2001). In addition, Lear further concluded that the human element is also a major impeding force against change. "It is the old adage question humans internalize, that is, 'What does this mean for me?' centers at the heart of resistance to change" (2000, p. 1).

### **Fiscal and Physical Constraints**

Small learning communities which share buildings within the larger school may experience scheduling and physical space constraints that hinder the restructuring progress of smaller learning communities (Raywid, 1996; Visher, Teitelbaum & Emanuel, 1999). Another constraint includes science and specialized labs that cannot be relocated to fix the need of smaller learning communities. Adequate funding poses another constraint in supporting smaller learning communities (Raywid, 1996; Visher, Teitelbaum & Emanuel, 1999). Some researchers contend that smaller learning communities' schools are only effective if their enrollment is between 200 to 400 students (Gregory, 2000; Wasley & Lear, 2000).

### **Laws, Regulations, Policies, and Procedures**

Over the last 50 years, laws and regulations, from the federal government down to the local boards of education, have followed the movement of creating large comprehensive high schools. Wasley and Lear (2000) reported that districts and state laws also reflect this attitude, including state funding and federal funds, favoring large high schools. This philosophy and paradigm continue to make the restructuring of smaller learning communities difficult.

### **The Cognitive Framework of Bolman and Deal**

In an attempt to redesign school organizations into meaningful frameworks, Bolman and Deal (2008) offered four cognitive frames in order to better understand organizations. According to Bolman and Deal (1997), the best leaders use multiple frames, each offering a different perspective on common challenges. The ability to use multiple frames has three advantages: (1) each can be coherent, focused, and powerful; (2) the collection of frames can be more comprehensive than any single one; (3) only when one has multiple frames can one reframe.

Reframing is a conscious effort to size up a situation from multiple perspectives and then find a new way to handle it.

According to Bolman and Deal (2008), four cognitive frameworks are commonly used by administrators for reframing organizations: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic perspectives. The structural frame emphasizes productivity and posits that schools work best when goals and roles are clear and when efforts of individuals and groups are high coordinated through authority, policies and rules as well as through more-informal strategies. Holding people accountable for their responsibilities and setting measurable standards are an important part of this rational approach. The human resource frame is a favorite among teachers and principals. It highlights the importance of individual needs and motives. It assumes that schools work best when needs are satisfied in a caring, trusting work environment. The political frame points out the limits of authority and the inevitability that resources are almost always too scarce to fulfill all demands. Schools are arenas where individuals and groups jockey for power. The symbolic frame centers attention on culture, meaning, belief, and faith. Every school creates symbols to cultivate commitment, hope, and loyalty. Symbols govern behavior through shared values, informal agreements, and implicit understanding (Bolman & Deal, 2002).

In dealing with leadership challenges, most educators rely primarily on the human resource or structural frames. Yet many of the situations faced are highly charged politically and emotionally packed symbolically (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

### **Summary**

The review of literature revealed that much focus has been placed on creating smaller, effective, and accommodating high schools. The challenge for administrators is how to restructure and redesign schools that operate and produce results that stimulate student

achievement. Change can be difficult and threatening, however, due to external pressure from local, state, and federal mandates, high school principals must change their paradigms to overcome the challenges facing secondary schools. In many cases, prior procedures and traditions must be abandoned to achieve academic, social, and school environmental goals. Schools and school districts that embark on restructuring and personalizing their schools need to be aware of problems that may occur. A common danger is the notion that school size alone will improve student outcomes. Reducing school size is worth the effort only when it is one element of comprehensive school reform, accompanied by strategies specifically designed to personalize the learning experience and take advantage of the flexibility small learning communities offer. New school structures can provide the opportunities for success, but structural change must be accompanied by changes in school culture to take full advantage of those opportunities.

Despite the barriers and potential pitfalls described in the literature, small learning communities are creating a great impact on high schools and continue to produce promising results. Bolman and Deal, (2008) identified four cognitive frameworks: political frame, human resource frame, structural frame, and symbolic frame, which were described in this review as the researcher utilized that framework in the analysis of the data obtained in this study.

## **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

This chapter is an overview of the method in which the research was conducted. The chapter includes a presentation of the purpose of the study, the research questions, research design, and procedures. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Little is known of South Carolina's high school administrators as they attempt to find solutions to meet the needs of rapidly growing and diverse student populations. Likewise, little is known of the experiences of South Carolina high school principals as they implement smaller learning communities, nor of the forces confronting those transitions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to discover the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. In addition, the researcher documented and analyzed the strategies used by administrators to overcome the forces, using Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames for reframing organizations.

### **Research Questions**

The researcher designed the study to address the following over-arching research question. How do South Carolina high school principals successfully implement smaller learning communities? In addition, the following supporting questions were addressed.

1. What are the supporting forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities?
2. What are the impeding forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities?



3. What strategies do South Carolina high school principals use in dealing with impeding forces?
4. How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being the leading facilitator of their schools?
5. How do South Carolina high school principals describe the culture and structure of their schools before implementing smaller learning communities?
6. How do South Carolina high school principals describe the culture and structure of their schools after implementing smaller learning communities?
7. How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being the change-agent of their schools?
8. How effective are smaller learning communities as viewed by South Carolina high school principals?

### **Research Design**

According to Fine and Weis (2000), qualitative research provides accounts and descriptions and social interactions in natural settings based upon observation and interviewing of participants in order to understand their points of view. Emphases are placed on meanings and processes rather than variables and outcomes. Therefore, this study utilized a qualitative design to identify the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities. The researcher provided a description of the processes used by administrators in dealing with the forces confronting the implementation of smaller learning communities by utilizing the four cognitive frameworks: structural framework, human resources framework, political framework, and symbolic framework.

## **Procedures**

### **Introduction**

This study investigated the forces experienced by South Carolina high school principals in the development of smaller learning communities. Due to the ever-increasing achievement gaps in South Carolina between disadvantaged and minority students compared to their non-disadvantaged and non-minority counterparts as well as pressure from the U.S. Department of Education and NCLB, high schools are strongly encouraged to change their paradigm in order to provide academic support and high-quality instruction for all students. High school administrators are, therefore, faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles to reform their educational environments.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description of the researcher's procedures for completing a study of the forces confronting South Carolina high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. The researcher's focus was to analyze the forces experienced by South Carolina high school principal implementing smaller learning communities based on the work of Bolman and Deal, (2008). The identified forces were analyzed and categorized into four frameworks: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

### **Population**

The study was limited to the state of South Carolina. According the South Carolina Department of Education, South Carolina has a total student enrollment of over 701,749 students. The state of South Carolina has 46 counties and 335 cities that contain 191 high schools. Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, the U.S. Department of Education began awarding federal grants to schools with enrollments of 1,000 students or more in which smaller learning communities were implemented. There are 85 school districts with 58 restructured high

schools using smaller learning communities in the state of South Carolina (US DOE, 2006). Of the 58 restructured high schools, only seven high schools, located in five districts in South Carolina, received federal grant funding for the 2008-2009 school year. For the purpose of this study, the researcher interviewed one administrator from each of the seven schools receiving federal funds for the 2008-2009 school year.

Each principal was asked to complete the demographic survey instrument, to provide information on the number of years of experience and length of service they have at their present school. A biographical portraiture was created of the participant involved in the study. Information provided from the portraiture included educational background, work experiences, and years of administrative experience of the principal. Additional information gathered included descriptions of the geographic area, the socioeconomic status of the students, and student achievement data of the school. Key demographic information was ascertained to create a portrait of the high school. Descriptions of the geographic area and the students also included socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and location (rural or urban). Relative to NCLB, the educational status of each school was discussed including information such as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected using in-depth interview questions conducted by the researcher. The questions will be designed to ascertain the role of high school principals in the development of smaller learning communities. The interview questions and the demographic survey were developed from information found in the review of literature discussed in chapter two, designed to answer the overarching research question and the eight sub-questions. The demographic survey instrument was sent prior to the interview process, which assisted in the creation of a

biographical portraiture of the participant. This researcher used a mechanical recording device to document the answers of the participant, providing a more structured analysis of the data.

Permission for the research was obtained from the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by submitting the required Human Subjects Protocol Request and securing consent for scheduled interviews from the participant. The data was collected using interviews. The interviews were conducted face to face. During the interview, notes were taken to provide the researcher an opportunity to obtain information with as much accuracy as possible while concentrating on the participant.

The over-arching question to be answered from the qualitative study was, “How do South Carolina high school principals successfully implement smaller learning communities?” To answer this question, the following questions were asked during the interviews:

1. What are the supporting forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities?
2. What are the impeding forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities?
3. What strategies do you use in dealing with impeding forces?
4. How do you view themselves in terms of being the leading facilitator of their schools?
5. How do you describe the culture and structure of their schools before implementing smaller learning communities?
6. How would you describe the culture and structure of their school after implementing smaller learning communities?
7. How do you view themselves in terms of being the change-agent of their schools?

8. Do you view smaller learning communities as effective schools? Why or why not?
9. Is there any additional information you would like to share regarding smaller learning communities?

The use of open-ended interview questions allowed the participants to fully explain their views regarding the development of smaller learning communities in a comprehensive manner.

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data collection proceeded through conducting interviews, which was audio recorded, as well as descriptive and reflective field notes. The interviews, in a form of a discourse, were the major source for data collection. The researcher engaged in a complex and extensive analysis, sorting through large amounts of data, and reducing them to a few themes and categories.

A second data source was the Smaller Learning Community (SLC) Grant manual. This manual is the seven school districts' data source in implementing remediation, career development initiatives, personalization strategies, and instructional reform. Due to commonalities that exist in each district such as wide achievement gaps, low graduation rates, and high drop-out rates, the manual acts as a compass to guide each district in achieving common goals outlined in the federal grant manual. The seven school districts act as a consortium in which each district must adhere to the condition of the grant in order to receive compensation. The 87 page manual also acts as a guiding source for the researcher in assuring trustworthiness. A portion of the manual is found in the appendix.

A third data source was the smaller learning community site meetings and visits. All SLC district grant coordinators including principals are mandated by the federal government to attend consortium SLC meetings monthly in support of accountability. In the meetings, minutes were

taken as well as current documentation and proof that smaller learning communities were being implemented in each school district. In each meeting, members of the consortium discussed the forces that impede the implementing of smaller learning communities as well as the supporting forces that foster the development of smaller learning communities. A portion of the minutes is found in the appendix. What makes this consortium unique was that these combined districts are experiencing the same common issues, that is, high dropout rates, low graduation rates, and wide academic achievements gaps between whites and minorities. Another important reason why this consortium was unique is that they were the only beneficiaries of federal SLC funds in the state of South Carolina for 2008-2009.

### **Trustworthiness and Triangulation**

The researcher established trustworthiness by utilizing triangulation in data gathering which will include: interviews, document reviews, and notes and observations. The questions to be asked in the interview were semi-structured, meaning that the interviewer was able to provide follow up questions to the main interview questions. The interview questions were created based on the forces experienced by principals who have already implemented smaller learning communities in their schools and found in the literature review. In addition, the researcher asked principals who have already established smaller learning communities to critique the interview questions to determine clarity, accuracy and content appropriate questions.

Thus, the three data sources of triangulation for this research were interviews, the smaller learning community manual, and minutes from the SLC site visit meetings. Triangulation increases the trustworthiness of research. The components of trustworthiness consist of credibility (truth value), transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency), and conformability (neutrality), (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One means to address credibility is to send

drafts of the report to the research subjects for them to confirm or disconfirm the hypotheses. In this study, conformability was addressed by the researcher by including data from which the interpretations and conclusions were drawn. Transferability occurs when the researcher provides thick rich descriptions that allow others to decide if the findings are applicable to other cases.

