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## High School Transformation: The Lived Experience of Teachers Moving to Small Learning Environments

Reginald Lawrence

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HIGH SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS  
MOVING TO SMALL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

by

REGINALD LAWRENCE

(Under the Direction of BRENDA MARINA)

ABSTRACT

Educators faced with a decline in student achievement and increases in dropout rates are seeking ways to provide the best possible educational environment for students (Oxley, 2005). High school transformation, also known as the small schools movement, is a reform that is gaining currency in the world of education (Meier, 2006). Alien (2001) observed that high school transformation is the process of altering the makeup of a large comprehensive high school, also known as a traditional high school, into small high schools or small learning communities at the same location. The teacher is the most important component of educational reform (Fullan, 1993; Glickman, 1990; Tracey, 1993), yet little research has focused on the experience of educators during the transformation to smaller learning environments. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers who have completed the transformation process from a large comprehensive high school to a small learning environment. Data were collected through open-ended, phenomenological-oriented interviews with 10 teachers in schools that had been transformed into smaller learning environments within an Atlanta Metro school district. The qualitative data from this study yielded the concepts of employment concerns, district support, teacher involvement in planning, and

instructional changes. Ultimately, this study will further discussions regarding all teachers involved in schools during transformation and will serve as a springboard for policy and practice changes leading to a reduction in resistance to change for future reforms and a refined process for high school transformation.

INDEX WORDS: Change, Reform, Small schools

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by

REGINALD LAWRENCE

Ed.S., Central Michigan University, 2004

M.A., Central Michigan University, 2002

B.A., North Carolina Central University, 1995

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REGINALD LAWRENCE

Major Professor: Brenda Marina

Committee: Lucinda Chance  
James Green  
Georj Lewis

Electronic Version Approved:

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## DEDICATION

On the path to reaching the goal of completion of my dissertation I have acknowledged and dedicated my papers and works to various persons. My masters' thesis was dedicated to my mother, who remains my hero. My specialist research was dedicated to my wife and son. Additionally, God was acknowledged at each step in the process. This particular work is dedicated to my home town neighborhood, Holly Acres, located in North Carolina.

All the lessons I learned from my neighborhood growing up have culminated to this point in my life. The pride you taught me in who I am gave me the strength to express myself during the defenses of my work. It was that pride or swagger that gave me the audacity to think that I could be a doctor in the first place. Living in Holy Acres one learns that you have to get back up no matter how many times or how hard you get knocked down. That is where I obtained the drive to complete this goal while working full time. Holy Acres gave me enough resistance growing up to ensure that I was mentally strong enough to reach any goal and avoid the temptations to stray from the path.

My neighborhood is the foundation of what I am and I will never forget where I am from. I dedicate this dissertation to everyone who has shared a page in the book that forms the story of my life. From the old ladies at church who encouraged me to the drug dealers on the corner, each of you played a roll in what I have become. I hope you are as proud of me as I am of you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my lord and savior Jesus Christ through whom all things are possible. I am firmly aware that my life could have been far different if not for your love for me. Every milestone or accomplishment in my life is due to your grace and mercy. I can only pray that I can become the man you desire me to be.

Also, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of my committee members in assisting me with the completion of this goal. Their expert advice and insight helped me to produce a dissertation that is worthy of merit. The major objective of the committee was to ensure that a scholarly work was produced. This work could not have been completed without a committee as dedicated and accessible as Dr. Marina, Dr. Chance, Dr. Green, and Dr. Lewis. I salute you for your efforts and assistance.

Thank you to my wife and son for allowing me to take the time to complete this goal. I realize that this goal took time away from our time as a family and I thank you for your understanding. However, understand that it is because of you that I strived to reach this goal. You gave me the strength to achieve at the highest level so that our family could be in a more secure position and my son would have the power of my example to drive him to reach his highest potential.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Change does not necessarily assure progress, but progress implacably requires change,” according to Henry Steele Commager (Lewis, 2006).

As schools face public demands to increase student achievement and reduce dropout rates, one of the educational reforms occurring in America’s high schools is the transformation of large comprehensive high schools into smaller learning environments (Oxley, 2005; Steinberg & Allen, 2002). This transformation creates either as small schools or small learning communities and involves a shift in the administration of instruction. Educational reform moves in cycles, and the shift has now moved to providing small learning environments in an effort to improve education (Steinberg & Allen, 2002; Wasley et al., 2002). District leaders possess a common discernment of cost, benefits, and best practices pertaining to implementation of change from a large high school to a smaller learning unit. Research is prevalent on the change in the role of the administrators and the implications for changes in administering instruction, including studies conducted by Bomotti, Ginsberg, and Cobb (1999), Raywid (2002), and Quint (2005). Change is not always popular, and the process has opponents. Bobby (2007), Miner (2005), and Supovitz and Christman (2005) observed that the transformation of high schools is not without opposition and negative effects. Change involves people, and in this case the participants are educators. Craine (2007) found that the change process takes people through seven stages, including shock and anger. Educators have traveled through the stages during the process of reforming high schools into smaller units; however, the limited research pertaining to the impact on the educators involved in the

process has created a gap in the literature. This study will provide information pertaining to the lived experiences of educators who have participated in the transformation of traditional high schools into small learning environments. The review of literature for this study examines the origins, benefits, oppositions, cost, implementation, and instructional changes associated with the transformation into smaller learning environments. The results of this study may provide insight into the change processes of educators and unearth a framework of issues for district leaders to consider when implementing large-scale change.

### Background of the Study

Education and reform are words that seem to be synonymous with each other. In fact, reform for education dates back to classical times when Plato believed that children would never learn unless intrinsic motivation was present. Conversely, Katz (1976) observed that the compulsory education law ensures that all children are required by law to receive an education and governments are to provide this education under the provisions of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This commitment to educate children began a trend of changes noted by Marzano (2000), who observed that research leading to reforms has gone through stages that include the school effectiveness movement, block scheduling, and improvement in literacy rates. In fact, Marzano (2000) stated that educational reform has passed through the classical, progressive, and civil rights era and has transformed itself into the standards-based movement of today.

Conant (1964) once thought that the large comprehensive high school was the answer to the problems in the world of education. Cutshall (2003) observed that about 70% of all high school students in the United States attend a school with 1,000 or more

students, and a sizable group goes to schools with 2,000 or more students. This large school model came into existence after World War II, but the origin of the concept revolves around the Soviet launch of *Sputnik* in 1957 (Cutshall, 2003). American society at this time believed that schools had to be enlarged to offer the kinds of math and science classes students needed to compete technologically with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Cutshall, 2003). Dukes and Lamar-Dukes (2006) traced the modern large comprehensive high school to the ideas espoused by James Conant (1964). Dukes and Lamar-Dukes (2006) found that small schools were inefficient and did not have enough course offerings for students. This led to a change in the structure of high schools during his time. As the size of high schools began to increase, McDonald (2004) questioned how schools could serve everyone and give attention to individuals.

Noguera (2002) noted that the structure and organization of large comprehensive high schools make them prone to a host of problems, including disengagement, violence, and fragmentation. Additionally, the infrastructure present in most comprehensive high schools makes the use of nontraditional instructional methods or modified curriculum difficult (Noguera, 2002). The challenge for educators in large high schools is to develop a comprehensive support model that enables all students to benefit from educational opportunities and services leading to a fulfilling quality of life (Grant & Grant, 2002). Large high schools have been shown to operate less cost-effectively than smaller schools, have a higher occurrence of violent acts, have more students drop out, and insufficiently serve the needs related to students of color (Lee & Smith, 1994). These factors have influenced many to question the size of high schools and advocate for the creation of small learning environments.

The overlaps that exist between the school effectiveness and standards-based movement have resulted in the need for the transformation of the nation's high schools. McCaslin (2006) wrote that reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and *The National Education Summit Policy Statement* (1996) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001) raised awareness across America about the condition of education and prompted a call for reform in high schools. The pressure on urban schools to address social inequities remains enormous, but few large high schools, in their planning and priority setting, have shown the ability to respond to the real needs of students and families (Myatt, 2004). The conversion of large high schools into small focused learning environments is gaining currency as an education reform strategy in communities across the United States (Steinberg & Allen, 2002). Issues such as dropout rates, school violence, and the increasing achievement gap for minority students are pushing America toward a change to small schools. Shriberg and Shriberg (2006) affirmed the need for change, citing high dropout rates, estimated at 29% nationally and much higher for African American and Hispanic students, as evidence. Quint (2006) concurred, stating that the low academic achievement of many high school students and the large numbers of high school graduates who are required to take remedial classes in college validate the need for change. Quint (2006) observed that 28% of all students entering public 2- and 4-year colleges in the fall of 2000 needed remediation. Quint (2006) magnified the issue by observing that more than two-thirds of new jobs created between 2000 and 2010 require a postsecondary education, with the fastest-growing, best-paying jobs requiring the most education.



School districts are challenged with correcting issues of violence, high dropout rates, and low student performance on standardized tests in an effort to meet the provisions of Adequate Yearly Progress listed in the No Child Left Behind Act enacted by President Bush's Goals 2000 plan. Shriberg (2006) cast a veil of gloom, reporting that the dropout rate is currently increasing while the achievement gap has shown no significant improvement for minorities. Additionally, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2003) reported that, during the 1999–2000 school year, 71% of U.S. public schools reported experiencing at least one violent incident, and the total number of incidents reported was 1,466,395. Serious violent incidents including weapons or gang activity have also increased; 20% of public schools reported at least one incident, and a total of 60,719 incidents were reported (NCES, 2003).

The process of improving our high schools requires change. Change is a process that does not happen quickly or without different stages before benefits can be determined. Fullan (2001) stated that the change process consists of a series of three overlapping phases: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. Initiation is about deciding to embark on innovation, and developing commitment toward the process. Implementation is the phase of the process that has received the most attention. This is when organizations attempt innovation. Last, institutionalization is the phase when innovation and change become part of the organization's normal order of business (Fullan, 2001).

Change in education occurs in a form known as reform. Educational reform has occurred over several eras and has taken on many names. At the center of any reform is

the teacher. The teacher is the most important component of educational reform (Fullan, 1993). Fullan (1993) commented:

The individual educator is a critical starting point because the leverage for change can be greater with the individuals, and each educator has some control over what he or she does, because it is ones' own motives and skills that are at question. (pp. 12–13)

Glickman (1990) insisted that the role of the teacher in the change process must be addressed before sustainable change could occur. Tracey (1993) stated that the teacher was most important since he or she decided how the change would be implemented in the classroom.