Moreover, the researcher used member checking. In other words, the data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions were examined by the participants or principals. The member checking technique helped to establish validity of the qualitative research. It provided an opportunity to understand and assess what the participant intended to do through his or her actions. It gave the participants the opportunity to correct errors and challenge what are perceived as wrong interpretations.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using the data analysis spiral as described by Creswell (1998). The data analysis spiral represents the idea of thinking about collected data in which one may notice new things or information within the data. The new things or new information within the data may create other new things or kinds of information in the data or information omitted from the data. This was called data analysis spiral.

The data analysis spiral includes four separate processes. The first process was data management which consisted of listing the data. The Data in this study included transcriptions of interviews, minutes of meetings, and appropriate sections of the SLC grant manual.

The researcher began the second process, perusal, or reading all of the data. This was done in order to obtain an overall “sense” of the data. Preliminary impressions, notable concepts, and initial interpretations were noted at this time and the researcher reflected on the meaning of the data as a whole.

Once all of the data have been read, the researcher will engage in the third process, categorization. This process involves grouping the data into categories, classifications, or themes in order to determine or find meaning in the data.

The researcher categorized the data first and then identified what goes where with regard to the research questions. The researcher then identified what was left over in terms of additional findings. These additional findings were placed in categories. In other words, the researcher noted additional information that may build upon or add to information as well as information not anticipated during data gathering.

A coding plan was developed to assign data to categories based upon the four frameworks as presented by Bolman and Deal (2008): human resource, political, structural, and symbolic. The first three processes enabled the researcher to deconstruct the data, to begin detailed analysis, to reflect, and to truly understand the data.

The fourth process, synthesis, was the reconstruction of the data and included development of a matrix, tables, or other representation of the data presented within the categories. Using those representations, the researcher constructed the presentation of the data.

### **Establishing Rapport**

As a means of establishing rapport, the researcher met with each participant on several occasions before the official interview in order to build trust, credibility, and rapport. As current smaller learning community coordinator of a South Carolina school district and a former South Carolina high school principal, several of the South Carolina principals were already known by the researcher. The familiarity of knowing the researcher adds greater value to the participants' comfort level and their willingness to answer the questions honestly and with integrity. Thus, the researcher's position as SLC coordinator and administrator as well as having established a



relationship with the participants creates a greater a stronger degree of trustworthiness and credibility to the research and interviews.

### **Summary**

Several unknown factors existed in South Carolina high schools as their administrators attempt to find programs and procedures to meet the needs of rapidly growing and diverse student populations. First, little was known of the experiences of South Carolina high school principals in making the transition into smaller learning communities nor the forces confronting those transitions. Second little was known of the cognitive frameworks use for reframing these organizations.

The demands of an ever-changing technological and diverse global society cause for systemic change in today's secondary schools. In face with this reality, American high schools must set a course on new mission for education. Not only must high schools require differentiated instructions to accommodate students' needs, high schools must be held accountable for student learning by producing a high quality education. Because of the variety of diverse issues, high school principals are faced with overcoming the challenges, obstacles, and forces that confront high school reforms.

This study attempted to determine the supporting and impeding forces surrounding South Carolina high school principals as they implement smaller learning communities. A qualitative methodology was used to conduct this study. The participants for the study were current South Carolina high school principals. After permission from the University IRB and selected participants, the participants were contacted and first completed a demographic survey.

The three data sources of triangulation for this research were interviews, the smaller learning community manual, and minutes from the SLC site visit meetings. Triangulation

supported the trustworthiness of research. Semi-structured interviews were held using an interview protocol in a face-to-face format. The interviews were transcribed and the data analyzed. Follow up, semi-structured questions were asked of the participants to increase clarity and accuracy of answers. The underlying principle of the research was to promote a more clear understanding of the forces surrounding high school principals as they implement smaller learning communities and to analyze those data using Bolman and Deal's cognitive frameworks.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to discover the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. In addition, the researcher documented and analyzed the strategies used by administrators to overcome the forces, using Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames for reframing organizations.

According to Fine & Weis (2000), qualitative research provides accounts, descriptions, and social interactions in natural settings based upon observation and interviewing of participants in order to understand their points of view. Emphases are placed on meanings and processes rather than variables and outcomes. Therefore, this study utilized a qualitative design to identify the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities. The researcher provided a description of the processes used by administrators in dealing with the forces confronting the implementation of smaller learning communities by utilizing the four cognitive frameworks: structural framework, human resources framework, political framework, and symbolic framework.

The researcher conducted seven interviews with a representative from within five school districts in the state of South Carolina identified through the U.S. Department of Education. These five districts contain seven schools which were participants in a federally funded smaller learning community grant for 2008-2009. This was for the purpose of restructuring a larger comprehensive high school with an enrollment of 1,000 students or more into small subunits. All seven principals agreed to participate in the study. Therefore, seven interviews were conducted.

While an analysis of school and administrative demographics was not conducted, the following demographic information was provided as background information concerning the participants and their schools. The following pseudonyms were used to identify the seven high schools: Lakeview High School, Woodfields High School, Westview High School, Northside High School, Spartan High School, Genesis High School, and Springfield High School.

Lakeview High School is located in an urban school district in central South Carolina. The school has an enrollment of 1510 students with a population consisting of 64% black, 26% white, and 10% Hispanic. The school percentage of economically disadvantaged students is 40%. Lakeview High School met adequately yearly progress (AYP) standards in the 2003-2004 school year, but have not met AYP standards in the last five years. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for the past two years.

Woodfields High School is located in an urban school district in central South Carolina. The school has an enrollment of 2051 students with a population consisting of 26% black, 70% white, and 10% Hispanic. The school percentage of economically disadvantaged students is 16%. Woodfields High School met adequately yearly progress (AYP) standards in the 2008-2009 school year but not meet AYP the previous year. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for the past two years.

Westview High School is located in a rural school district in Northwest South Carolina. The school has an enrollment of 1693 students with a population consisting of 42% black and 52% white, and 6% Hispanic. The school percentage of economically disadvantaged students is 43%. Westview High School met adequately yearly progress (AYP) standards in the 2003-2004 school year but have not met AY standards in the last five years. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for the past two years.

Northside High School is located in an urban school district in central South Carolina. The school has an enrollment of 2014 students with a population consisting of 37% black and 57% white, and 6% Hispanic. The school percentage of economically disadvantage students is 31%. Northside High School met adequately yearly progress (AYP) standards in the 2007-2008 school year but have not met AYP in the past two years. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for the past two years.

Spartan High School is located in a rural school district in Northern South Carolina. The school as an enrollment of 1550 students with a population consisting of 40% black, 50% white, and 10% Hispanic. The school percentage of economically disadvantaged students is 40%. Spartan High School met adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards in the 2007-2008 school year but had not met AYP in the past two years. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for the past two years.

Genesis High School is located in an urban school district in Northwest South Carolina. The school has an enrollment of 1620 students with a population consisting of 54% black, 38% white, and 8% Hispanic. The school percentage of economically disadvantaged student is 74%. Genesis High School met adequate year progress (AYP) in the 2003-2004 school year but have not met standards in the last five years.

Springfield High School is located in a rural school district in South Central South Carolina. The school has an enrollment of 1578 students with a population consisting of 94% black and 4% white, and 2% Asian. The school percentage of economically disadvantage student is 80%. Springfield High School met adequately yearly progress (AYP) standards in the 2003-2004 school year, but have not met AYP standards in the last five years.

High school demographic and administrator demographic Information are provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1  
*High School Demographic Information*

School #	Students	Teachers	Asian	Black %	White %	Hispanic %	Other	Econ. Disadv %	Yrs in SLC
Lakeview	1510	104	0	64	26	10	0	40	2
Woodfields	2051	148	0	26	70	10	0	16	2
Westview	1693	100	0	42	52	6	0	43	2
Northside	2014	158	0	37	57	6	0	31	2
Springfield	1578	105	6	94	4	0	0	80	2
Spartanburg	1550	130	2	40	50	5	2	40	2
Genesis	1620	103	0	54	38	0	3	74	2
Average	1716.5	121.1	1.1	51	42.4	5.3	.7	46.3	2
Maximum	2051	158	6	94	70	10	3	80	2
Minimum	1510	100	0	26	4	0	0	16	2

Table 2  
*Administrator Demographic Information*

Admin #	Age	Sex	Adm	Adm Exp w/i School	Degree Attained			Ethnicity	
					MEd	EdS	EdD/PhD	White	Black
Joe Fields	60	M	20	10		X		X	
Ralph Hayes	47	M	10	2			X	X	
Beth Wood	50	F	15	5		X		X	
Stephen Nickles	35	M	3	3	X			X	
Gregory Young	44	M	7	2		X			X
Richard Chapman	37	M	12	4	X			X	
Bob Strauss	56	M	14	6		X			
Average	47		11.6	4.6	2	4	1	4	1

## **Research Question 1**

What are the supporting forces experienced by South Carolina High School principals implementing smaller learning communities? In completing the review of literature, the researcher found eight supporting forces identified by researchers as the common supporting forces experienced by administrators for implementing smaller learning communities. These forces were achievement, affiliation/belonging, cost, parental involvement and satisfaction, preparation for higher education, safety and order, teacher attitude and satisfaction, truancy and dropouts. Two other supporting factors were found during the interview process; accountability and data-driven decision making. Participants' names have been change to protect anonymity: Joe Fields, Ralph Hayes, Beth Wood, Stephen Nickles, Gregory Young, Richard Chapman, and Bob Strauss. A description of the findings follows.

### **Accountability**

While the literature review did not reveal accountability as a common supporting force for implementing smaller learning communities, five participants of the seven interviewees (71%) concluded that state and federal accountability standards had led them to a reform effort. Fields stated, "When the AYP report came out we knew we needed to do something about working with every student." Strauss summarized, "In our academies, teachers are held accountable for each other and for student learning....When teachers understood that part of their yearly evaluations was based on their students' achievement scores, many teachers began to focus on the needs of all their students."

### **Achievement**

Three participants of the seven interviewed responded that student achievement was a supporting force for implementing smaller learning communities. South Carolina high school

graduation test results, accountability, adequate yearly progress as defined by the *No Child Left Behind Act*, and high failures rates were the most common examples of low student achievement that were cited. According to Hayes, “We noticed that SLC allowed us to focus on the academic needs of individual student so that none were slipping through the cracks.” Nickles concluded, “The reporting of achievement provides the ability to make data driven decisions.”

### **Affiliation/Belonging**

Four of the seven interviewed participants responded that students’ and teachers’ sense of affiliation/belonging were a supporting force for implementing smaller learning communities. Giving students a common group of teachers, personalization, relationship-building, and collaboration were the most common examples of affiliation/belonging that were cited. Hayes stated, “Smaller learning communities allowed us the ability to work together.” “With SLC, we were able to break into smaller components which made it easier to get to know other faculty and students”, according to Young. Building meaningful relationship was a common supporting force that was mentioned by the participants. Wood concluded, “We were able to build better relationship with students, staff, and administration. It allowed us to better know the students we serve and many of the issues they faced.”

### **Cost**

While the researched revealed that some educators were seeking ways to use larger facilities and faculties more efficiently, cost was not mentioned as a supporting force of any of the seven interviews conducted by the researcher.

### **Equity**

One of the participants of the seven interviewed stated that equity and closing achievement gaps were important supporting forces for school reform. Young stated, “When you



look at subgroups who are not achieving, whether it is gender, race, or socioeconomically based; SLC allows you to work with the subgroups who are not achieving in order to close the achievement gaps. SLC's allow you to identify these groups and work individually to even the score so that all students are able to achieve."

### **Data-driven Decision Making**

Three of the participants out of the seven interviewed stated that data-driven decision making was an important supporting force in implementing SLC. "Following the rise of accountability efforts at that state and federal levels, the age of data decision making has begun. Our school was too large for any one person to handle and monitor student progress" stated Chapman. According to Strauss and two other participants, the need to look closely at each individual student's progress and achievement led them in search of a reform effort. "The restructuring design of smaller learning communities allowed us the opportunity to divide and conquer the monumental task of reviewing performance data," according to Strauss.

### **Parent Involvement and Satisfaction**

According to the researcher's review of literature, parents, whose children attend smaller learning communities, were more likely to say that teachers helped struggling students and that students speak and write well. In addition, these parents were considerably happier with smaller learning communities on issues of civility, student alienation, and parent-teacher engagement. Smaller learning communities provide greater opportunities for communication between parents and teachers. Although these factors were included by researchers in current literature, no participant mentioned parent involvement or parent satisfaction as a supporting force.

### **Preparation for Higher Education**

Four of the seven participants stated that SLC collaborates with the state's Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA) mandate and prepares students for higher education. Nickles indicated, "SLC supports the state of South Carolina mandate of (EEDA) in which all students must have an Individual Graduation Plan (IGPs)." EEDA is a state legislative initiative to ensure that all students are better prepared for post secondary education. An Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) consists of a student postsecondary goals, majors, and career goals. Fields stated, "Before SLC, the top 20% of our students went to college, the bottom 30% dropped out, and those in between found jobs after high school." "SLC has created a college-going-culture at our school. Instead of asking students, are they going to college, we now ask them what college are they going to", concluded Young.

### **Safety and Order**

While four out of seven participants stated that affiliation/belonging were supporting forces, none of them concluded that safety and order was a supporting force.

### **Teachers' Attitudes and Satisfaction**

One participant mentioned that teacher attitudes and satisfaction were supporting forces for implementing smaller learning communities. According to Wood, "teacher morale was low; increasing accountability stakes left teachers feeling as if they were on the firing line. SLC gave teacher a sense of community and shared responsibility."

### **Truancy and Dropouts**

Five participants out of seven (71%) interviewed provided truancy and dropouts as supporting forces for implementing smaller learning communities. Among the common factors were low graduation rates, low student attendance, suspensions, expulsions, and high dropout

rates, particularly between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Fields shared, “SLC has created transition support for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and advisory/advisee initiatives that will help students stay in good academic standing.” Hayes stated, “The SLC supports differentiated instructions and academic tutoring for struggling students.” Wood concluded, “The advisor/advisee program created by SLC helps students acquire study skill/habits and test-taking strategies.” Nickles indicated, “SLC supports the truancy rate by creating family and information meetings for students who are in jeopardy of failing due to truancy.” Young insisted, “SLC have provided more activities such as career fairs, job shadowing, and assemblies with guest speakers of various fields of study throughout the school year as a means to encourage students to have goals and to perform well in school.”

Supporting forces are shown in Table 3.

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**Table 3**  
*Supporting Forces*

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<u>Supporting Force</u>	<u>Frequency of Responses</u>
Accountability	5
Achievement	3
Affiliation/Sense of belonging	4
Cost	0
Equity	1
Data-driven Decision Making	3
Parent Involvement & Satisfaction	0
Preparation for Higher Education	4
Safety and Order	0
Teacher Attitudes & Satisfaction	1
Truancy & Dropouts	5

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### Summary

The researcher identified eight supporting forces experienced by administrators implementing smaller learning communities: accountability, achievement, affiliation/sense of belonging, equity, data-driven decision making, preparation for higher education, teacher

attitudes and satisfaction, and truancy and dropouts. The main supporting forces, having a frequency of three or more responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities as an organizational restructuring efforts were: (1) an attempt to meet the accountability standards set forth in federal and state mandates, (2) attempt to increase student's academic achievement, (3) a desire to increase a student's affiliation and sense of belonging in their school, (4) an attempt to involve more stakeholders in the decision-making process, (5) an attempt to prepare students for higher education, and (6) an attempt to reduce the truancy and dropout rate.

### **Research Question 2**

What are the impeding forces experienced by South Carolina High School principals implementing smaller learning communities? In completing the review of literature, the researcher found three common impeding forces identified by researchers as the common forces experienced by administrators in implementing smaller learning communities. These three factors were cultural expectations, fiscal and physical constraints, and laws, regulations, policies, and procedures. A description of the findings follows.

#### **Cultural Expectation**

Three of the seven participants reported that cultural expectations were an impeding force they experienced in implementing smaller learning communities. Among the impeding forces, the participants cited teacher resistance to change from high school practices of which they were familiar and student social expectations. Fields concluded, "Parents are familiar with the high school they went to, so when you change the structure from what they knew to SLC's, it can be intimidating." According to Woods, "students had expectations that they should take classes

based on their friends who were signed up for the same class. The concept of academic or career goals seemed to be a foreign concept.”

### **Fiscal and Physical Constraints**

Two participants of the seven interviewees reported fiscal and physical constraints to implementing smaller learning communities. The constraints included older building structures and limited budgets for personnel. Young stated, “Our building is approximately 40 years old. It was designed on a departmentalized model. SLC’s require the pan integrated and collaborative design model. In some cases, we couldn’t move rooms, like science labs, thereby limiting our pure SLC approach.” Fields reported, “Because we have a limited personnel budget, we could not hire enough teachers to meet the demand of all our SLC’s. We had to place and assign teachers in other SLC’s as well to make things work.”

### **Law, Regulation, Policies, and Procedures**

No participant reported that local regulations and policies were creating an impeding force for implementing SLC’s., as noted in Table 4.

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**Table 4**  
*Impeding Forces*

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<u>Impeding Force</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Cultural Expectations	3
Fiscal & Physical Constraints	2
Laws, Regulations, Policies & Procedures	0

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### **Summary**

The researcher identified two impeding forces experienced by administrators implementing smaller learning communities: cultural expectation, and fiscal and physical

constraints. The main impeding force, having three or more responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities as an organizational restructuring effort was: a desire to maintain cultural expectations.

### **Research Question 3**

What strategies do South Carolina high school principals use in dealing with impeding forces? Two of the high schools are undergoing major renovations and restructuring of their buildings. Chapman stated, “This was a great opportunity to move teachers to different locations that may have developed strong ties and cliques with other teachers. These teachers often resisted new ideas and visions for the school”. Strauss reported, “The physical restructuring of the school enabled us to do restructuring among teachers within the school and academy. Some teachers who had a history of being negative were dispersed in different locations throughout the school.”

Three of the high school principals reported that allowing SLC teachers to view the data and become a part of the data decision-making were a powerful strategy in dealing with impeding forces. Mr. Hayes declared, “Once teachers saw how poor students performed on EOC (End of Course) and HSAP (High School Assessment Program), they were more willing and open to new ideas and approaches to the concept of teaching and learning.” Wood said, “Every teacher receives a copy of their students’ performance on state and federal mandated assessment. Teachers are requested to provide pedagogical alternatives (must be documented in writing) on what can be done in the future to ensure the success of those students who did not perform at expected levels.”

Two of the high school principals reported utilizing professional development as a strategy in dealing with impeding forces. Hayes stated, “Teachers were naturally hesitate and

reluctant to the new concept of SLC. Therefore, we instituted two days of SLC training for all our teachers. This allowed teachers to be more acquainted with the dynamics and components of SLC which in turned reduced uncertainty, anxiety, and fears.” Nickles reported, “The more we discussed and shared the different facets of SLC during our teacher workdays and staff development days, the more teachers became comfortable with the SLC change.”

One of the high school principals reported that using authority and power was a strategy used in dealing with impeding forces. Hayes insisted, “Our leadership team no longer tolerated teachers sitting idly by and then criticizing in private. This type of attitude and behavior are no longer an acceptable practice at our school.”

Two high school principals reported that motivation was a strategy used in dealing with impeding forces. Young summarized, “Do whatever you can to motivate the teachers, such as incentives and rewards, because when the teachers are happy they will do everything they can in order to have successful students. Hayes shared, “I think the best way to create success is through incentives and rewards to increase motivation.”

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**Table 5**  
*Strategies Principals Used in Dealing with Impeding Forces*

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Restructuring the local of teachers	2
Teachers utilizing the data to make instructional decisions	3
Professional and Staff Development	2
Authority and Power	1
Motivation	2

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### **Summary**

The researcher identified five strategies principals used in dealing with impeding forces in implementing smaller learning communities: restructuring the local of teachers, allowing

teachers to utilize the data to make improvements in student learning and achievements, creating professional and staff developments opportunities, authority and power, and motivation. The main impeding force, having three or more responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities was: teachers utilizing the data to make instructional decisions.

#### **Research Question 4**

How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being the leading facilitator of their schools? When asked if whether or not the high school principals viewed themselves as the leading facilitator of their school, each of the principals reported viewing themselves as being the leading facilitator of their schools. However upon further deliberation and elaboration, several participants seemed to consider their role more of a manager instead of one who facilitates change. Several of them mentioned that they are the ones who receive instructions from the district office and are responsible for ensuring that the tasks are carried out. Fields stated, “Our school is not a site management school, most of our mandates come from the district office.”

#### **Research Question 5**

How do South Carolina high school principals describe the culture and structure of their schools before implementing smaller learning communities?

Two principals described the culture and structure of their schools as a place where sports and extra-curricular activities ruled. Three principals described the culture and structure of their school as the typical and traditional high schools that had not changed since they were in high school. “Many of the values and ideals about high school are the same as they were 30 years ago”, stated Nickles. Two principals described the culture and structure of their school as a mill or factory. Young stated, “The culture of our school centered around sports, mainly football. Our



school has a strong tradition and history that focused primarily on athletics. We are currently moving from that end of the spectrum toward the center embracing the arts, academics, as well as athletics.” Chapman indicated, “Many of the teaching staff as well as the community had a difficult time adjusting to the focus from athletics to academics.” Strauss replied, “Before SLC, you had those who were going to college and those who were not; with SLC all students are expected to attend post-secondary institution and have post-secondary training.” Fields stated, “Before SLC, the top 20% of our students went to college, the bottom 30% dropped out, and those in between found jobs after high school.” “The culture and structure of our school resembled a factory or mill which manufactured certain products. If the product was defected (sic) you simply threw it out; this procedure was similar to what was happening with our students,” insisted Hayes.

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**Table 6**

*How South Carolina High School Principals Describe the Culture and Structure of Their Schools Before Implementing Smaller Learning Communities*

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<u>Description</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
School primarily focus centered on Sports	2
Traditional high school	3
Factory and Mill	2

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The researcher identified three descriptions of how South Carolina high school principals viewed the culture and structure of their schools before implementing smaller learning communities: school primarily focused on sports, traditional high school, and factory and mill concept. The main description, having three or more responses, of how South Carolina principals describe the culture and structure of their school before implementing smaller learning communities was: traditional high school

### Research Question 6

How do South Carolina high school principals describe the culture and structure of their schools after implementing smaller learning communities? Four of the participants stated that SLC allowed them to better manage student learning by creating student-centered communities. “SLC allows us to structure our high school into academies thereby reduces the high school into manageable size parts”, insisted Wood. “The personalization component of SLC has allowed students, teachers, and parents to develop relationship virtually unknown under the old comprehensive high school setting”, stated Nickles. Two of the participants stated that SLC motivated teachers to change their methods of teaching and instructions. “SLC forces teachers to examine their teaching practices and methods”, declared Young. “The concept of SLC embraces all students, not just the elite or gifted ones. SLC allowed us to realize that we could make significant changes in student achievement for all students, declared Fields. “Even though, this is just our second year in implementing SLC, the culture and structure of our school is changing from being teacher-centered to student-centered”, according to Chapman. Strauss concluded, “We found out after implementing SLC that we had to change our paradigm about teaching and learning. SLC created a way for all of us to see the whole picture, working and supporting all students, instead of focusing only on a selected few.”