Little is known about the effects of reforms on the lives of educators. Smylie (1994) recorded that school restructuring efforts have created a heightened awareness of the need to reexamine the rewards and conditions of teaching. McKinny (2003) discerned that past reform initiatives have not been aligned with the culture of the school and, when paired with ineffective communication to educators, have limited implementation efforts. In addition, Johnson (1997) observed that a resounding theme among restructuring schools has been positive change, which requires attention to the beliefs of educators about the change, which influences their professional behavior. Mclaughlin (1990), Popham (1988), and Scriven (1994) agreed, stating that a void exists in understanding complex change processes experienced by educators as they become involved in policy-driven program innovations and change initiatives. Claudet (1999) found that addressing change processes, and individual as well as collective belief systems surrounding educators' perceptions of change within high-stakes environments, would prove

beneficial in deepening understanding of educator response to change. Fullan (1993) solidified the need for further research concerning teachers and change, stating that the benefits of teachers' insights will be lost without deliberate examination of the experiences of educators and the support they feel is needed through the different stages of reform.

### Statement of the Problem

Living in the realm of accountability has made it impossible to ignore the dismal state of the educational system in America. Attendance rates continue to plummet, while dropout rates remain at an all-time high (Oxley, 2005). Additionally, the media have become all-too-willing participants in portraying schools in a negative manner. Violent crimes among high school students have sharply increased, and drugs are commonplace on school campuses across the country (Oxley, 2005). Legislative acts have forced schools to explore new avenues of reform to meet the public demands for accountability for the education of children. In response, high school transformation, defined as the conversion of large high schools into small focused learning environments, is gaining currency as an education reform strategy in communities across America (Oxley, 2005; Steinberg & Allen, 2002). Cotton (2001) and Meier (2006) researched transformation efforts and confirmed that small school education increases student achievement, attendance, and engagement while decreasing the dropout rate.

Ark (2002) and Quint (2005) studied the effects of high school transformation and found no significant deviation in findings in relation to the benefits of transformation for students. Lee and Smith (1994) found that students benefit from the smaller learning environment in several variables in both rural and urban settings. Across the nation,

school districts that have completed the transformation process are reporting increases in attendance, achievement, and graduation rates while acts of violence and discipline issues have decreased (Kennedy, 2005; Royer, 2007). There is little debate with regard to the process of transforming schools into smaller units or funding for reforming America's high schools. Funding for the transformations comes largely from the 2003 Small Learning Communities Grant from the federal government and philanthropic organizations such as the Gates and Carnegie foundations. However, there has been limited research on the experience of the educators working in the schools during the process. There has been research on change processes leading to the identification of the stages of the change process (Craine, 2007; Fullan, 1993) and the transformation of comprehensive schools into smaller units (Cotton, 2001; Lamar & Dukes, 2006; Oxley, 2005). The time has now come to examine the experience of educators during the transformation process.

Teachers carry out the daily operations of schools and reside at the center of the reform movement to transform large comprehensive high schools into smaller learning units. The literature regarding the effects of the process on educators working in the schools that are transformed is limited at this time. Efforts to understand the experiences of educators during the transformation could produce policies that would assist with reducing the amount of resistance to the change. Additionally, reporting issues identified by teachers during the transformation process may allow for implementation changes for school leaders that are more inclusive of educators. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of teachers who have experienced the transformation process from a large comprehensive high school to a small learning environment.

### *Research Questions*

This qualitative study focused on high school teachers from the metro region of Atlanta. The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of teachers through the transformation process from large comprehensive high schools into smaller learning units. Data were collected by phenomenological interviews utilizing the researcher as the instrument for the study. The following research questions served as a guide throughout the process: (1) What are the experiences of teachers during the transformation process into smaller learning units? (a) What challenges do teachers face during the transformation process? (b) What supports do teachers receive during the transformation process? (c) What benefits do teachers perceive come from the transformation to small learning environments?

### *Research Design*

According to Creswell (1998), one should choose a qualitative approach when he or she (a) wants to ask how or what, (b) has a topic that needs to be explored, (c) wants to present a detailed view, (d) studies individuals in a natural setting, (e) wants the writing to be more personal, (f) wants to spend sufficient time and resources on data collection and analysis, (g) has an audience that is receptive to a qualitative approach, and (h) wants to emphasize the role of researcher as an active learner. The qualitative research paradigm allows the researcher more flexibility in data collection than in the quantitative research paradigm. For example, it is much more likely for qualitative researchers to employ multiple methods of data collection during the course of one study (Patton, 2002).

Phenomenology is one research tradition that flows from the qualitative paradigm. Husserl (1931) observed that phenomenology is the study of how people describe things through their senses. The assumptions underlying the qualitative paradigm as described by Creswell (1994) are vastly different from those of the quantitative approach. Unlike the quantitative view of reality, the qualitative view is that reality exists as constructed by the persons involved in the research project. Quantitative measures, on the other hand, are deterministic, and not concerned with asking questions in order to explore how one creates the meaning of one's world (Cohen & Manion, 1994). As a method, phenomenological research attempts to explicate phenomena as they are lived by human beings. Omery (1983) described the method as inductive, descriptive research, the goal of which is to "describe the total systematic structure of lived experience, including the meaning that these experiences had for the individuals who participated in them" (p. 50). The philosophic underpinnings of phenomenological research are examined through consideration of the work of Brentano, Husserl, and Heidegger (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). Husserl (1931) stated that one can only know what one experiences by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken the conscious awareness. While one's understanding comes from sensory of phenomena, in phenomenology, it is important that the experience is described, explicated, and interpreted (Patton, 2002).

This study describes the experiences of high school teachers in small learning environments transformed from comprehensive high schools. It will utilize qualitative, phenomenological research methodology as outlined by Seidman (1991) and Creswell (2003). Semistructured, open-ended interviews are the primary means of data collection. Ten teachers from a Metro Atlanta school district were included in the study. This study

sought a better understanding of the experiences of these teachers during the transformation to smaller learning environments. Further discussion of the research methodology used in this study can be found in chapter 3.

### *Significance of Study*

High school reform has moved to the top of the education policy agenda, commanding the attention of the federal government, governors, urban school superintendents, philanthropists, and the general public (Meier, 2006). An alarm has been issued due to high dropout rates, increased violence, and a reduction in college readiness skills. The low academic achievement of many high school students and the large numbers of high school graduates who are required to take remedial classes in college affirm the need for change. The staggering trends have the potential to impose limits on individual potential and serious constraints on America's competitive position in the global economy.

The preceding information is an indicator that educators must find an intervention for students (Oxley, 2005). High school transformation, the process of transforming large comprehensive high schools into smaller learning environments, has become a major reform strategy for addressing the problems schools face today. Researchers such as Meier (2006), Cotton (2001), and Oxley (2005) are advancing toward consensus on the benefits of smallness as it relates to education, but no research on the experience of educators during such a shift in the educational system has been conducted. This study examined the effects of the school transformation in a Metro Atlanta school district system on the teachers involved in the process. This district received funds from the Small Learning Communities grant in 2003 and the Gates Foundation and has begun the

process of transforming every high school in the district into smaller learning environments. This researcher investigated the challenges and possibilities presented to educators during the transformation process. According to the Gates Foundation summative reports, school systems receiving grants must develop transformation plans, including milestones and accountability, with teachers. Also, teachers are to be included in planning processes concerning support mechanisms for instruction as well as personnel policies. Additionally, formative assessments should include data from teachers regarding the amount of collaborative planning accessible and the effects on the student-teacher relationship. This study provides the possibility of producing an inventory of factors for educational leaders to consider in refining the change process and could become the catalyst for changing the process of high school transformation as it relates to educators. This refinement in policy could lead to a smoother process of change, resulting in a reduction of resistance. Leaders should endeavor to understand the effects of change on educators so that their needs can be addressed through policy, allowing the needs of the children to be met at the school level by educators. Additionally, by improving the understanding of the experience of educators directly working with children by district leaders, school districts can truly become learning organizations.

#### *Organization of the Study*

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to high school transformation, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the research questions, the limitations, definitions of terms, and the significance for studying experiences of teachers living through the transformation. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on change, change processes, teachers and change, reform eras, and high school transformation to smaller learning



environments. In chapter 3, the study's data collection and analysis procedures are discussed. The chapter addresses sample selection, a description of data collection procedures, an explanation of phenomenological research, stages of constant comparative analysis, and credibility criteria. Findings from the data are presented in chapter 4, as well as discussion of the findings with conclusions and implications are provided in chapter 5.

#### *Delimitations*

Delimitations of this study include the following: (a) The study was conducted in a Metro Atlanta school district during the 2008–2009 school year, which is currently transforming high schools from traditional comprehensive high schools into smaller units. (b) The study was conducted in high schools that have been transformed from traditional comprehensive high schools into smaller units. (c) Participants had worked at the location for at least 2 years so that norms and relationships have been created. (d) Participants had at least 3 years of teaching experience, per the requirement by the state of Georgia, to be considered tenured and experienced.

#### *Limitations*

Limitations of this study include the following: (a) The use of a sample from only one state in an urban environment will not generalize to rural areas. (b) The researcher's interpretation of categories and themes are subject to scrutiny. (c) Given that the educators may be currently employed by the district, the possibility of speaking negatively about their employer may limit personal experience recorded.

### *Definition of Terms*

*Change.* Change is a process that requires educators to adopt an innovation and use it in daily schooling work (Hord et al., 1987).

*High school transformation.* This is the process of changing a comprehensive high school into smaller learning environments of 400 students or less (<http://www.atlanta.k12.ga.us>).

*Phenomenological study.* This “[d]escribes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 51).

*School-within-a-school.* Raywid (1996) noted that a school-within-a-school is a separate and autonomous unit formally authorized by the board of education.

*Small learning communities.* These are separate learning units within larger schools and are organized around specialized settings, such as art, theater, music, or technology (Massengale, 2006).

*Small school.* A small school is a separate autonomous school with a small number of students, no more than 100 to 350 in elementary schools and 500 in secondary schools (Wasley et al., 2000).

*Small schools movement.* Also known as the small schools initiative, this movement in the United States holds that many high schools are too large and should be reorganized into smaller, autonomous schools of no more than 400 students (Raywid & Cotton, 1996).

*Restructuring, reform.* These terms are used to define the movement to rebuild America’s public education system.

*Summary*

America has become infatuated with the notion of smallness as it refers to high schools. Researchers have produced literature on the benefits of small schools for students. Bomotti, Ginsberg, and Cobb (1999) conducted studies affirming a reduction in dropout rates, reduced disciplinary infractions, and increased performance on standardized tests. Also, there is a rich amount of literature regarding how to implement the change process. Districts have a clear understanding of how to transform large comprehensive school into smaller units, the financing available to do so, and the support organizations available to assist. However, the gap in the literature resides with the understanding of the effects that the transformation has on the educators involved in the process. It is important to understand the processes of change that educators go through during the transformation process. This will allow school districts to truly become learning organizations and reduce the immediate resistance to change. This resistance can manifest itself in decreased job satisfaction of school leaders, causing low morale among the faculty as a whole leading to high attrition rates or poor job performance affecting the nation's most precious resource, the children. Additionally, an understanding of the processes that take place with teachers and change could assist with future reforms and assist with determining why past reforms never reached full implementation. Implementation occurs in the classroom where the teacher is in control of how a reform reaches the students; thus, it is imperative to understand how to make change a welcomed asset for teachers.

This study is a qualitative phenomenological examination of the lived experiences of educators involved in the high school transformation process. It was conducted in the

Atlanta public school district utilizing 10 teachers as participants. The study took place during the 2008–2009 academic year at schools that had been transformed and one currently in the process. The participants were selected through purposive sampling techniques, and data were collected through semi-structured interview sessions using open-ended questions. Data were reviewed using a basic interpretive model with three levels of coding and the concept indicator model. The researcher has examined factors involved with the conversion of traditional high schools into smaller learning environments. There will be an introduction to the history of smaller learning environments before moving to a discussion of implementation with respect to benefits, cost, opposition and instructional changes. The following chapters will explain the methods used to conduct the study and how the data will be interpreted. The findings will be reported and serve as a contribution to the literature written about small learning environments.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Small schools are exactly what the name implies; they are schools with fewer students, a separate space, and a small faculty even though such schools sometimes share space (NEASP, 2001). Smaller numbers of students, a more intimate and personalized learning environment, and a cohesive vision among teachers characterize small schools (NEASP, 2001). Small schools should operate with no more than 350 students in an elementary school and 500 in a high school (Meier, 1996). Small schools foster environments in which parents, teachers, and students get to know one another well (Meier, 1996). The small size serves as a platform on which other important elements of successful schools can be implemented. Small schools use thematic, interdisciplinary, inquiry-based approaches to develop innovative curricula that link schools to student and community concerns (Capps & Maxwell, 1999). Capps and Maxwell (1999) asserted that the manageable size of a small school allows the faculty to meet frequently to discuss the day-to-day operations of the school, as well as to design curriculum, discuss student progress, and meet with parents and community members. Students choose a small school by matching their interests or educational ideals with a school's focus. Most small schools do not select their students based on test scores or grades; students are usually selected based on interest or by random lottery (Capps & Maxwell, 1999).

#### *Organization of Review*

The purpose of this literature review is to examine what has been written about the phenomenon known as high school transformation. High school transformation is the

process of changing a larger comprehensive high school into a smaller learning environment. The review examines literature written on three topics connected to this study. Change models and processes are examined to provide a background on change and how people engage in the concept. A section follows this on teachers and change, connecting the portion of the review to the study. Additionally, the change that teachers face most in this arena is known as educational reform. The literature surrounding educational reform eras was examined to exhibit the types of changes teachers endured in the past. Also, this section could assist with understanding the findings of this study. Connecting these topics, the review examines the literature connected to the small schools movement. This section outlines the phenomenon in which the teachers participated and provides a connection to the challenges, supports, and experiences that this study will inspect. This part of the review explains the latest reform movement that teachers are expected to adopt. The remaining portion of the review is concerned with the transformation to smaller learning environments. There is an explanation of the origins of smaller learning environments and then a brief description of the types of smaller learning units associated with the high school transformation movement. Next, the researcher expounds on the literature concerning implementation of the change from a large school to a small school setting. At that point, the review investigates changes in instruction for teachers and the role of distributive leadership during the process. The researcher then discusses the literature connected to the benefits associated with small-scale schooling found in the literature. Change does not occur without opposition, and high school transformation has not proved to be an exception. Thus, the review exhumes

what researchers have written in opposition to small-scale schooling before ending with a summary of the findings.

### *Change*

The heart of this study is the changes teachers endured during the transformation to smaller learning environments. The history of education runs parallel to the evolution of change. Fullan (1993) discerned that, as each new paradigm about educational change appears, the organizational structure and culture in which the change exists evolve, which is similar to the process and the organizational structure of K–12 education. Change is continuous and a constant process of revitalization and growth that takes time (Fullan, 1993). Change is undisputedly part of our world, and education aligns with change to prepare students to one day control and direct the changing world (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2004). Teachers play a key role in educational change, as their goal is to enhance student learning. Fullan (2001) pointed out that educational change is a learning experience for the adults who are involved, and that teachers are the agents of educational change. Quinn (1996) stated: "Deep change differs from incremental change in that it requires new ways of thinking and behaving. It is change that is major in scope, discontinuous with the past, and generally irreversible" (p. 3). Fullan (2001) affirmed asserting that deep change demands the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for teachers, and transformative learning that affects their beliefs about teaching and learning.

The idea of reform is not new to schools; however, most of the so-called reform efforts have resulted in nothing more than cosmetic changes (Sarason, 1990). Cuban (1990) defined these efforts as first-order changes that are mechanical in a sense. First-

order changes might address logistical operations of a school, such as scheduling and graduation requirements (Cuban, 1990). Cuban (1990) observed that, for any significant difference to occur, second-order change is necessary. Second-order change might address how teachers utilize instructional time in their classrooms from both a theoretical framework and a sound pedagogy (Cuban, 1990). Second-order change becomes an integrated part of a system, whereas first-order change is simply laid on top of the system.

The growing demand for accountability in education requires change, but change is not easily realized. Reeves (2004) pointed out the reality of change in stating that it is never convenient, universally popular, risk-free, or without opposition. Bennis, Benne, and Chin (1985) described three basic change strategies that include the power-coercive strategy, the rational-empirical strategy, and the normative reeducative change strategy. The power-coercive strategy is authoritative in nature, and can be efficient in the short-term, but depends largely on the leader to push the change (Bennis et al., 1985). Over time, this strategy meets with resistance and proves to be ineffective. Bennis et al. (1985) observed that the rational-empirical strategy assumes that, as people respond to new information or data, they change through rational responses. This strategy is not effective, since people rarely change because of new data or evidence. The normative reeducative change strategy links people's drives and needs to change (Bennis et al., 1985). This strategy has the greatest long-range impact but also takes the most effort.

Although education has attempted to keep pace with our changing society, society's unrealistic expectations and plans have not influenced the core of our educational system (Schlechty, 1992). To be fully integrated, these changes have to reach



into the attitudes, beliefs, and values of teachers, administrators, parents, students, and other stakeholders involved in each school community (Fullan, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992). The philosophy of this approach assumed that laws would force schools to meet certain conditions. This top-down approach met only the needs of politicians and legislators who enacted the reform and further frustrated educators. Sashkin and Egermeier (1993) saw the dominant approach in the 1990s for change and school restructuring efforts has focused on the cultural perspective. This approach is focused on the school or district as a distinct entity and asserts that improvements occur only with changes in values and expectations (Sashkin & Egermeier, 1993). Deal and Kennedy (1982) observed that this perspective evolved as a result of the school climate movement. Educators looked to the business and corporate communities and adopted initiatives that were similar in nature, such as total quality management and shared decision-making (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). The bottom-up restructuring efforts of the 1990s were founded on the behavior of each individual to influence organizational culture (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Through this understanding of shared beliefs and values, an organization can become a dynamic and powerful culture (Sashkin & Kiser, 1991).

*Change processes.* An understanding of the change process is important for analyzing levels common movement of teachers along a continuum of change (Fullan, 1999). Fullan (1999) explained change in terms of complexity theory and evolutionary theory. Complexity theory claims that change unfolds in nonlinear ways and that creative solutions arise out of interaction under conditions of uncertainty, diversity, and instability (Fullan, 1999). This theory deals with learning and adapting under unstable and uncertain conditions. Fullan (1999) stated that the evolutionary theory of relationships deals with

how humans relate to interaction and cooperative behavior, acknowledging that culture allows humans to share and influence one another concerning ideas, knowledge, practice, and beliefs. Fullan (1999) pointed out the difference between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge and stressed the importance of each in the change process. Formal planning is logical and analytical and introduces explicit knowledge. Organizations that are successful with change are able to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge on an ongoing basis Fullan (1999). Fullan (1999) asserted that these organizations tap into the values, meanings, day-to-day skills, knowledge, and experiences of all members and make these issues available for organizational problem solving.

Change is a process that occurs gradually over a long period of time (Guskey, 1990; Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). Change is accomplished by individuals and is, therefore, a personal experience (Hord et al., 1987). The advent of any change requires not only learning something new but also “unlearning” something (Guskey, 1990). Schein (1987) stated that the unlearning process is at the root of most resistance for teachers. This process of change, the integration of new perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors into one’s sense of self, is known as cognitive transformation in the literature on school culture (Schein, 1985). Teachers relate to change in terms of what it will do for them (Hord et al., 1987). Facilitators of change must remember the personal nature of change. Lasting change must not be sanctioned or imposed by a fiat (Miller, Cohen, & Sayre, 1985). The literature indicates that change is not easy; it requires the time and coordinated efforts of groups of individuals who are willing to work together and share common goals (Fullan, 1993; Guskey, 1990; Schein, 1987). Educational leaders who are responsible for influencing change must engage in a participatory process

that allows members of the culture to contribute and take on responsibility and ownership of change (Fullan, 1993).