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**Table 7**

*How South Carolina High School Principals Describe the Culture and Structure of Their Schools After Implementing Smaller Learning Communities*

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<u>Description</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Student-Centered	3
Change of paradigm	3
Creating effective method of instructions	1

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The researcher identified three descriptions of how South Carolina high school principals viewed the culture and structure of their schools after implementing smaller learning communities: student-centered, change of paradigm, and creating effective methods of instructions for all students. The main descriptions having three or more responses of how South Carolina principals describe the culture and structure of their school after implementing smaller learning communities were: student-centered and change of paradigm.

### **Research Question 7**

How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being the change-agent of their schools?

Even though all of the participants view themselves as the change-agent of their schools, many of the participants viewed their role as managers instead of having the authority to make change or decision at the school level. Three participants mentioned that the chain of command must be followed. “We are not a site-based management school, most of the decisions are made at the district level,” summarized Chapman. “In our district, the authority to make significant changes rest (sic) with the superintendent and the board of trustees,” concluded Strauss. “We work in collaboration with the district; no decisions or changes are made without the expressed consent of the district administration,” stated Young.

### **Research Question 8**

How effective are smaller learning communities viewed by South Carolina high school principals? Fields stated, “We are currently in our second year of implementation; there are a lot of changes to be made before we can determine the impact of smaller learning communities at our school.” “At this current time we have made many changes to accommodate the SLC

approach, we hope that in the next few years, we will see significant improvements in student discipline, attendance, and student achievement”, declared Hayes. “Time will tell concerning the effective of SLC, however at this time we believe that it has already enhanced our ability to reach more students than in the traditional way of schooling”, insisted Wood. Nickles replied, “Based upon our early assessment of SLC, we believe that SLC will reduce many of the barriers that affect student learning and achievement.”

Although the seven participants are only in their second year of implementing SLC, all of the participants were optimistic about the current effectiveness of smaller learning communities at their school. As stated by the participants, time will be the determining factor of the effectiveness of SLC.

### **Bolman and Deal Framework Analysis**

What cognitive frameworks do South Carolina high school principals use in implementing smaller learning communities? In an attempt to redesign school organizations into meaningful frameworks, Bolman and Deal (2008) offer four cognitive frames in order to better understand organizations. According to Bolman and Deal (1997), the best leaders use multiple frames, each offering a different perspective on common challenges. The four frames are structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frameworks. The researcher analyzed administrators’ experiences in dealing with or overcoming impeding forces as they implemented smaller learning communities using the cognitive frameworks provided by Bolman and Deal’s (2008) research.

#### **Structural Framework**

The structural framework focuses on the purposes and processes that assist the organization in being efficient and effective. Six assumptions undergird the structural frame:

1. Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives.
2. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor.
3. Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
4. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures.
5. Structures must be designed to fit an organization's current circumstances including its goals, technology, workforce, and environment, (Bolman and Deal, 2008).

Several responses were provided by the participants who used Bolman and Deal's structural cognitive framework as a means to establish goals and objectives. Participants indicated they spent a great deal of time forming committees to determine the objective for the SLC reform effort. Fields indicated, "We established committees that involved all staff in researching improvement efforts for everything from scheduling to student achievement from test scores to teacher morale. "We needed everyone to look at the big picture and find a solution," shared Hayes. Chapman concluded, "A lot of time was spent preparing the groundwork for implementing SLC, from getting the latest research on the topic to creating a customized SLC that would accommodate our staff." Strauss summarized, "Every department has spent hours and energy developing strategies to enhance school improvement and student achievement."

Two responses were provided indicating that leaders established rational sequences to produce right decisions. Nickles indicated that before decisions were made all stakeholders had to be involved to provide all perspectives. "It was amazing how easy decisions could be made

once we had all stakeholders' including parents, booster clubs, board members input including faculty and staff," declared Nickles. "While it took some time, getting input from all parties involved lead to better decisions and easier implementation," declared Wood.

Two responses were provided indicating that administrators realigned roles and responsibilities to fit task and the environment. "Some of our staff leadership had to be changed due to ineffective practices. This created a sense of awareness and accountability among our faculty," shared Hayes. Wood shared, "We redefined our department chair job responsibilities from an old structure of plan autocracy and execution, to a cyclical process of planning and seeking input from department members."

Two responses were provided indicating administrators sought ways to distribute rewards or penalties and control performances. "In examining student performance, we had to look at teachers. Some of the controls meant crossing kids and sometimes teachers over into different SLCs," reported Young. One of the first challenges we faced in addressing goals was how we would recognize students and teachers and celebrate," stated Hayes.

Two responses were provided indicating that administrators maintained organizational goals by having authorities resolve conflict. "There were some cases where we [administrators] had to make some decisions; they weren't always popular," stated Young.

Four responses were provided indicating goal setting primarily keeps the organization headed in the right direction. For Hayes and Nickles, the NCLB accountability measure of AYP provided the direction for their schools. Beyond AYP, Young said, "Our goals were established along with our strategic direction." According to Nickles, "You have to establish goals to know where you are going. If your school has no goals the organization is just spinning wheels." Strauss concluded, "At the onset of implementing SLC, we determined what would be our short

term and long term goals.” Chapman summarized, “our goal and objective was for SLC to be the vehicle that would enable us to raise the bar as it relates to state and mandatory testing.”

Four responses were provided indicating that communication was utilized to transmit facts and information.”Communication has to take more than one form in order to make sure that all stakeholders know what’s going on,” according to Fields. “With SLCs, lines of communication become much clearer than a traditional high school,” according to Hayes. “It’s very clear cut as to who deals with what issues; you know where to go to get the information you need,” he added. Wood suggested that “communication should be frequent and in varied forms. I often communicate information verbally and then follow up in writing to make sure the facts aren’t misinterpreted.” Strauss summarized, “the more we talked about the components and the benefits on SLC, the more comfortable teachers became.” Chapman concluded, “Communication is key when making dramatic changes in schools.”

Four responses were provided indicating that meetings were formal occasions for making decisions. “If we don’t have frequent meetings anything can be assumed and many times the assumptions are incorrect”, according to Young. Nickles shared that his school has, “an established meeting scheduled at the beginning of the year.” “Since they are scheduled in advance, we have an agenda, stay on track and resolve issues; however occasionally you have to provide opportunities for unexpected problems that may arise which need to be discussed,” he added.

Two responses were provided indicating that motivation comes through economic incentives. Wood has provided economic incentives on a small scale which she said, “We create incentives among SLCs to determine who will have the best attendance or passing rate.” “Monetary incentives are necessary, but they don’t have to be on a large scale. Our kids will

compete for anything from a free ticket to a game to a free dinner coupon at a local restaurant,” shared Fields.

### **Human Resource Framework**

The human resource framework focuses on the balance between meeting the organization’s goal and the goals of people within the organization. Four assumptions undergird the human resource frame:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse.
2. People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.
3. When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization – or both become victims.
4. A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed, (Bolman and Deal, 2008).

Several responses were provided by the participants who used Bolman and Deal’s human resource cognitive framework as a means to balance the needs and goals of the organization and the people within the organization. “We intentionally established routine committee meetings to solicit support and input,” stated Wood. Nickles indicated, “We did a great job of communicating after we realized there was some resistance within the ranks.”

Four responses were provided indicating that administrators created an open process to produce commitment. Young indicated, “A great deal of decision making was placed back on their teachers to produce buy-in. While they were responsible for devising solution to problems and issues, teachers were also responsible for providing support for their solutions.” “No one can say they were unaware of the areas being examined or how they could become involved in the



decision process.” Fields concluded. Chapman summarized, “Everyone knew that in order for SLC to be effective there had to be commitment from everyone.” Strauss stated, “All stakeholders were involved in the implementation and decision-making process.”

Two responses were provided indicating that maintaining a balance between human needs and formal roles was a strategy utilized by administrators in dealing with reorganization. “While we were physically relocating teachers, we created surveys for them to complete to identify their areas of interests in order to place them with a SLC that they would have a connection to,” shared Nickles. “I conducted individual interviews with every faculty member. I wanted each one to know how the reorganization effort would affect them and also have them identify where they felt they could best benefit their students and the organization.” declared Young.

Four responses were provided indicating responses to the evaluation process. Fields revealed, “I’ve been at this school for 10 years. We went from no evaluation process to looking at data and making choices according to what was needed as best for everyone.” “I believe our evaluation process has become less fearful and intimidating, teachers now see the evaluation process as a helpful practice rather than documentation for dismissal,” reported Nickles.

Four responses were provided indicating that developing relationships by having individuals confront conflict was the most common strategy used by administrators. Nickles shared his experience of, “involving the naysayers on committees and sending them to SLC workshops and conferences.” According to Wood, “We had our negative folks face the concept in person. This strategy allowed them to air their concerns and question folks who had been through the SLC restructuring.” Hayes concluded, “Most of our conflicts were resolved through

face to face communication.” Field alluded, “We had to learn to put our differences on the table and come together to reach an agreement.”

Two responses were provided indicating that goal setting should keep people involved and communication open. According to Fields, “goal setting and collaborative strategic planning go hand in hand.” Wood concluded, “Being able to meet as a group and look at our students within the SLC helped us really come up with a plan to help students. These are more like intervention strategies to make sure we hit our target; the goal gives us a common language.”

Five responses were provided indicating communication should represent an exchange of information, needs, and feelings. Nickles shared, “Our monthly SLC meetings encourage open discussion concerning students’ progress and faculty frustrations. Our people have become accustomed to sharing their feelings concerning all aspects of school.” Young stated, “We knew we were headed in the right direction when teachers began asking questions about students’ home life and conditions.” Chapman concluded, “Teachers began to create dialogue among themselves as to how SLC could work effectively in their field of study.” Strauss summarized, “The staff development training allowed teachers to ask questions and receive concrete answers to their concerns and fears.”

Two responses were provided indicating that meetings were informal occasions for involvement and sharing feelings. Wood summarized, “I think that meetings whether they are community meetings, teacher meetings, informal SLC, or faculty luncheon are crucial because it keeps you in contact with positive issues as well as negative issues.” Strauss stated, “Our faculty and staff meetings became the catalyst for implementing SLC and school improvement.”

Three responses were provided indicating that motivation builds growth and self-actualization. Strauss summarized, “We have found that motivation is a powerful way to

reinforce positive behavior.” Hayes shared, “I think the best way to create success is through motivation. We put things out there in small pieces to assure ourselves that we are creating success.” Young revealed, “I think it helps to have a smaller group of students and being able to work with them on things that are important to them, their goals and objectives and being able to get together in a group and motivate each other.”

### **Political Framework**

The political framework focuses on the allocation of scarce resources, power, and the negotiation of positions. The following assumptions undergird the political framework:

1. Organizations are collations of assorted individuals and interest groups.
2. Coalition members have enduring difference in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
3. Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources - who gets what.
4. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests.

Several responses were provided by the participants who used Bolman and Deal’s political cognitive framework as a means to allocate scarce resources and negotiate position. “We revisited some responsibilities that had been overlooked due to constant administrative turnover,” Young shared. Only one response was provided indicating that opportunities to gain or exercise of power was demonstrated. “Our leadership team no longer tolerated teachers sitting idly by and then criticizing in private. This type of attitude and behavior are no longer an acceptable practice at our school,” declared Hayes. Only one response indicated that administrators redistributed power and formed new coalitions. Fields indicated that, “power once

held by a few department chairs and the administrator in the building was now held by a number of other faculty members within the building including team leaders and counselors.”