Craine (2007) observed that individuals experiencing the phases of change noted by Fullan journey through smaller units known as cycles. The change cycle has the same steps as the grief cycle, which includes shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, testing, and acceptance (Craine, 2007). In fact, Kubicek (2006) implied that the implementation of change can quickly turn to grief if leaders do not properly manage the steps of the change process. Craine (2007) observed that the change process occurs in seven stages known as shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, testing, and acceptance. Each stage has different reactions from those involved in the process and occurs at different times for individuals (Kubicek, 2006). The first stage of shock occurs when individuals are first made aware of the intentions of change. Craine (2007) contended that at this point educators often become psychologically paralyzed at the news of change in their work lives and the shock immediately affects their performance. Denial follows shock. This is a defense mechanism that acts as a buffer and allows people to collect themselves. During this time, faculties at schools begin to discuss reasons why the change does not, or should not, include them. Kubicek (2006) found that fewer than four in 10 employees are committed to strategic change when it comes their way, but at this stage support for change can be gained by winning over key influencers and providing adequate support for those on the front line of change. Craine (2007) stated that when people can no longer deny the inevitable they move to the next stage, anger. Anger is difficult to manage because it can be channeled in so many different directions and thrust into the workplace almost at random. Ruin (2004) asserted that resistance can be

minimized by involving others in decision making at this point. After anger, the next stage is bargaining, where there is an effort to prolong the inevitable before moving into the depression stage of the cycle. Craine (2007) discerned that there are two types of depression stages, known as reactive and preparatory, and it is important to draw a distinction between them in terms of response. Reactive depression occurs when people are worried about how change will affect basics such as money, job, and family. Preparatory depression, on the other hand, occurs as the emotional process of preparing for what lies ahead transpires. The next stage is testing or anxiety. This is when people recognize that things are not going to be the way they were and begin to seek realistic solutions. Craine (2007) stated that honest communication is critical at this point to move to the next stage. Leaders should be discussing expectations and explaining the effects of the change on individuals at this point. The last stage is acceptance, which will occur only if people have enough time receive help in working through the previous stages. This stage is only reached by individuals with a degree of expectation for the change.

*Models of change.* Just as it is important to understand how people accept change, it is equally as important to understand how change occurs. According to Lieberman (1995) there are three models of change efforts include the concerns-based adoption model developed in the early 1970s (Hall & Rutherford, 1975), the Institute for the Development of Educational Activities (I/D/E/A) (Lieberman, 1985), and the Rand change agent study (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977). According to Lieberman (1995) the concerns-based adoption model focuses on the user and seven levels of concern that individuals go through as they experience organizational change. This model focuses on teachers and how they react to incremental change, such as a new curriculum, as opposed

to large-scale change initiatives. The first five stages in the model relate to participant readiness: awareness of concern, informational concerns, personal concerns, management concerns, and concerns about consequences (Lieberman, 1995). Lieberman, (1995) observed that the concerns-based adoption model is a useful framework; however, it is critical to remember that change is not a linear process. Organizations are composed of individuals who are unique organisms that process information in different ways. Acceptance of different elements of change initiatives will occur at different rates and in a chaotic order (Lieberman, 1995).

The Institute for the Development of Educational Activities study examined change as it relates to school improvement efforts. Lieberman (1985) noted that this study provided a three-stage process that included dialog, decisions, and action. In the dialog stage, teachers discuss new ideas, their ability to perform new roles, and the resources the teachers would need to assist them in their efforts (Lieberman, 1995). Lieberman (1995) found that, in the second stage, decisions are made, and as in the concern-based adoption model, management concerns dominate the process of change. The third stage is action that brings about the implementation of new plans. This fourth and final stage is marked by development, which is a result of interaction and collaboration of staff members (Lieberman, 1995). The stages repeat as members of the organization continue to explore new ideas and ask questions. Lieberman (1995) wrote that this study is important because it emphasizes the importance of subgroups addressing and dealing with problems in a collaborative format to initiate change and improvement.

Johnson (2006) indicated that the concerns-based adoption model has been used to describe, explain, and predict changes in teacher behavior when adopting an

innovation. The three areas used in this framework are the stages of concern, levels of use, and the innovation components (Horsley & Loucks-Horsley, 1998). The stages of concern measure the level of concern an individual has for an innovation. Results show that an increased level of concern decreases the implementation of an innovation by teachers (Johnson, 2006). Johnson (2006) found that individuals are placed in stages or levels of concern based on response to an interview and observation process. Johnson (2006) wrote that the concerns-based adoption model addresses three primary factors, including the individual's level of usage, the stages of his or her concern, and how these factors impact the ability of the individual to work with others to implement the innovation.

Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall (1987) found that in the original concerns-based adoption model, there were seven stages of concern. These were (a) awareness (no concern for the innovation) (b) information (a desire to know about the innovation), (c) personal (effect of using the innovation on the individual), (d) management (handling the time required when using the innovation), (e) consequences (effect of the innovation on outcomes), (f) collaboration (interest in relationship of personal use of innovation with others' use of innovation), and (g) refocusing (idea of new uses of innovation or new innovations). The stages of concern have recently been changed to a five-stage model omitting awareness and refocusing, which were merged into the remaining five stages (Shotsberger & Crawford, 1996).

Murphy (1999) wrote that the Rand change agent study focused on the role of the change agent in implementing changes in organizations. Murphy (1999) indicated that change can not be considered accepted until a supporting setting and plan for change are

in place. Additionally, Murphy (1999) found that leadership is critical to enact change, and there is a need for communication about the change process reinforced by training and resources during the period of change.

The three studies identified the element of readiness as an essential part of the change process. Murphy (1999) found that readiness is the organization's capacity to initiate, develop, or adopt a given innovation. Readiness must be approached in terms of both the individual and the organization (Murphy, 1999). Acceptance of change for an individual must make he or she feel change is needed and appear reasonable, and time must be provided for implementation (Firestone, 1989). Change must be compatible with organizational culture, resources must be available, and new changes must be prioritized with existing initiatives (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991).

*Teachers and change.* In school reform, it is necessary to guarantee all students access to quality teachers and to ensure that teachers are meaningfully included in the reform effort (Anyon, 1997). Regardless of the specific reform, teachers are essential agents of change (Anyon, 2005; Fruchter, 2007; Noblit, 1986; Perry, 2003). Teachers are often seen as part of the problem, but are necessary to the successful implementation of policy. Administrators must also be willing to broaden the base of decision makers to include those affected by decisions in efforts to improve achievement for students (Payne, 1984). Teachers are solely responsible for the effective delivery of any reform and ultimately determine the success or failure (Fruchter, 2007; Noblit, 1986; Payne, 1984). Noblit (1986) argued that if school reformers truly desire excellence and quality, the reformers must cultivate and attend to issues that affect teaching and teachers,

providing additional flexibility and ownership of the school's direction, process, and climate.

The act of teaching is demanding and complex because teachers' knowledge is contextual, interactive, non-routine, and speculative (Blase & Blase, 1998). Blase and Blase (1998) stated that teachers are constantly making decisions that are either subconscious, spontaneous, planned, or a mixture of these. Changes to the decisions made during the planning phase are carried out on the spur of the moment in the fast-paced interaction of the classroom (Blase & Blase, 1998). Costa and Garmon (1994) found that teachers often have little time to consider alternative teaching strategies and the consequences of each. In response to these realities, experts have recently begun to study teachers' values and philosophies and their effects on decisions made in the classroom. Increasingly, it is now recognized that professional knowledge comes from sources outside the teacher and from the teachers' own experiences (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). Providing opportunities for teachers to examine and reframe experiences, develop alternative perspectives, generate alternatives and experiment with new hypotheses, and leads to professional development (Blase & Blase, 1998). It is essential for leaders to understand not only the change process for teachers but also if there are variables that reduce resistance or would assist with the implementation of the change (Graham, Wilson, Gerrick, Frass, & Heiman, 2002). An understanding of these variables would increase time and efforts for the implementation of the change.

Graham et al. (2002) observed that two factors influencing a teacher's acceptance of change are the participatory nature of the school climate and the number of years that the teacher has worked with his or her principal. Graham et al. (2002) stated that if the



relationship is positive between the teacher and the principal and the teacher has a sense of contribution to the change, there is a better chance of acceptance. Loucks and Hall (1981) found that teacher acceptance of reform moves through the stages of concern. Each stage of the change process (development, dissemination, adoption, implementation, institutionalization, and refinement) has distinct characteristics. After this, teachers enter into a process known as levels of use of the innovation (Loucks & Hall, 1981). This concept describes behaviors individuals may display as they interact with the change and become proficient with the concept. There are eight levels of this concept, but as with the stages of concern, there is no guarantee that an individual will move through all stages.

As educators experience the stages of change, district- and school-level leaders should be aware how the change is perceived and processed. The theory of organizational change includes teams that perceive the whole of the organization, grow professionally, navigate short- and long-term organizational experiences through exposed mental models, share a vision, and hear each voice in an ongoing communal learning process (Senge, 1990). This theory was created for the business world but has correlations to education. For example, each school district, each building, and each classroom represent a team of individuals working together for the ultimate purpose of learning, which is the shared goal (Senge, 1990). Richardson (1994) observed that educators adopt change according to student needs to increase learning. According to Senge (1990), the characteristics of a learning organization include systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, a shared vision, and team learning. Valdez (1992), Richardson (1998), and Williams (2003) affirmed that educators would be more receptive to change in a

learning organization. Valdez (1992) asserted that educators prefer reflective change, which is aligned with personal mastery. Richardson (1998) also suggested that educators are receptive to change when it is presented in a collaborative format. This statement implies that educators value the tenets of systems thinking, shared vision, and team learning within a learning organization. Williams (2003) concurred, stating that educator acceptance of change and job satisfaction is connected inextricably with satisfying relationships and a sense of community. Conversely, Morimoto (1973) observed that forced or mandated change makes educators feel threatened, and in turn, they take on a defensive posture toward the change. Richardson (1998) and Fenstermacher (1994) agreed, divulging that educators resist mandated change and need to be involved in connecting the change to student needs. Meyer (1988) exhorted that if educators are not involved in the planning process, then only 15% of any change will be implemented.

Today's teachers are faced with the challenge of building effective communities of learners (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993). Striving to meet that challenge often requires change in the way schools are organized and in responsibilities given to teachers. Almost constantly, educators are being asked to rethink and restructure how schools operate (Pajak, 1993). In the current realm of school accountability and school improvement, teachers sometimes must abandon comfortable ways of teaching as the instructors are required to implement new programs. "When engaged in any change process, teachers will have specific and individualistic concerns about the change and their involvement in it" (Hord et al., 1987, p. 30). Reeves (2004) clarified five points about change in an effort to debunk educational myths regarding teachers and change. Reeves (2004) stated that people are miserable when they are not feeling successful in

their professional lives, or when people fail to sense personal mastery; people resist change because they have been burned before on changes that were poorly planned, badly executed, and resulted in more work for fewer results. Resistance to change is an organizational reality; perfect research does not exist (Reeves, 2004). Reeves (2004) indicated that sufficient research is needed and there is no risk-free alternative.

As Richert (1991) noted, there have not been many changes in teaching, and this is especially true when the role of the teacher in the change process is considered. Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, teachers have found themselves responsible for making schools work for all students, and the proliferation of standardized testing and academic standards has created new expectations for teachers and the role they play in improving student learning and achievement (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Teachers have been traditionally viewed as the implementers of externally mandated reform initiatives; those who study reform as it relates to teachers have tended to focus primarily on the factors that might explain teachers' willingness to change their behaviors, attitudes, and or beliefs (Lukacs, 2008).

During the last 20 years, the education community has shifted its view of the teacher as the implementer of a reform strategy to one in which teachers assume leadership roles that had previously been considered the responsibilities of principals and superintendents, such as evaluating teacher performance, designing staff development programs, and deciding school budgets (Barth, 2001). Despite arguments from proponents of the teacher leadership movement that detail the benefits of teachers extending their influence beyond their own classrooms, the assumption that a teacher works only in the classroom continues to persist (Hatch, Eiler-White, & Faigenbaum,

2005; Urbanski & Nickolaou, 1997). Some argue that teachers themselves should be on the front lines of school reform and cite the lack of much investigation into whether teachers are capable of pursuing change; it would be useful to know which teachers might be expected to embrace change and therefore become the innovators within their building (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Elmore, 2004), since the terms change agent and change leader most often refer to a person outside the classroom (Chin & Benne, 1969; Rogers, 2003).

In contrast, Cuban's (1988) conceptualization of teacher change suggests that teachers initiate change on a daily basis without needing to be instructed to do so. Cuban (1988) stated that teachers change in one of two ways. First-order changes are situation specific or organizational, while second-order changes are specific, such as teaching methods or thinking processes. Cuban (1990) stated that recent literature on teachers and change has examined teachers' second-order changes and what might explain how, why, and when these kinds of changes occur. Lukas (2008) commented:

“categorized studies seeking to examine the individual factors that explain teachers' willingness to change their attitudes, beliefs, or practices into three different groups: (a) naturalistic or voluntary changes, (b) stages of development, and (c) formal programs. In studies with a naturalistic change orientation, teachers' willingness to change can be explained by their personal experiences. In stages of development research, it is thought that teachers' willingness to change can be explained by their placement in one of several phases of development, such as the five stages of expertise (novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert) developed by Berliner (1994).” (p.11).

### *Educational Reform*

Changes for teachers are generally associated with a term known as educational reform. This section of the review connects the previous section of change to teachers, which is the basis of the study. Educational leaders are quickly realizing that there is a need to better align schools to the needs of society (Ashby, 2005). Ashby (2005) discerned that, as demands on schools continue to rise and the needs of schools become more complex, school leaders are required to think more holistically and in ways that are intentionally focused on the desired outcomes. Secondary education is under scrutiny as politicians, business leaders, and society as a whole are finding gaps between high school and the workplace or postsecondary education (Ashby, 2005; Bush, 2005; Houston, 2006). Statistics suggest that increasingly more occupations today require postsecondary education than previously (“Diplomas Count,” 2006). Because only 69.6% of students graduated from high school in 2003 and many more students entered postsecondary education than completed it, high schools face great challenges (Barton, 2005, 2006; “Diplomas Count,” 2006; Harvey & Housman, 2004; Thornburgh, 2006). The changing demographic characteristics of today’s society also necessitate educational reform. In particular, the number of students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds has grown substantially from 12% of the student population in 1976 to 36% of the student population in 1996 (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). The number of students whose primary language is not English is currently 2.7 million and continues to increase (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Murphy and Hallinger (1993) found the number of children from single-parent home or homes where both parents work now represents 25% of all families. Additionally, Darling-Hammond (1993) wrote that, when all of the factors

that are having an impact on today's school age youth are considered, the need to restructure schools to be more responsive to the needs of the student of the 21st century is readily apparent. For example, one of the major challenges for educational reformers is to modify approaches to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and evaluation (Tharinger et al., 1996). Facilitating the development of today's diverse learners calls for schooling approaches that promote the development of students' unique intellectual talents, ways of knowing, academic interests, cultures, and individual learning styles (Darling-Hammond, 1993). Concurring, Glickman (1993) observed learning will need to become more active, relevant to the real world, challenging, reflective, and collaborative, and occur in empowering and physically comfortable environments.

Villaverde (2003) stated that, in the time following the Great Depression and World War II, the labor market helped reshape secondary schools. As fewer skill-related jobs became available, schools focused more on life education and the general curriculum (Villaverde, 2003). The civil rights movement and the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s provided even more controversy when curriculum and standards for schools were developed (Villaverde, 2003). The publication of such documents as *The American High School Today* (Conant, 1959), *Horace's Compromise* (Sizer, 1984), and *The Failed Promise of the American High School, 1890-1995* (Angus & Mirel, 1999) continued the scrutiny for school districts. Sizer (1984) stated, in spite of this ongoing dialogue, the comprehensive American high school is little changed from the early standards in place for many years. Friedman (2004) confirmed, stating that it could be firmly said, that from the days of Horace Mann to No Child Left Behind, there has always been pressure to

improve and reform America's schools. Some would explain that school reform was simply a cycle of complaints and solutions.

In examining the topic of school reform, one may look at various eras of school reform and how they have shaped the successes and failures of our schools today. With the Lancastrian reform plan in the early 1800s, the focus was on the provision of education to the masses through a monitorial system (Lancaster, 1973). Lancaster (1973) found that, through large classes and the use of students as monitors, more students could be educated. In the mid-1800s, Horace Mann's efforts began the age-graded plan that helped to shape our current public education system (Lancaster, 1973). He observed that this reform effort provided the framework in which we teach children in classrooms and in schools based on their age. This system evolved into the Gary plan in the early 1900s, and provided a work-study-play plan that allowed students to rotate through the three areas of their schooling (Lancaster, 1973).

TheodoreSizer began examining and documenting the need for changes in high school education. Through his work with the Coalition of Essential Schools, he provided a framework of principles that challenged the ideas of secondary schools (Tharp, 2007). The framework addressed issues such as organizational structure, essential skills and areas of knowledge, personalization, the requirements for a diploma, collaboration with parents, and teacher caseloads (Tharp, 2007). In the post-No Child Left Behind era, or the accountability era, schools and school districts throughout the United States are looking for answers and creating their own reform plans that focus on student achievement, graduation, and school-to-work (Tharp, 2007). Although education reform is a highly diverse field encompassing multiple methods and viewpoints in order to improve

educational outcomes, “it is nevertheless organized by a general professional perspective about reform, namely that it is necessary, it is possible and practicable, and, unfortunately, it is still largely work-in-progress” (Adkins, 1997, p. 41). As the new millennium has dawned, so has the transformation of American society in the United States.

The United States is driven by technological innovations and global interdependency driven by a workplace that emphasizes the skills of a knowledge economy (Cope & Kalantis, 2000). Cope and Kalantis (2000) noted that teamwork and problem solving are employed to attain the flexibility and reflective strategic intelligence desired for productive work. Citizens must embrace diversity and adaptability among a world of numerous, distinct societies if the United States is to remain a thriving democracy (Cope & Kalantis, 2000). Cope and Kalantis (2000) found that most public school classrooms differ little from those of 50 years ago: desks lined up in rows, textbooks hailed as the anchoring tool of knowledge, and teachers dispersing information for students to absorb and store in the remote cells of their brains. Schools continue to be a model of the industrial age factories that drove the country’s economy (Sizer, 1992). Most alarming is the fact that in a country where education is seen as a basic civil right, the gaps between those who do and do not benefit from its existence continue to grow (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004).

*Educational eras.* Reform in education occurred in different times or eras, leading to different changes for the teachers of a particular time period. Understandably, colonial education reflected the social organization of colonial communities, and religion was often woven into this social fabric. Gutek (1981) observed that the classical period



focused on education for religious purposes. Denham (2002) concurred, and observed that education during the classical period centered on the occupations of the time. Parker and Parker (1996) found that the classical period was grounded with laws stating that children had to learn to read and write and that every town with 50 or more homes by law had to have an elementary teacher. Gutek (1981) stated that during this time period the teacher was the absolute authority in the classroom. Resources were scarce, and teachers were forced to teach several subjects, including logic, rhetoric, ethics, metaphysics, astronomy, physics, and mathematics (Denham, 2002).

However connected the civil and religious authority may have been in various colonies, from the time of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and throughout the colonial period in America, schooling was primarily viewed as a responsibility of the family and the church, while the role of the state or civic authority was merely to assist these institutions (Jorgenson, 1987). Jorgenson (1987) noted that, during this era, schools were largely voluntary, and only occasionally aided by government funding. A law passed by the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1642 informed town officials that they had the power to require parents to educate their children and mandated such compulsory instruction of children by their parents or guardians (Butts, 1973). The law also set up a minimum curriculum to be taught, and parents who disobeyed the law could be fined.

When schools were supported by the civic authority, the purpose of colonial education was most often to foster the attainment of religious or spiritual ends (Butts, 1973). Butts (1973) stated that, in 1647, the General Court of the Colony of Massachusetts, where civil powers were largely in the hands of the clergy, passed the Old Deluder Satan Law. The law was founded on the Calvinist belief that a more literate,

better-educated populace would be less likely to be tricked into doing evil by the devil. The law required towns of 50 households to appoint a teacher to instruct children how to read and write, and towns of 100 or more families to set up a grammar school to prepare young men to attend Harvard College (Butts, 1973).