No responses were provided indicating opportunities for individuals to exercise power. The researcher did not record any instances where administrators delegated administrative power beyond the administrative level (assistant principals). No responses were provided indicating that developing power by bargaining, forcing, or manipulating others to win for dealing with supporting or impeding forces.

Two responses were provided indicating that communication was used to influence or manipulate others. Fields stated that “While our BOE supported us in writing for the SLC grant, they still remain unsure of the restructuring. We took advantage of every opportunity to share the successes in support of SLC.” Strauss concluded, “The more communication faculty and staff receives the better the chances goals and objectives were understood.” No response was provided indicating that meetings were competitive occasions to win points.

Three responses were provided indicating that motivation comes through coercion, manipulation, and seduction. “Once we saw the expectation for NCLB and AYP and where we stood on the continuum, there was no choice but to change; accountability provided the major portion of our motivation,” stated Fields. Hayes reported a similar experience, “Change is a difficult process. Our administration had to force a lot of change while emphasizing federal accountability. Once we began experiencing success, internal motivation followed,” shared Hayes. Chapman stated, “When teachers understood that part of their yearly evaluations were based on their student achievement scores, many teachers began to focus on the needs of all their students.”

## Symbolic Framework

The symbolic framework focuses on the deeper meaning, interpretation of actions, and words. Five assumptions undergird the symbolic frame.

1. What is most important is not what happens but what it means.
2. Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events and actions have multiple interpretations as people experience life differently.
3. Facing uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, find direction, and anchor hope and faith.
4. Events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced. Their emblematic form weaves a tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to help people find purpose and foster passion.
5. Culture forms the superglue that bonds organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise accomplish desired ends.

Several responses were provided by the participants who used Bolman and Deal's symbolic cognitive framework as a means to provide deeper meaning and interpretation of actions and words. One response was provided indicating the significance of symbols as it relates to change. "A great deal of time went into the decision-making process for what we would call our SLC's. We wanted the names to be meaningful and relative to all stakeholders as well as be symbolic of our organizational change," according to Hayes. Chapman concluded, "Every academic hall is represented by a certain symbol. Often times, students identify themselves by their symbols." Strauss reported, "Students and teachers take great pride in the

symbols they represent.” No responses were provided indicating that rituals existed to confirm values or create opportunities for bonding.

Three responses were provided representing the image of accountability. Hayes concluded that accountability was a major strategy that he utilized for implementing SLCs. He shared, “We went from operating as one large high school into operating as four schools within one building. Our people soon realized that the new organization made it easier to hold everyone accountable – students, teachers, and administrators.” Strauss stated, “In our academy, teachers are held accountable for each other and for student learning.” Chapman concluded, “We have found that when teachers put pressure on other teachers to perform, teachers who are not performing effectively usually improve.” No responses were provided indicating occasions to play roles in a shared drama used by administrators in implementing SLCs.

Two responses were provided indicating that administrators developed shared values and used conflict to negotiate meaning. “Conflict coexists with change; the best way to handle the conflict is to be a good listener,” according to Fields. According to Fields, creating buy-in and having common values creates a team which is willing to work together to overcome conflicts. “In our monthly SLC meetings, teachers feel more comfortable within their group of teachers to express themselves if there is an area of conflicts,” stated Young.

One response was provided indicating that goal setting helped to develop symbols and shared values. “Our data wall became symbolic of our success in reaching our goals. It gives people something to shoot for and something by which they can hold themselves accountable,” Hayes declared.

One response was provided indicating that meetings were a sacred occasion to celebrate and transform the culture of the organization. “We meet once a month to eat and share ideas with each other,” stated Wood.

Four responses were provided indicating that motivation came by way of symbols and celebrations. Nickles shared that in addition to scheduled monthly meetings for sharing information and student achievement, these meetings and informal luncheons occurred to celebrate small successes. “We find at least one item to celebrate each time we gather; sometimes it’s as simple as sharing a miniature chocolate bar with everyone,” He added. Young summarized, “Do whatever you can to motivate the teachers, because when the teachers are happy they will do everything they can in order to have successful students. That’s very important. A kind thank you, a treat every now and then, the brag board we have, providing teachers with lunch are all ways to motivate them.” Chapman concluded, “Each month, we celebrate a different teacher and a student for the month. We believe there is good and value in every person.” Strauss added, “We believe that celebrating small successes lead to great success. We can never do enough for our teachers.”

### **Document Reviews**

The three data sources of triangulation for this research were interviews, SLC Grant Manual, and SLC site visit meetings. To ascertain triangulation for this research, the researcher included information addressed in the SLC Grant Manual and SLC site visit minutes to respond to the following sub questions.

1. What are the supporting forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities?

- A. SLC Grant Manual: Achievement gaps among subgroups, high dropout rates, low graduation rates, and poverty represented the supporting forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities.
  - B. SLC Site Visit Minutes: The SLC site visits revealed that additional supporting forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing SLC included increasing rates of student retention, suspension, and expulsion.
2. What are the impeding forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities?
    - A. SLC Grant Manual: No impeding forces were listed in the SLC Grant Manual.
  3. SLC Site Visit Minutes: The SLC site visits revealed that resistant to change and culture expectations were the impeding forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities. All of the principals stated that teacher resistance and change from high school practices of which they were familiar were the most dominant impeding forces.
  4. What strategies do South Carolina high school principals use in dealing with impeding forces?
    - A. SLC Grant Manual: The SLC grant manual revealed that research and documentation of successful SLCs indicate that school administrators, school counselors, special educators, and other stakeholders must be involved in the planning of SLC. The SLC grant manual recommend meeting with the School Improvement Council (SIC), Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), teachers, groups of students, and district level administrators to explore program strategies for enhancing and expanding SLC buy-in and availability. A team of faculty and staff members through professional and staff



- development training should examine the data about school performance, student achievement, review literature, and research studies to generate ideas and develop solutions that will address issues that interfere with student achievement and the implementation of SLC.
- B. SLC Site Visit Minutes: The site visit revealed that principals relocated teachers to different areas of the building who created resistance to change and the implementation of SLC. Other principals utilized their authority and power, and their ability to motivate.
5. How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being the leading facilitator of their schools?
- A. SLC Grant Manual: No information exists in the SLC grant manual concerning how principals view themselves.
- B. SLC Site Visit Minutes: Even though none of the principals mentioned being the leading facilitator of their schools during the site visits, their role as leading facilitator were apparent during the site visit discussions.
6. How do South Carolina high school principals describe the culture and structure of their schools before implementing smaller learning communities?
- A. SLC Grant Manual: The SLC grant manual revealed that before SLC, the average graduation rate for the seven schools within the SLC consortium was 75% , meaning that one in four students (more than 3,000 students) do not graduate from high school each year. In particular, one in three African –American students do not graduate.

- B. SLC Site Visit Minutes: The site visits revealed that principals viewed their schools as traditional high school similar to factories and mills where all students were not expected to succeed or graduate.
7. How do South Carolina high school principals describe the culture and structure of their schools after implementing smaller learning communities?
- A. SLC Grant Manual: No information exists in the SLC grant manual describing the culture and structure of the schools after implementing smaller learning communities. The current status of SLC is in the infant stages within the high schools, however all the principals seem to be optimistic about SLC. Nevertheless, the goal for SLC as it relates to the graduation rate and the graduation rate for subgroups (males, African American, African American males, children with disabilities, free/reduced-price lunch) is to increase each year by at least three percent.
- B. SLC Site Visit Minutes: Even though the principals are only in their second year of SLC implementation, the principals have described the culture of their school as being student-centered with positive changes in the philosophy of teaching and learning as well as instructions throughout the schools.
8. How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being the change-agent of their schools?
- A. SLC Grant Manual: No information exists in the SLC grant manual viewing or requiring principals to be change-agents. However, the SLC grant manual does state that before change occurs, the principal/administration must be the leading proponent in the change process.

- B. SLC Site Visit Minutes: Even though all of the participants seem to view themselves as the leading facilitator of their schools, many of the participants viewed their role as managers instead of having the authority to make change or decisions at the school level.
9. How effective are smaller learning communities viewed by South Carolina high school principals?
- A. SLC Grant Manual: No information exists in the SLC grant manual indicating how principals viewed the effectiveness of SLCs.
- B. SLC Site Visit Minutes: Even though the schools are only in their second year of SLC implementation, all of the principals are optimistic and enthusiastic about the current changes made in implementing SLC at their schools.

In conclusion, the researcher revealed the method of triangulation by utilizing interviews, SLC grant manual, and SLC site visit minutes in determining the trustworthiness of this study. The SLC grant manual and SLC site visit minutes are consistent to the responses of the interview questions. These two additional sources, SLC grant manual and SLC site visit minutes, add value and credibility to the interview questions.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to identify the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina high school principals implementing smaller learning communities and analyze the forces using Bolman and Deal's frameworks for redesigning organizations. The researcher identified nine supporting forces experienced by administrators while implementing smaller learning communities: accountability, data decision-making, achievement, affiliation and sense of belonging, preparation for higher education, equity, cost, teacher attitudes and

satisfaction, truancy and dropouts. The first two supporting forces, accountability and data-driven decision making, were derived during the interview process from the participants.

While the literature review did not reveal accountability and data-driven decision making as a common supporting force for implementing smaller learning communities, five participants of the seven interviewees concluded that data from state and federal accountability standards had led them to a reform effort. Five of the participants of the seven interviewed stated that data-driven decision making was an important supporting force in implementing SLC.

The main supporting forces, having a frequency of three or more responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities were: (1) an attempt to meet the accountability standards set forth in federal and state mandates, (2) and attempt to increase student's academic achievement, (3) a desire to increase a student's affiliation and sense of belonging in their school, (4) an attempt to involve more stakeholders in the decision-making process, (5) an attempt to prepare students for higher education, and (6) an attempt to reduce the truancy and dropout rate.

The researcher identified three descriptions of how South Carolina high school principals viewed the culture and structure of their schools before implementing smaller learning communities: school primarily focused on sports, traditional high school, and the factory and mill concept. The main description, having three or more responses, of how South Carolina principals describe the culture and structure of their school before implementing smaller learning communities was: a traditional high school.

The researcher identified three descriptions of how South Carolina high school principals viewed the culture and structure of their schools after implementing smaller learning communities: student-centered, change of paradigm, and creating effective methods of

instructions for all students. The main descriptions having three or more responses of how South Carolina principals describe the culture and structure of their school after implementing smaller learning communities were: student-centered and change of paradigm.

Even though all of the participants view themselves as the change-agent of their schools, several of the participants viewed their role as managers instead of having the authority to make changes or decisions at the school level. Three participants mentioned that the chain of command must be followed.

The researcher identified three impeding forces experienced by administrators while implementing smaller learning communities based on the literature review: cultural expectations, fiscal & physical constraints, and laws, regulations, policies, and procedures. However, during the interviews only two impeding forces were mentioned by the participants: cultural expectations and fiscal & physical constraints. Due to the fact that people (including teachers) expect high schools to function with the same familiarity as when they went to school, there can be strong resistance when creating school change. The participants cited teacher resistance to change from high school practices of which they were familiar and student social expectations. The participants also indicated that the physical structure of their schools and the limited monetary resources restricted SLC from operating at the maximum level.

The main impeding force, having three or more responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities was: a desire to maintain cultural expectations. No participant reported that local regulations, policies, and procedures were creating an impeding force for implementing SLC's.