The religious nature and purposes of colonial schooling were evident in the curricular materials and texts used in colonial schools (Cremin, 1951). The most notable example of this is the *New England Primer*, which was the primary text used by most American schools, both inside and outside colonial New England (Cremin, 1951, pp. 183–184). Children were drilled through rote memorization and imitation on the primer's contents, which included moral lessons, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Apostle's Creed, and the Westminster Catechism (Cremin, 1951). In the Latin grammar schools reserved for the sons of the upper class, students studied Latin and Greek authors to prepare for entry into Harvard College. Cremin (1951) found that, as part of the classical and theological education provided by Harvard, students were also offered Hebrew and ancient history to aid in studying the Bible and other religious texts.

The progressive education movement was partially inspired by the French revolutionists, who believed education should promote human welfare and social progress (Corti, 1959). Corti (1959) observed that reformers such as Jane Adams and John Dewey promoted education for social purposes and urged education for a changing world. The progressives thought that in order to create true democracy, universal education was necessary, and every student must be promoted fully and freely (Corti, 1959). Corti (1959) found that sciences and utilitarian subjects were favored over traditional aristocratic disciplines. The philosophies of the progressives included new

ideas, opportunities, and findings, as well as moderate political change, but especially the philosophy of creating social improvement by government action (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000). Bhavnagri and Krolikowski (2000) stated that this educational movement emphasized the individual child, supported self-expression, and employed informal classroom procedures. The progressive era occurred roughly between the end of the Civil War and the end of the First World War (Stebner, 1997). A critical part of the spirit of reform was a platform or program that included shared moral values (Stebner, 1997). Southern Progressivism had many of the same broad concerns as Northern Progressivism (Stebner, 1997). However, Stebner (1997) asserted that in the South there was an increased role of the professional and middle classes in public policy. Additionally, middle-class and upper-class women were admitted to institutions of higher education (Stebner, 1997). Stebner (1997) found that women, including Black and immigrant females, also found work in the industrial workplace.

The progressive era of education ushered in a feeling that bigger was better for schools, and the notion of one best system was introduced (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Wojcik (1999) uncovered a belief that a well-designed school building improved the quality of education for students. Bhavnagri and Krolikowski (2000) discerned that during this period educators were using the one best system concept to Americanize people through compulsory schooling. Teachers moved from religious teaching to education geared toward industrial jobs (Wojcik, 1999). During this period of social reform and concern for communities, the kindergarten concept was introduced, and teachers regularly practiced home visits (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000). Educational leaders felt that the poor and immigrants should receive education in the same manner

(Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000). However, Wojcik (1999) found that this did not include African Americans, who were at this time in segregated schools. Teachers of these students stressed that education was the best means for economic success since the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case had confirmed that their lot in life would not be on the same scale (Wojcik, 1999).

During the same period, the development of widespread use of intelligence testing supported the notion of measurable differences (Tyack, 1974). The policy elites responsible for educational progress reforms of the early 20th century, called administrative progressives by Tyack (1974), pushed for what Oakes (1985) called the new equality, which was a comprehensive high school that offered something for everyone. Tyack (1974) asserted that administrative progressives merged a belief in progressive education principles with the supposed science of social efficiency. This new comprehensive high school would meet the needs of different students by tailoring their educational experiences based on their perceived ability. Oakes (1985) stated there was also widespread belief in the infallibility of standardized testing as a tool for bringing forth a new era of efficient and equal education for the masses. These new high schools would fix the social ills of society, Americanizing diverse students to take their respective place in the social order. Under the banner of new equality, administrative progressives designed high schools based on the principles of unification within stratification (Oakes, 1985). The underlying assumption that heterogeneity and diversity helped produce educational challenges in urban high schools continues to permeate urban education reform.

The civil rights era of education brought change to the face of education, and once again teachers had to adjust to reform efforts. Gutek (1981) observed that this was a time of great tension caused by the integration of school districts across America. Merritt (2005) found that the *Brown v. the Board of Education* landmark case forced many Caucasian and African American students into classrooms together in the face of opposition from local governments and many school district officials. Many White parents began to place their children in private schools to avoid integration, and some schools shut down in resistance to the change (Orfield & Lee, 2004). However, the predominant theme of the era, integration, has reappeared with an interesting twist. Merritt (2005) asserted that schools, including universities, strive for a mixed population of students, indicating a desire for a cosmopolitan feel to their institutions. Conversely, Orfield and Lee (2004) found that schools in cities and metropolitan areas are segregated more than their perceived less cultured rural counterparts that fought for segregation.

*Restructuring schools.* Restructuring the daily routine in an effort to improve organizational structure has been an ongoing challenge for educators. Cawelti (1994) defined restructuring as the significant changes made to increase productivity and effectiveness. Fundamental changes in learning and teaching expectations, as well as in the management and organization of schools, have been the underlying focus of restructuring (Canady, 1995). Systemic restructuring may take place at the district level, or at the state level, and may involve reforming instructional methods, curriculum, finance, school governance, and other aspects of schooling (Vinovskis, 1999). For example, state-level systemic restructuring has recently been implemented in Kentucky, where the state supreme court declared the state's system of schooling unconstitutional

on the grounds that it was ineffective and inequitable (Ornstein & Levine, 2003). In concurrence, Vinovskis (1999) wrote that in Kentucky restructuring plans included performance-based assessments, teacher development strategies, increased funding, and public school choice. Ornstein and Levine (2003) explained that systemic reform has emerged as a strategy because of the belief that the present public school system does not adequately provide for the needs of poor and minority students.

In the past decade, the vocabulary used to describe educational reform has shifted from school reform to school restructuring (Whitaker, 1993). Whitaker (1993) noted that a primary aim of restructuring has been to improve reform efforts by involving individuals at the grassroots level and to recognize and attend to the complexities of the educational system. Unlike many prior attempts to reform education, restructuring focuses on renewing the entire system and does not rely on partial and piecemeal initiatives (Whitaker, 1993). Concurring, Hansen (1989) stated that individual projects may help to jumpstart the change processes, and restructuring acknowledges that such projects are insufficient to maintain and establish lasting transformations. Jenkins and Houlihan (1991) stated that there is a necessity for a focus on issues that have the potential to significantly alter the format of school governance, the relationships among school professionals at varying levels, and the culture of schools. Only an approach that restructures the fundamental design of schools will be able to remedy problems such as poor student achievement, high dropout rates, an inadequately prepared work force, and social and economic factors that place students at risk (Hansen, 1989).

Although many schools both nationally and internationally are actively involved in the restructuring process, a substantial amount of confusion about what constitutes

restructuring still exists (Murphy & Hallinger, 1993). One explanation for the confusion is that restructuring is used as both a political construct to guide reform efforts and as a professional construct to focus educational improvements (Mitchell & Beach, 1993). Consequently, educators are advocating for restructuring based on considerably divergent principles (Goodman, 1995). Murphy and Hallinger (1993) observed that the ever-changing and school-specific nature of restructuring, aligned with the lack of a precise definition, is problematic. Goldman, Dunlap, and Conley (1991) noted that restructuring should be redefined daily within the local contexts in which it occurs. Mitchell and Beach (1991) added that the definition's meaning should be unique to each school struggling with the process.

One method of restructuring that is gaining in popularity is block scheduling. Block scheduling was defined as a restructuring of the school day into classes longer than the traditional 50-minute period (Adams & Salvaterra, 1997). Lare, Jablonski, and Salvaterra (2002) stated that block scheduling might be the most significant reform strategy in secondary education in the last half of the 20th century. Rettig and Canady (2001) found that 50% of high schools in the United States used some type of block scheduling. High schools embraced block scheduling due to several factors (Justiz, 1984). Justiz (1984) stated that the business community for many years demanded a fundamental change in education, which was a major motivator for educators to evaluate current practices. Educators of students with special needs, including at-risk as well as gifted, found that block scheduling afforded a way to meet diverse special needs (Retting & Canady, 2001). Many schools moved to block scheduling to improve test scores, reduce discipline problems, and increase learning through longer class periods (Canady, 1995;

Cawelti, 1994). Moreover, high schools used block scheduling to meet demands of accountability, improve education for all students, and simplify the structure of the school, thereby providing more flexibility and better organization (Oregon Department of Education, 1996). Five scheduling models in addition to traditional scheduling have been used in U.S. schools, according to Canady and Rettig (1995). The accelerated block schedules, those that allowed students to take more courses within a certain period of time, included the 4 x 4 schedule, the alternating block schedule, the trimester accelerated block schedule, and the quarter-on quarter-off accelerated block schedule.

### *Small Schools Movement*

Connecting the previous two themes of change and reform is the occurrence known as the small schools movement. This portion of the review will provide background about the changes that take place during the transformation. Additionally, the benefits and oppositions to the concept will be examined in an effort to help readers understand the data this study will provide. Recently, privatization demands and vouchers have opened the door for the era of educational entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates and organizations including the Carnegie Foundation have developed new models for delivering instruction or recruiting teachers and have applied old-fashioned practices with inspired fidelity (Hess, 2007). This latest movement has given birth to the small schools movement, otherwise known as high school transformation. The platform of this movement encompasses a belief that smaller learning environments provide an increase in student achievement through improved student teacher relationships and academic rigor (Meier, 2006). In response, “smallness” has been interwoven with many of today’s school district reform themes in the form of high school transformation.



Steinberg and Allen (2002) observed that high school transformation is the process of altering the makeup of a large comprehensive high school, also known as a traditional high school, into small high schools or small learning communities at the same location. Rydeen (2004) noted that in the 2000–2001 school year, 46.7% of all schools contained 300 to 749 students. Average enrollment in a high school was 752 students, middle school 612, and elementary school 441. Lamar and Dukes (2006) reported that the small school movement is characterized by efforts to make high schools accessible to students and parents. Learning communities where students know each other, their teachers, and administrators characterize smaller learning communities in contrast to the impersonal interactions that frequently take place in larger high schools (Lamar & Dukes, 2006).

Oxley (2005) observed that the small schools movement referred to as high school transformation has undergone many changes during the last four decades. House models of small schools and schools-within-schools appeared in the 1960s magnet programs career academies and mini-schools in the 1970s, charter schools in the late 1980s and 1990s, and small learning environments today (Oxley, 2005). The purpose of creating small schools is to enable school systems to serve students better and to enable these students to achieve academically and develop socially.

Historically, small elementary schools provided strong evidence that smaller school size can help lead to higher levels of academic achievement (Wasley et al., 2002). Wasley et al. (2002) observed that reformers cited the positive achievements of historically small schools in Chicago to press the idea of creating new small schools as a reform strategy. Several researchers have reached consensus on the benefits of small learning environments. Studies conducted by Baker and Gump (1964), Cotton (2001),

Lee and Smith (1994) established a strong correlation between smaller environments and improved student attendance, achievement on standardized tests, reduction of disciplinary issues, and improvement in graduation rates. However, Meier (2006) questioned whether success could be sustained at higher levels of the school system, noting that the size of elementary schools is structured to support no more than 350 students and the pedagogy is to provide opportunities for experiential and active learning; however, middle schools and high schools are not structured for active learning and full engagement in the projects at hand. Conversely, Meier (2006) observed that the success of elementary schools can be replicated in high schools and the benefits for students are vast.

Once the decision has been made to transform a high school into smaller learning environments, districts are challenged to decide which model will best serve the students. Wasley et al. (2002) noted that the two types of autonomous small learning environments are small schools and schools-within-schools. Small schools are characterized by themes on which the curriculum is centered, while schools-within-schools operate within a range of models (Meier, 2006). These models include but are not limited to house models based on grade levels, career academies, parent participation models, and advisory models that are based on the student advocacy system (Meier, 2006). Additionally, charter schools have been in existence for some time but are categorized as small schools.

*Origins of small schools.* The founder of the small schools movement is Deborah Meier. She works to this day to improve the workings and understandings of the concept (Goldberg, 1991). Meier was born April 6, 1931, in New York City and attended Antioch College. She received an MA in history from the University of Chicago in 1955. Deborah Meier has received honorary degrees from Bank Street College of Education, Brown,

Bard, Clark, Teachers College of Columbia University, Dartmouth, Harvard, Hebrew Union College, Hofstra, The New School, Lesley College, SUNY Albany, UMASS Lowell, and Yale University (Meier, 1996). Early in her career, she spent several years as a kindergarten teacher in Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York City. In 1974, Meier became the founder and director of the alternative Central Park East School, which embraced progressive ideals in the tradition of John Dewey in an effort to provide better education for inner-city children (Meier, 1996).

In 1984, Meier founded Central Park East Secondary School, which was hailed as a success by most researchers in the education field (Goldberg, 1991). Goldberg (1991) stated that more than 90% of the school's entering students went on to college, mostly to 4-year schools. During this period, she founded a local Coalition center, which networked approximately 50 small Coalition-style K–12 schools in the city (Goldberg, 1991). In addition, between 1992 and 1996, she also served as codirector of the Coalition Campus Project that successfully redesigned the reform of two large failing city high schools, and created a dozen new small Coalition schools (Goldberg, 1991). Afterwards, in 1987 Meier received a MacArthur Fellowship for her work. Goldberg (1991) noted that Meier went on to help establish a network of small high schools in New York City based on progressive principles as part of an Annenberg grant. In 1996, Meier moved to Boston, where she became the founding principal of a small K–8 pilot school, Mission Hill, within the Boston public school system. She is currently on the faculty of New York University's Steinhardt School of Education, as a senior scholar and adjunct professor as well as a board member and director of New Ventures at Mission Hill, director of and

adviser to Forum for Democracy and Education, and on the board of the Coalition of Essential Schools (Goldberg, 1991).

Another major contributor to the small school movement is Ted Sizer, who is arguably one of the leading educational reformers in the United States (Martin & DeVitis, 1987). Along with his wife Nancy Faust Sizer and Deborah Meier in 1984, he founded the Coalition of Essential Schools and is currently serving as its chair emeritus (Martin & DeVitis, 1987). Sizer received his BA from Yale and his doctorate from Harvard and held several teaching positions before becoming dean of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard and, subsequently, the headmaster of Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts (Coalition of Essential Schools, n.d.). He is the founding director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (Martin & DeVitis, 1987). After retiring from Brown University, Professor Sizer took a 1-year position as head of the Francis W. Parker Essential School. Since the late 1970s, he has worked with hundreds of high schools, studying the development and design of the American education system (Coalition of Essential Schools, n.d.).

Sizer's reflection on a 5-year study of high schools in which a team of investigators toured high schools and interviewed teachers, students, and administrators, and spent considerable time observing classrooms and, especially, following students through their daily routines led him to create Horace's Compromise (Martin & DeVitis, 1987). Martin and DeVitis (1987) stated that in Horace's Compromise Sizer launched an attack on several of the ubiquitous features of an American high school, such as the standard 50-minute classroom block used in scheduling. Martin and DeVitis (1987) wrote that Sizer felt that 50 minutes is not adequate time to teach a lesson given the distractions

such as announcements and administrative procedures that have to be completed by the teacher. Sizer also objected strongly to the extensive system of electives, which potentially distract from the core curriculum and lead to breadth over depth (Martin & DeVitis, 1987). This aligns with Sizer's skepticism of sports, which he feels occupies a position of significant importance in the life of high schools (Martin & DeVitis, 1987). Martin and DeVitis (1987) noted that, most central to his critique, however, were practices of teaching and learning. Sizer agreed with the educational philosophies of John Dewey and Paulo Freire in insisting that education must be dialogical, characterized by give-and-take interaction between teacher and student, rather than unidirectional lecturing (Martin & DeVitis, 1987). Conversely, most of the observations conducted were of teacher-centered classrooms, which does not agree with this philosophy (Martin & DeVitis, 1987).

In response, Sizer created Horace, an archetype teacher, qualified, capable, and committed, but dehumanized by his working conditions and willing to make the compromise, though painfully conscious of the cost in authenticity (Martin & DeVitis, 1987). The compromise is to get by on what is considered good enough, in short, to exist without performing your intended task, which is to truly educate the children (Martin & DeVitis, 1987). Martin and DeVitis (1987) wrote that Horace's Compromise is followed by Horace's School and then Horace's Hope, which is Sizer's vision of high schools under reform. This reform would come in the form of the Coalition of Essential Schools.

Quint (2005) asserted that the foundation for small learning environments began with First Things First Schools. Before the small school movement known as high school transformation swept the educational world, First Things First Schools began in the

Midwest (Hendrie, 2005). James P. Connell is the president, cofounder, and architect of Institute for Research and Reform in Education, referred to as the IRRE, school reform initiative First Things First (Hendrie, 2005). Quint et al. (2005) noted that the First Things First initiative, which was developed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education, works with its partner schools to strengthen relationships among students, school staff, and families to improve teaching and learning in every classroom every day. First Things First was initially implemented as a district-wide reform in all elementary, middle, and high schools in the Kansas City, Kansas, school district, and now operates in more than 70 schools in nine districts (Hendrie, 2005). The key elements of the model are small learning environments, instructional improvement efforts, and the Family Advocate System (Quint et al., 2005). Quint et al. (2005) observed that the family advocate system is intended to enable teachers to get to know well not only the 12 to 17 students in the small learning environments for whom the teachers serve as advisers but also the parents or guardians of these students. During a regularly scheduled family advocate period, advocates meet in a group with the students to whom the advocates are assigned; the advocates are also responsible for conducting weekly check-in meetings with each student and for meeting with students and their parents at least twice a year (Quint et al., 2005). Quint et al. (2005) found that the majority of students said that they felt comfortable talking to their family advocate, and the system may serve an especially important function for the 43% of students who reported not having another adult in the school besides the family advocate whom they could contact when needed. Also, a majority of teachers who served as advocates observed that they had made progress in giving students a sounding board when they needed one, in helping them succeed

academically, and in many other ways (Quint et al., 2005). Quint et al. (2005) also asserted that high school students in Kansas City, Kansas, registered large gains on a wide range of academic outcomes that were sustained over several years and were pervasive across the district's schools. Findings included increased rates of student attendance and graduation, reduced student dropout rates, and improved student performance on the state tests of reading and mathematics (Quint et al., 2005). These and similar results have prompted districts to adopt variations of the First Things First program across the nation. This has led to a wide range in types of small school settings.

#### *Types of Autonomous Small Schools*

Autonomy refers to the amount of decision-making power an administrator or a small school has to make decisions (Ark, 2002). If a small school or learning environment is to be truly different in the approach of teaching students, then decisions cannot come from the district office rendering one-size-fits-all mandates (Ark, 2002). Ark (2002) stated that autonomy is important in a number of areas, including curriculum, budget, and staffing. Small schools are created based on a theme for teaching and learning, and educational goals for the students; thus, small schools need curriculum autonomy to develop integrated learning experiences that support the schools' focus (Ark, 2002). However, Ark (2002) found that small schools operate around the country with the same per-pupil funding as large schools. This creates difficulties in implementing the small student/teacher ratio that has become prevalent in small schools. In addition, a lack of autonomy in staffing can create problems as well. Ark (2002) wrote that small schools need the opportunity to hire staff members who understand the mission

of the school and have complementary skills, but are inhibited by district-office placement. Seniority schemes inhibit the ability of small schools to retain their focus.

The two types of small schools are autonomous small schools and schools-within-schools (Wasley et al., 2002). Large numbers of autonomous small schools have their own principal and at times share a building with one or more other schools. In this case, Wasley et al. (2002) observed that each school is run completely independently but has the benefit of sharing common spaces such as the athletic facilities and cafeteria. In addition, when a school building houses more than one small school, the number of school choices for students and parents in the neighborhood is increased (Wasley et al., 2002).

Two types of autonomous small schools are autonomous neighborhood small schools and autonomous charter small schools (Wasley et al., 2002). Autonomous neighborhood small schools are autonomous small schools that enroll students from the local attendance area. In most cases, autonomous neighborhood small schools have small numbers of students and specifically design their programs to maximize the benefits of a small faculty and student body (Wasley et al., 2002). These small neighborhood schools have their own unit number, administration, faculty, students, local school council, budget, and schedule (Wasley et al., 2002). Wasley et al. (2002) found that most autonomous neighborhood small schools do not require admissions tests for students. In a few cases, small schools housed in one building utilize a director for each small school and one building principal, rather than a principal for each small school. These schools are referred to as multiplex schools, and to maintain identity, each school in a multiplex has its own unit number, lead teacher or teacher director, budget, and schedule (Wasley et



al., 2002). The principal in a multiplex manages building-wide issues and shared space, as well as approves teacher evaluations and personnel decisions made by each of the small schools (Wasley et al., 2002).