In analyzing the strategies utilized by administrators to overcome impeding forces, the researcher identified five strategies principals used in implementing smaller learning

communities: restructuring the local of teachers, allowing the teachers to utilize the data to make improvements in student learning and achievements, and creating professional and staff developments opportunities, authority and power, and motivation. The main impeding force, having three or more responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities was: allowing teachers to utilize the data to make instructional decisions.

The researcher identified cognitive frameworks commonly used by administrators in implementing smaller learning communities: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The structural frame emphasizes productivity and posits that schools work best when goals, policies, rules, and roles are clear. The human resource frame is a favorite among teachers and principals. It highlights the importance of individual needs and organizational needs. The political frame posits the inevitability that resources are always too scarce to fulfill all demands. The symbolic frame centers attention on culture, meaning, belief, and faith.

Although the seven participants are only in their second year of implementing SLC, all of the participants were optimistic about the current effectiveness of smaller learning communities at their school. As stated by the participants, time will be the determining factor of the effectiveness of SLC.

Table 8 lists the top six supporting forces and the top three impeding forces. The highest ranks in frequency of responses were accountability and truancy & dropouts, followed by both achievement and preparation for higher education and then affiliation and data-driven decision making.

Since one of the main assumptions of structural framework is the establishment of goals and objectives, achievement and accountability are two supporting forces which can be categorized under the structural cognitive framework. Affiliation/sense of belonging, preparation

for higher education, data-driven decision making and truancy & dropouts can be categorized under the human resource framework which focuses on the support of human needs.

**Table 8**

*Top Six Supporting Forces and Top Three Impeding Forces*

<u>Supporting</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Cognitive Framework</u>
Achievement	3	Structural
Affiliation/Sense of belonging	4	Human Resource
Preparation for Higher Education	4	Human Resource
Accountability	5	Structural
Data-driven Decision Making	3	Human Resource
Truancy & Dropouts	5	Human Resource
<u>Impeding Forces</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Cognitive Framework</u>
Cultural Expectations	3	Human Resource
Fiscal & Physical Constraints	2	Structural
Laws, Regulations, Policies & Procedures	0	Structural

Under the category of impeding forces, cultural expectations can be categorized under the human resource cognitive framework due to the reference to culture. The fiscal & physical constraints with its relationship to standards, criteria, and policies, can be categorized under the structural cognitive framework.

The researcher found a total of eleven supporting forces based on the literature review and from extensive participant interviews: accountability, data-driven decision making, achievement, affiliation/belonging, cost, equity, parental involvement and satisfaction, preparation for higher education, safety and order, teacher attitude and satisfaction, truancy and dropouts. Accountability and data-driven decision making were two additional forces found based upon the common responses and categorical themes reported from the interview participants.

The literature revealed three impeding forces as the forces experienced by administrators in implementing smaller learning communities. These three forces were cultural expectations, fiscal and physical constraints, and law, regulations, policies, and procedures.

Subsequently, there were more supporting forces in implementing smaller learning communities than impeding forces. The supporting forces versus impeding forces had a ratio of almost four to one. There were more substantial reasons to create a viable and thriving reform effort, such as SLC, than not.

In analyzing the cognitive frameworks commonly used by administrators in implementing smaller learning communities, the researcher found that the majority of cognitive frames fell within the human resource framework. The second largest group of responses fell within the structural framework followed by the symbolic framework and then the political framework. These data are shown in Table 9.

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**Table 9**  
*Comparative Chart for Frameworks*

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Framework	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Number of Responses	26	28	8	12

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Even though this research focused on supporting and impeding forces, the participants also gave the researcher valuable information which was not anticipated in the research. In other words, by collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher found common themes from the participants not originally found in the research literature. This information based on the participants' interviews included the importance of: communication, evaluation, and goal-setting. These three potential supporting forces may be invaluable in helping future high school principals successfully implement smaller learning communities.



## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina high school principals implementing smaller learning communities based on the work of Bolman and Deal, (2008). The identified forces were analyzed and categorized into four frameworks: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The design of this study was qualitative using in-depth interviews to record and identify the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities. The researcher provided a description of the processes used by administrators by categorizing the forces into four frameworks: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic.

There are 85 school districts with 58 restructured high schools using smaller learning communities in the state of South Carolina (US DOE, 2006). Of the 58 restructured high schools, only seven high schools, located in five districts in South Carolina, received federal grant funding for the 2008-2009 school year. For the purpose of this study, the researcher interviewed one administrator from each of the seven schools receiving federal funds for the 2008-2009 school year.

The data were collected using in-depth interview questions conducted by the researcher. The questions were designed to ascertain the role of high school principals in the development of smaller learning communities. Permission for the research was obtained from the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by submitting the required Human Subjects Protocol Request and securing consent for scheduled interviews from the participant.

The interviews were conducted face to face. During the interviews, notes were taken to provide the researcher an opportunity to obtain information with as much accuracy as possible while concentrating on the participant. The interviews, in a form of a discourse, were the major source for data collection. The researcher was engaged in a complex and extensive analysis, sorting through large amounts of data, and reducing them to a few themes and categories. The use of open-ended interview questions allowed the participants to fully explain their views regarding the development of smaller learning communities in a comprehensive manner.

The researcher established trustworthiness by utilizing triangulation in data gathering which included interviews, document reviews, and observation. The document reviews included the SLC grant manual and SLC site visit minutes. The questions asked in the interview were semi-structured, meaning that the interviewer provided follow up questions to the main interview questions. The interview questions were created based on the forces experienced by principals who have already implemented smaller learning communities in their schools.

A peer reviewer read and reviewed the entire research to provide an independent and objective assessment of the qualitative research at the conclusion of the study. The procedure of having an independent peer reviewer was to look over the entire research, that is, to identify the accuracy of transcription, the relationship between the research questions and the data, and to assess the level of data analysis from the raw data or field notes through interpretations. The peer reviewer enhanced the overall validity of the qualitative research study (Creswell, 2009).

Moreover, the researcher used member checking. In other words, the data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions were examined by the participants / principals. The member checking technique helped to establish credibility of the qualitative research. It provided an opportunity to fully understand and assess what the participants intended to do through his or

her actions. It also gave the participants the opportunity to correct errors and challenge what are perceived as wrong interpretations.

As a means of establishing rapport, the researcher met with each participant on several occasions, before the official interviews, in order to build trust, credibility, and rapport. The familiarity of knowing the researcher added greater value to the participants' comfort level and their willingness to answer the questions honestly and with integrity.

The researcher designed the study to address the following over-arching research question: How do South Carolina high school principals successfully implement smaller learning communities? Before attempting to answer this overarching question, several issues had to be addressed using sub-questions:

1. What are the supporting forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities?

The researcher found a total of eleven forces based on the literature review and from extensive participant interviews: accountability, data-driven decision making, achievement, affiliation/belonging, cost, equity, parental involvement and satisfaction, preparation for higher education, safety and order, teacher attitude and satisfaction, truancy and dropouts.

Accountability and data-driven decision making were two additional forces found based upon the common responses and categorical themes reported from the interview participants.

2. What are the impeding forces experienced by South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities?

The three forces were cultural expectations, fiscal and physical constraints, and law, regulations, policies, and procedures. However only two impeding forces were mentioned during the participants interview: cultural expectations and fiscal and physical constraints.

3. What strategies do South Carolina high school principals use in dealing with impeding forces?

The researcher identified five strategies principals used in dealing with impeding forces in implementing smaller learning communities: restructuring the local of teachers, allowing teachers to utilize the data to make improvements in student learning, creating professional and staff developments opportunities, authority and power, and motivation.

4. How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being the leading facilitator of their schools?

All of the principals view themselves as being the leading facilitator of their schools. However, several participants saw their leadership role more of a management facilitator rather than a facilitator for change.

5. How do South Carolina high school principals describe the culture and structure of their schools before implementing smaller learning communities?

The researcher identified three descriptions of how South Carolina high school principals viewed the culture and structure of their schools before implementing smaller learning communities: sports oriented, traditional high school, and factory and mill concept.

6. How do South Carolina high school principals describe the culture and structure of their school after implementing smaller learning communities?

The researcher identified three descriptions of how South Carolina high school principals viewed the culture and structure of their schools after implementing smaller learning communities: student-centered, change of paradigm, and effective methods of instructions for all students.

7. How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being the change-agent of their schools?

Even though all of the participants view themselves as the change-agent of their schools, many of the participants viewed their role as managers under the watchful eye of the district instead of having the authority to make changes or decisions at the school level.

8. How effective are smaller learning communities viewed by South Carolina high school principals?

Although all the participants believed that SLC could be the catalyst for greater school reform, many of the participants recognized that SLC was not the exclusive answer to all of the many challenges their school faced. Many of the participants stated that the key to genuine school reform begins in the classroom. There is no quick one step solution to school reform. Teachers need to learn better instructional method of teaching and learning. There must be effective, authentic, and engaging instructions going on in the classrooms, reported one participant.

In summation, most high schools have remained structured the same way over the last 50 years, but recently some high schools have begun to implement smaller learning communities based on the suggestions of researchers that positive outcomes associated with SLCs stem from the school's ability to create close personal environments in which teachers can work collaboratively with each other, create communal environment with students, and support learning. In the state of South Carolina, 58 schools have undergone the transition into smaller learning communities out of the total 191 high schools. This represents 30% of the high schools in South Carolina.

## Discussion of Findings

### Supporting Forces

The literature revealed nine supporting forces as the forces that have influenced high school administrators to implement smaller learning communities. These nine forces were achievement, affiliation/belonging, cost, equity, parental involvement and satisfaction, preparation for higher education, safety and order, teacher attitude and satisfaction, truancy and dropouts (Ancess & Ort. , 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Bickel,1999; Cotton, 1996a, 1996b; Cushman, 1999; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, & Moss, 2000, Mitchell, 2000; Oxley, 1989, 1996, 2004; Raywid, 1998, 1999; Roellke, 1996; Wasley, et al., 2000; Wasley & Lear, 2001). Two additional supporting forces, accountability and data-driven decision making were not found in the review of literature. These two forces were created based upon the common responses and categorical themes reported from the interviews. Therefore, the total number of supporting forces from the literature review and interviews were eleven.

The most frequent supporting forces for South Carolina principals implementing smaller learning communities were accountability and truancy & dropouts. Due to federal and state mandates such as *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and AYP which created a era of measurable accountability. Accountability was ranked top in priority (with truancy & dropout) as a supporting force experienced by South Carolina high school principals in implementing smaller learning communities. High school principals are responsible for leading the charge in accountability measures at their schools. Accountability issues seem to drive the efforts to reform high schools as a means to increase student achievement.

Some administrators felt that the national and state accountability mandate to increase student achievement are forcing some students to become frustrated and disenfranchised with the school environment. This sense of urgency created by federal and state accountability standards which mandates administrators to reform their schools can be a daunting task.

Having one of the worst on-time graduation and dropout rates in the nation, many South Carolina principals are looking to small learning communities to change this debilitating reality. A large number of authors in the literature review favored smaller learning communities for its ability to create and develop personal relationship with students. Affiliation /sense of belonging ranked a close second for the most frequent supporting force in implementing smaller learning communities.

Most of the participants summarized that the single most important factor of SLCs was personalization. Smaller learning community has the propensity to increase collaboration and relationship-building between teacher and teacher and teacher and student. One administrator admitted to the thought of terminating faculty members who opposed the idea of building relationships and hiring only those who emphasized and valued the importance of relationship-building.

Several administrators believed that the success of personalization will give rise to school pride, increased attendance rates, reduction of disciplinary issues, reduction in dropout rates, increased student achievement on standardized test scores, increased promotion rates, and increased graduation rates.

Even though building relationship with students may not be the sole solution to the problems facing schools, students who feel connected to the school environment are more likely to perform better in schools, concluded one administrator. South Carolina administrators are

looking for ways not only to develop relationships with students, but provide a meaningful and relevance curriculum that is applicable to their daily lives.

Preparation for higher education tied with affiliation/sense of belonging as the second most reported supporting forces shared by South Carolina high school principals in implementing smaller learning communities. All of the research participants supported the state of South Carolina mandate of (EEDA). Education Economic Development Act (EEDA) is a legislative act designed to better prepare South Carolina students for the workforce and post-high-school education through early career planning and an individual curriculum. This legislative act provides students with the opportunity to customize their high school education according to their post-secondary and career aspirations.

Low income African American and Hispanic students face a particularly difficult time making the transition from high school to college (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Only six percent of young people from the lowest socioeconomic quartile earn a four-year degree (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2001)

“The guidance staff, career development facilitators, and faculty advisor meet individually with students and their parents to update individual graduation plans, discuss requirements for specific college entrance and assist with securing financial aid”, commented Nickles. Hayes concluded, “To help students gain admission to colleges, students may participate in school-sponsored SAT and ACT improvement sessions. With grant funds, these sessions will be available to all students rather than only to the ones who can afford to pay the full cost.” “Experienced SAT/ACT experts provide one day-day workshop each semester either on-site or at an off-campus site location”, summarized Wood. “Throughout the year students visit regional colleges to learn about the academic programs offered at each site. Bus



transportation allows students who otherwise might not be able to visit an out-of-area college campus the opportunity to make college visits”, reported Fields.

Achievement and data-driven decision making ranked third in the supporting forces principals used in implementing smaller learning communities. In regard to achievement, several of the principals reported that they noticed an alarming achievement gap that continued to increase and widen among subgroups. The achievement gap between African American students and whites continues to widen. The Hispanic population which is growing at a rate faster than the national average has increased 200% in the last decade (SC Commission for Minority Affairs, August 2007). These challenges, in turn, lead to low enrollment in AP (Advanced Placement) and IB (International Baccalaureate) courses and low enrollment in higher education. Chapman reported, “The challenge for schools lie in meeting the learning needs of the diverse population while making the learning relevant so that students remain authentically engaged in learning and graduating to higher level of study and skill acquisition.”

Tied with achievement was data-driven decision making. Just as accountability is based on performance and measurable data, data drives decision-making. Having the faculty and staff observe, scrutinize, and evaluate data fifteen years ago was a foreign practice. Most of the supposed data was placed on a shelf or stored in a file cabinet. However, today it is imperative that data becomes a vital part of the school curriculum. Teachers and administrators must understand and be able to analyze data based on achievement levels and the needs of students. “We all know that increased achievement scores on school report cards determine whether or not schools and districts receive federal funds. Schools which continue to struggle academically run into jeopardy of being labeled a falling school, which in turn, places teacher and administrator jobs in jeopardy”, reported Strauss. Therefore, the “decisions about what to focus on, what to

teach, as well as goals and objectives, must be data-driven. Without accurate data, you would not know where you were or where you need to go”, summarized Hayes.

Equity and teacher attitude and satisfaction were the least discussed by the research participants. One of the participants stated that equity was a supporting force for school reform. One participant mentioned that teacher attitudes and satisfaction increased positively while implementing smaller learning communities.

Although identified in the review of literature, other issues such as cost, parent involvement and satisfaction, and safety and order were not mentioned by participants of this study as factors for supporting the implementation of smaller learning communities or school reform (Cocklin, 1999; Cotton, 1996a; Gladden, 1998; Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, and Moss, 2000; Hasley, 2004; Oxley, 1996, 2004; Raywid, 1995, 1999; Steifel, Berne, Iatarola, & Frucher, 2000). While these factors such as cost, parent involvement and satisfaction, and safety and order were evident in the national literature, most South Carolina schools are not located in metropolitan or large urban areas, which may limit some factors which were experienced by other administrators.

### **Impeding Forces**

The literature revealed three impeding forces as the forces experienced by administrators in implementing smaller learning communities. These three forces were cultural expectations, fiscal and physical constraints, and law, regulations, policies, and procedures (Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Bickel, 1999; Cotton, 1996a, 1996b; Cushman, 1999; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, & Moss, 2000, Mitchell, 2000; Oxley, 1989, 1996, 2004; Raywid, 1998, 1999; Roellke, 1996; Wasley, et al., 2000; Wasley & Lear, 2001). However only two forces were mentioned by the participants. They were

cultural expectations and fiscal & physical constraints. No participants mentioned laws, regulations, policies, and procedures as an impeding force experienced by administrators in implementing smaller learning communities.

The main impeding force, having a frequency of three responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities was cultural expectations. For the majority of administrators, teachers were the group that was most resistant to change. Administrators reported some of faculty and staff did not expect SLCs to create reform or student achievement. Some teachers were resistant and reluctant to undergo major local restructuring within their building. A few even chose resignation than to face change even if it meant substantial school improvement.

The second impeding force, having a frequency of two responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities was: fiscal and physical constraints. The impeding force included older building structures and limited budgets for personnel. Young stated, "Our building is over 40 years old. It was designed on a departmentalize model. SLC's require an integrated and collaborative design model. In some cases, we couldn't move rooms, like science labs, thereby limiting our pure SLC approach." Fields reported, "Because we have a limited personnel budget, we could not hire enough teachers to meet the demand of all our SLC's. We had to place and assign teachers in other SLC's as well to make things work." Therefore, fiscal and physical constraints were two impeding forces mentioned by the participants.

Of all the sub-questions that were asked of the participants, the question of, "How do South Carolina high school principals view themselves in terms of being *the* change-agent of their schools?" was the question principals struggled or wrestled with the most. Three of the participants were hesitantly to give an answer while one fidgeted in his chair with a grimace.

Some participants answered the question based upon what their districts would want to hear but their faces and body language told a different story. It would appear that many of the same routine of traditional high schools were still strong and alive even in the face of implementing SLC. It was clear to the researcher that the participants had a great desire to bring about real change but the impeding forces posed many challenges.

In a world that is currently in a vortex of dramatic change, America high schools cannot afford to be an exception. Change is now a vital part of society than ever before. In order for schools to function at its peak performance, school leaders and stakeholders must be willing to embrace change and become partners with it. School leaders must be willing to change or be left behind.

### **The Analysis of the Cognitive Frameworks Used by South Carolina High School Principals**

Principals can learn a great deal from the cognitive frameworks (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Cognitive frameworks are frames or lenses which allow administrators and leaders to see from multiple perspectives. Just as there are four cardinal directions: north, south, east, and west that govern the directional dimensions of the world, there are four cognitive frameworks that governs the dimensions of organizations: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. With the knowledge and ability to utilize the cognitive frameworks, principals can have a panoramic, 360 degree, view inside their organizations.

Cognitive frameworks offer powerful and provocative ways of thinking about organizational opportunities and pitfalls. Many times, leaders misread clues and situations in their organizations. Cognitive frameworks allow leaders to look at situations through different perspectives which reduces the likelihood of erroneous decisions and judgments. Cognitive frameworks are multiple frames that will enable leaders to better see what they are up against

and what possible solutions they might use. Bolman and Deal (2008) argue that in every organization there are four possible frames or mental processes.

In analyzing the cognitive frameworks commonly used by administrators in implementing smaller learning communities, the researcher found that the majority of cognitive frames fell within the human resource framework. The human resource framework operates under the assumptions that organizations need ideas, energy, and talent. Administrators reported that the majority of their stakeholders were willing to create or generate new ideas and the energy necessary to have a more positive environment and increase student achievement. Administrators felt that stakeholders' involvement in the SLC implementation process provided individuals with meaningful and satisfying work, while the organizations got the talent and energy they need to succeed.

The second largest group of responses fell within the structural framework. The structural framework operates under the assumptions that organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives as well as the use of coordination and arrangements to ensure that goals and objectives are met. It appears that the administrators are trying to redefine and assign roles and responsibilities in their organizations while providing opportunities for stakeholders to give input into school reform.

The third largest group of responses fell within the symbols framework. The symbolic framework operates under the assumptions that when facing uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, find direction, create purpose, anchor hope and faith, and foster passion. One administrator indicated that the symbols throughout his school have reenergized the passion of teaching and learning for both students and teachers alike.

The least group of responses fell within the political framework. The political framework operates under the assumptions that goals and decisions emerge through the distribution of resources, power, and influence. It appears that the majority of power and influence within these schools remain with the principal and/or administrators within the building.

Based on the cognitive frameworks, most principals and teachers normally operate in the human resource and structural frameworks. While the result of this research is in conjunction and compliance with Bolman and Deal's research on how school leaders view organizations, there are two frameworks that need more exploration: political and symbolic frameworks. It is these two frameworks, if used effectively, may bring about substantial improvements in the restructuring of school organizations.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to identify the specific supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina high school principals implementing smaller learning communities and analyze these forces based on Bolman and Deal cognitive frameworks. The researcher concluded the following:

1. Nine supporting forces were identified as being experienced by South Carolina high school principals including: accountability, achievement, affiliation/sense of belonging, equity, cost, data-driven decision making, preparation for higher education, teacher attitudes and satisfaction, and truancy and dropouts.
2. Two supporting forces, accountability and data-driven decision making, were derived during the interview process from the participants.
3. While the literature review did not reveal accountability and data-driven decision making as a common supporting force for implementing smaller learning

- communities, five participants of the seven interviewees concluded that data from state and federal accountability standards had led them to a reform effort. Five of the participants of the seven interviewed stated that data-driven decision making was an important supporting force in implementing SLC.
4. The main supporting forces, having a frequency of three or more responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities as an organizational restructuring efforts were: (1) an attempt to meet the accountability standards set forth in federal and state mandates, (2) an attempt to increase student's academic achievement, (3) a desire to increase a student's affiliation and sense of belonging in their school, (4) an attempt to involve more stakeholders in the decision-making process, (5) an attempt to prepare students for higher education, and (6) an attempt to reduce the truancy and dropout rate.
  5. The researcher identified three impeding forces experienced by administrators while implementing smaller learning communities based on the literature review: cultural expectations, fiscal & physical constraints, and laws, regulations, policies, and procedures. However, during the interviews only two impeding forces were mentioned by the participants: cultural expectations and fiscal & physical constraints. Due to the fact that people (including teachers) expect high schools to function with the same familiarity as when they went to school, there can be strong resistance when creating school change. The participants cited teacher resistance to change from high school practices of which they were familiar and student social expectations. The participants also indicated that the physical structure of their schools and the limited monetary resources restrict SLC from operating at the maximum level.

6. The researcher identified five strategies principals used in dealing with impeding forces in implementing smaller learning communities: restructuring the local of teachers, allowing the teachers to utilize the data to make improvements in student learning and achievements, and creating professional and staff developments opportunities, authority and power, and motivation. The main impeding force, having three or more responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities was: teachers utilizing the data to make instructional decisions.
7. The researcher identified three descriptions of how South Carolina high school principals viewed the culture and structure of their schools before implementing smaller learning communities: school primarily focused on sports, traditional high school, and factory and mill concept. The main description, having three or more responses, of how South Carolina principals describe the culture and structure of their school before implementing smaller learning communities was: traditional high school.
8. The researcher identified three descriptions of how South Carolina high school principals viewed the culture and structure of their schools after implementing smaller learning communities: student-centered, change of paradigm, and creating effective methods of instructions for all students. The main descriptions having three or more responses of how South Carolina principals describe the culture and structure of their school after implementing smaller learning communities were: student-centered and change of paradigm.
9. Even though all of the participants view themselves as the change-agent of their schools, several of the participants viewed their role as managers instead of having



- the authority to make changes or decisions solely at the school level. Three participants mentioned that the chain of command must be followed.
10. Most of the supporting forces for South Carolina high school administrators and faculties have been a result of federal and state educational mandates to improve the educational process for students and close the achievement gaps.
  11. The majority of impeding forces were: cultural expectations; fiscal and physical constraints; and laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.
  12. Administrators spend the majority of their efforts in overcoming impeding forces dealing with structural and human resource strategies, leaving little time to deal with the political and symbolic framework.
  13. The researcher identified cognitive frameworks commonly used by administrators in implementing smaller learning communities: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The structural frame emphasizes productivity and posits that schools work best when goals and roles are clear and when efforts of individuals and groups are high coordinated through authority, policies, and rules as well as through more-informal strategies. The human resource frame is a favorite among teachers and principals. It highlights the importance of individual needs and motives. The political frame points out the limits of authority and the inevitability that resources are always too scarce to fulfill all demands. The symbolic frame centers attention on culture, meaning, belief, and faith.
  14. South Carolina administrators appear to have primarily used structural and human resources strategies to overcome impeding forces, not fully utilizing political and symbolic frameworks.

15. Although the seven participants are only in their second year of implementing SLC, all of the participants were optimistic about the current effectiveness of smaller learning communities at their school. As stated by the participants, time will be the determining factor of the effectiveness of SLC.

### **Implications**

High school administrators are faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles to reforming their educational environments, mainly due to external pressures such as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. The purpose of this study was to analyze the supporting and impeding forces experienced by South Carolina high school principals implementing smaller learning communities based on the work of Bolman and Deal, (2008). By providing cognitive frameworks, such as structural, human resource, political, and symbolic, future administrators may have a powerful and resilient resource for dealing with the forces involved in implementing smaller learning communities.

Administrators spend a great deal of time dealing with human resource and structural frameworks confronting impeding forces for implementing smaller leaning communities. However, political and symbolic frameworks were not utilized to their full capacity. If used effectively, these two frameworks may add greater dimension and depth to the redesign of organizations.

Since the state of South Carolina is not a unionized state and collective bargaining does not exist, administrators are faced with finding creative measures to implement change and to create school improvements. Most administrators used the human resource framework to target and overcome the most frequent impeding force, cultural expectations.

Administrators who participated in this study seem to have focused a great deal on structural and human resources issues during the implementation of their smaller learning communities. Bolman and Deal's (2008) research suggests that administrators who ignore the political and symbolic frameworks for viewing change will most likely make only temporary changes in their school's structure without sustainability (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Administrators cannot overlook the significance of the political and symbolic frameworks when dealing with impeding forces which arise during a restructuring process.

Colleges of education in the state of South of Carolina should consider including coursework that will train future administrators in restructuring American high schools. Theory and research skills are necessary; however, future administrators need hands-on experience in dealing with the change process.

### **Recommendations**

Since 58 federally-funded reformed South Carolina high schools exist, the researcher recommends that further research on the forces that support and impede high school principals implementing smaller learning communities be completed to get a broader sense of the specific practices utilized by South Carolina administrators. Moreover, additional research needs to be completed examining the political and symbolic frameworks, utilized by administrators to overcome high school reform impeding forces.

Even though this research focused on supporting and impeding forces, the participants also gave the researcher valuable information which was not anticipated in the research. In other words, by collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher found common themes from the participants not originally found in the research literature. This information based on the participants' interviews included the importance of communication, evaluation, and goal-setting.

These three additional potential supporting forces may be invaluable in helping future high school principals successfully implement smaller learning communities. These three new supporting forces may be a research topic for other researchers in the future.

More research needs to be completed using the cognitive framework model used by Bolman and Deal. The cognitive framework model can be used in any organizational setting. Principals need to study and learn the different mental frameworks that make up how organizations can be viewed or seen and the wherewithal to effectively use each model to redesign schools and organizations.

The over-arching question of this research was, “How do South Carolina high school principals successful implement smaller learning communities?” One research examination to answer this question is limited. More SLC research is needed to answer such an important, relevant, pertinent, and provocative question.

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Zimmerman, J. A. (2005). Making change at a junior high school: One principal's sense of it.  
*American Secondary Education* 33(2), 29-38. APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A  
IRB Approval Letter

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
<b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

**To:** Les Gamble, Jr.  
102 Abbey Court  
Greenwood, SC 29649

**CC:** Charles E. Patterson  
Associate Vice President for Research

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Date:** April 22, 2010

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

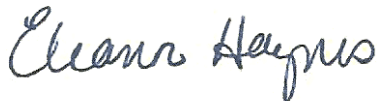
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After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H10331** and titled “**The Cognitive Frameworks that Enable South Carolina High School Principals to Implement Smaller Learning Communities**”, it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to 7 subjects.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

**This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter.** If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX B  
Cognitive Framework Analysis of Interview Data

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Structural</b>	<b>Human Resource</b>	<b>Political</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>
Joe Fields	We established communities that involved all staff in researching our improvement in many areas			We wanted names to be meaningful to stakeholders & be symbolic of change
Ralph Hayes	We needed everyone to look at the pig picture and find a solution	I think the best way to create success is through motivation. We put things out there in small pieces to assure ourselves that we are creating success		
Beth Wood	While it took some time, getting input from all parties involved lead to better decisions and easier implementation	We intentionally established routine committee meetings to solicit support and input		
Stephen Nickles	It was amazing how easy decisions could be made once we had all stakeholders' input	We did a great job of communicating after we realized there was some resistance within the ranks		

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Gregory Young	In examining student performance we had to look at teachers. Sometimes this meant crossing kids and teachers into different SLCs	We knew we were headed in the right direction when teachers began asking questions about students' home life and conditions	We revisited some responsibilities that had been overlooked due to constant administrative turnover	
Bob Strauss	Every department spent hours and energy developing strategies to enhance school improvement and student achievement	The staff development training allowed teachers to ask questions and receive concrete answers to their fears and concerns	The more communication faculty and staff receives the better the chances goals and objectives are understood	
Richard Chapman	A lot of time was spent preparing the groundwork for implementing from getting the latest research on to creating a customized SLC that would accommodate our staff	Each month we celebrate a different teacher	We have found that when teachers put pressure on teachers to perform, teachers who are not performing usually improve.	Each month we celebrate a different teacher
Stephen Nickles	All stakeholders had to be involved to provide all perspectives			We find at least one item to celebrate each time we gather.
Joe Fields		No one could say they were unaware of the areas being examined or how they could become involved in the decision process	Developing buy-in creates a team willing to work together in overcoming conflicts.	

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Beth Woods	We redefined our dept. chair responsibilities from an old structure of plan autocracy and execution to a cyclical process of planning and seeking input from department members	I think that the meetings [all meetings] are crucial because they keep you in contact with positive forces as well as negative forces.		
Gregory young	There some cases where we [administrators] had to make some decisions; they weren't always popular	A great deal of decision making was placed back on the teachers to produce buy-in. While they were responsible for devising solutions to problems and issues, teachers were also providing support for their solutions.		Do whatever you can to motivate the teachers.
Ralph Hayes	One of the first challenges we faced in addressing goals was how we would recognize and celebrate teachers and students.	Our leadership team no longer tolerates teachers sitting idly by and criticizing in private. This type of attitude and behavior is no longer acceptable at our school.		One of the first challenges we faced in addressing goals was how we would recognize and celebrate teachers and students.
Ralph Hayes	Some of our staff leadership had to be change due to ineffective practice			Our people soon recognized that the new organization made it easier to hold everyone accountable- students, teachers, and administrators

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Bob Strauss	At the onset of implementing SLC, we determined what would be our short term and long term goals	Our faculty and staff meetings became the catalyst for implementing SLC and school improvement	In our academies, teachers are held accountable for each other and for student learning	Students and teachers take great pride in the symbols they represent.
Robert Chapman	Our goal and objectives were for the SLC to be the vehicle that would enable us to raise the bar as it relates to state and mandatory testing	Teachers began to create dialogue among themselves as to how SLC could work effectively in their field of study		Every hall is represented by a certain symbol. Students often identify themselves by the symbols.
Joe Fields	Goal setting and collaborative strategic planning go hand in hand.		Power once held by dept chairs and the administrator in the building was now held by a number of faculty members including team leaders and counselors	
Beth Wood	We create competition among SLCs to determine who will have the best attendance or passing rate			
Stephen Nickles		We created surveys for teachers to identify their areas of interest in order to place them with an SLC that they could have a connection to.		

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Ralph Hayes	With SLCs, lines of communication became much clearer than in a traditional high school. It was very clear who deals with what issue; you know where to go to get information.			A great deal of time went into the decision making process for what we would name our SLCs. We wanted the names to be meaningful and symbolic of our organizational changes
Joe Fields		[After 10 years] we've gone from no evaluation process to looking at data and making choices according to what was needed as best for everyone.	Conflict coexists with change; the best way to handle conflict is to be a good listener	
Stephen Nickles	You have to establish goals to know where you are going. If your school has no goals then the organization is just spinning wheels.	Involving the naysayers on committees and sending them to SC workshops and conferences [was productive]		
Robert Chapman	Communication is key when making dramatic changes in schools	... in order for the SLC to be effective there had to be commitment from everyone	When teachers understood that part of evaluation was based on student achievement scores, many began to focus on the needs of all the students.	

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Bob Strauss	The more we talked about components and benefits of SLC, the more comfortable teachers became	We found that motivation is a powerful way to reinforce positive behavior		
Stephen Nickles	We established a meeting schedule. Since meetings are scheduled in advance, we have an agenda, stay on track and resolve issues.	Monthly SLC meetings encourage open discussion concerning student progress and faculty frustrations. People have become accustomed to sharing		
Beth Wood		We had our negative folks face the concept in person; allowing them to air their concerns and to question folks with restructuring experience.	We meet once a month to eat and share ideas with each other.	
Bob Strauss		All stakeholders were involved in decision making and implementation		We believe that celebrating small successes lead to great success.
Gregory Young	Our goals were established along with our strategic direction	... individual interviews with every faculty member. I wanted each one to know how... SLC effort would affect them and also have them identify where / how they could be effective.	...teachers feel more comfortable within their group of teachers to express themselves if there is an area of conflict.	



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Ralph Hayes	NCLB Standards set the goals and directions for our school	Most of our conflicts were resolved through fact to face communication	Change is a difficult process. Our administration had to force a lot of change through while emphasizing federal accountability.	Our data wall became symbolic of our success in reaching our goal.
Beth Wood	Monetary incentives are necessary but they don't have to be on a large scale. Our kids will compete for anything.		... developed goals based on the interest of students, teachers and parents to see the students succeed.	
		We have learned to put our differences on the table and come together to reach an agreement.	While our BOE supported us in writing the SLC grant, they still remain unsure of the restructuring. We took advantage of every opportunity to share the successes with them in support of SLC.	
Stephen Nickles	Federal accountability standards determined the course of action	Our evaluation process has become less fearful and intimidating. Teachers now see it as a helpful practice rather than documentation for dismissal.		

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Joe Fields	Communication has to take more than one form in order to make sure that all stakeholders know what's going on.		Once we way the expectation for NCLB and AYP and where we stood on the continuum, there was no choice but to change; accountability provided the major portion of our motivation.	
Beth Wood	Communication should be frequent and in varied forms. I often communicate verbally and then follow up in writing.	Being able to meet as a group and look at our kids within the SLC helped us come up with a plan to help the kids.		