The second type of autonomous small schools is known as charter small schools. Bomotti, Ginsberg, and Cobb (1999) observed that charter schools are one of the fastest-spreading, dynamic, and controversial educational reform movements to emerge in response to widespread demands for better public schools and more school choice. A majority of states have now passed legislation allowing parents, teachers, and community members to start these more autonomous schools, which receive public funds but operate without interference by most state and local school district regulations governing other public schools (Bomotti et al., 1999). These are schools that operate independently from the Board of Education, usually founded by community organizations, universities, foundations, or teachers. Nevertheless, Wasley et al. (2002) noted that each charter school is operated by its own individual board and is held accountable for achievement by the local school district. Charter schools have control over budgets, school calendars, hiring and firing, and curriculum. Also, many choose to use longer school days and academic years than traditional public schools (Wasley et al., 2002). Bomotti et al. (1999) asserted that, because of the schools' enhanced autonomy, they would encourage educational innovation, provide more professional opportunities for teachers, and operate more efficiently than regular public schools. For these reasons, charter schools are also expected to serve as educational research and development laboratories and a spur to reform of the public education system as a whole (Bomotti et al., 1999).

*Schools-Within-Schools.* Sharing a unit number and principal with other schools on the same site or academic programs in the same building are characteristics of a school-within-a-school. Schools-within-schools have self-selected faculty and students who are identified as a part of a small school or academy within the school complex (Sicoli, 2000). Often, the students within each school are identified and separated with the use of uniforms. Schools within schools are subgroups within schools, organized around particular themes (Sicoli, 2000). For example, career academies combine key principles of the school-to-career movement, integrating academic and vocational instruction, providing work-based learning opportunities for students, and preparing students for postsecondary education and employment with the personalized learning environment of a small, focused learning community (Sicoli, 2000). Sicoli (2000) wrote that these schools are generally formed to provide students and parents with a consistent educational approach across the years or subject areas and a reduced feeling of anonymity within a large setting. The purpose is to offer alternatives to parents who want a specialized education for their children not available through the normal school structure or standard curriculum (Sicoli, 2000). Coffee and Prestridge (2001) observed that career academies are schools-within-schools that link students with peers, teachers, and community partners in a disciplined environment, thereby fostering academic success and mental and emotional health. The career academy concept includes the following three key elements: a college preparatory curriculum with a career theme, partnerships with employers, community, and higher education (Coffee & Prestridge, 2001). Additionally, Coffee and Prestridge (2001) stated that within the key elements there must be a team of teachers who have joined the program by choice, voluntary enrollment by

students who are allowed to focus on a discipline of their choice, academic courses that meet high school graduation and college entrance requirements, common planning time for the teaching team, counseling to ensure that students have postsecondary plans, employers providing mentoring and job shadowing, a steering committee of community partners to oversee academy operations, and parental support of students' enrollment in the academy.

When several school-within-a-school sites exist in a large school, they provide parents, students, and teachers with several choices of smaller communities within the larger school, each with a distinct focus, allowing for a good match to be made. Sicoli (2000) stated that these schools typically control their curriculum, interactions with parents, and partnerships with outside organizations. Additionally, varying autonomy with respect to budget, schedule, and personnel depending on the school district is a cornerstone characteristic (Sicoli, 2000). Schools within schools are sometimes referred to as smaller learning communities, or institutes, or academies (Tharp & Gallimore, 1997). However, small schools imply teacher-centered and passive learning environments; small learning environments are understood as learner-centered and encourage active learning. Additionally, these settings are structured to support low levels of adult direction, and students are able to fully participate in the activities at hand (Tharp & Gallimore, 1997).

*House models.* As with other types of small schools, there are different types of school-within-a school models. One of the most popular models is known as the vertical house model (Cotton, 1996). House plans divide students in a large school into groups of several hundred, either by grade levels or combining grade levels. Cotton (1996)

observed that, in vertical house plans, students in grades 9–12 or 10–12 are assigned to groups of a few hundred each within a large high school. Students take some or all courses with their house members and from their house teachers. House arrangements may be yearlong or multiyear arrangements (Cotton, 1996). House plans personalize the high school experience but usually have a limited effect on curriculum or instruction (Cotton, 1996). Raywid (1996) observed that a house should be organized on a 1-year or a vertical, multiyear basis. The house plan is a form of internal organization, which is typically overlaid upon the departmentalized structure characterizing most high schools. Inside the large high school, each house shares the same faculty and facilities but has autonomous policies for student discipline, activities, government, and parental involvement (Raywid, 1996). In ninth-grade house plans, the ninth graders in large high schools have their own house with various support services to ease the transition into high school (Cotton, 1996).

The special curriculum school model organizes students into houses based on special interests or needs. These schools offer advanced courses for high-achieving students, and other students are divided into houses based on the students' special needs or interests (Cawelti, 1993). Raywid (1996) wrote that, influenced by the book *A Nation at Risk*, career academies and clusters are becoming popular. Cawelti (1993) observed that in these models students engage in classes or house systems aligned with the students' interests and possible career choices. Also growing in popularity are at-risk models. These plans serve students who have not responded well to traditional learning environments. A typical model includes a traditional academic curriculum along with an academy program in which students learn a trade such as computer repair (Cawelti,

1993). Newcomer school models are sometimes established in areas where a large number of students—generally elementary school students—are entering a school system for the first time and having difficulty with the transition (Boloz & Blessing, 1994). Then there are parent-participation models, in which parents of elementary-school children are permitted to enroll the children in the school only after making a commitment to donate a specific amount of their time and energy as teachers (Boloz & Blessing, 1994). This model has surfaced more among charter schools in recent years. Lastly, the advisory systems place students under the guidance and care of either a teacher or administrator for their entire school experience (Boloz & Blessing, 1994). Teacher advisory systems are similar to adult advocate systems; teacher advisory systems organize adults to personalize the high school experience and support academic achievement, working with small groups of students (Boloz & Blessing, 1994). Some schools and districts establish advisory classes that meet weekly; others schedule students for less formal one-on-one or group time with teachers (Boloz & Blessing, 1994). Advisory activities may include helping students develop personal learning plans, introducing students to career clusters, helping students select courses, and working with students on postsecondary plans and preemployment skills (Boloz & Blessing, 1994). Ark (2002) found that, at the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center in Providence, Rhode Island, ninth-grade students are assigned to an adviser who worked with them for all 4 years of high school. The advisory groups had 14 students and served as the fundamental building block for the school. The students and their advisers developed individual learning plans, and the plans reflected each student's needs and interests. This personal connection with

an adult helps ensure that students have an advocate who understands their interests, struggles, and ambitions (Ark, 2002).

The types of models and schools are expanding yearly according to the demands of the public and will provide more choices in the future. This will undoubtedly cause confusion about which schools are small schools and which are schools-within-a-school. Raywid (1996) asserted that it should be noted that the terminology distinguishing one type from another, as well as the practice, is highly idiosyncratic: for example, New York's distinction between minischools and schools-within-schools has probably not been formalized elsewhere, or, if it has, may elsewhere be identified in other terms. Philadelphia's charter schools are defined as schools-within-schools, yet some look like rather weakly implemented house plans (Raywid, 1996).

#### *Transformation to Small Learning Environments*

Once the decision has been made to transform a school into small schools, the change can be implemented in several ways. Raywid (2002) found that New York City developed perhaps the oldest model in 1983, under then-Chancellor Anthony Alvarado. This model is known as top-level central office support or district initiated. Raywid (2002) noted that Alvarado created a new position called superintendent of alternative schools and programs to launch innovative schools, to represent them within the system, and to oversee them with more flexibility. In 1997, the city's alternative schools numbered 425 and were scattered throughout New York's five boroughs (Raywid, 2002). Next, superintendent-mandated schools-within-schools began in Philadelphia. Superintendent Hornbeck launched small learning communities with the mandate that no unit in Philadelphia schools could exceed 400 students (Raywid, 2002). The units were

overseen by their principal, who was responsible for carrying out the superintendent's mandate of downsizing and supervising the development of a distinctive theme for each unit. Raywid (2002) noted that the next model of downsizing called small schools to counter charter schools came from the Boston Teachers Union. This initiative was launched in reaction to the charter schools launched in Boston and elsewhere in Massachusetts. Chicago modeled the school board adoption with minimal support model. According to Raywid (2002), the liaison at the central office was the director of the Office of Special Initiatives, who oversaw an array of special projects and had no staff or budget. Another pattern consists of schools-within-schools created at the school level, rather than at the district level, and at the instigation of the principal (Raywid, 2002). Raywid (2002) asserted that, at Kapaa Elementary School on Hawaii's island of Kauai, a elementary school enrolling 1,500 students, the principal encouraged teachers to design their own separate school-within-a-school. Over a 4- or 5-year period, the school was gradually converted into eight schools-within-a-school, each with its own teacher leader. Raywid (2002) observed that the last model of downsizing, called grassroots initiated, is the weakest. In the grassroots model, a group of teachers or of parents and teachers decides to try to launch a school-within-a-school and seeks the principal's authorization to do so (Raywid, 2002).

Although developing a new school is not a linear process, six stages frame the work: study, stage, design, build, launch, and sustain (Degnan, 2006; Palmer, 1994; Raywid, 1998). Raywid (1998) implied that, to make the transformation happen, the schools-within-schools or small schools must be recognizably different and distinctive from others. Transformed schools must reflect many features associated with restructured

schools, such as strong professional communities, a distinct school culture and climate, and adaptive modifications in the core technology of teaching (Degnan, 2006; Palmer, 1994; Raywid, 1998). Raywid (1998) asserted that the distinctiveness that attracts students, parents, and teachers emerges from a wedding of structural and organizational to programmatic features, and without both, the potential is limited. Thus, the biggest single mistake designers can make is restricting their changes to one type or the other, organization or program, and the constraining of their creations in other ways (Raywid, 1998). New schools-within-schools and small schools are far more likely to disappoint as a result of their similarity to the old ones than as a result of changes that are too expensive and risky (Lund, 1991; Raywid, 1998).

The work of new school development is complicated, and success depends on the commitment of all change facilitators to support and guide the effort. The specific names of these facilitators may differ from school to school, but the roles and responsibilities described are central to the success of any new small school transformation effort. It is also important to note that membership in several groups at the same time will occur by individuals. First, the process begins with a change coordinator or a project administrator. According to the *New England Small School Network Planning Manual* (2008), this person should have the most knowledge of the process of change, believe firmly in the benefits of small schools for students, staff, and the community, and be able to communicate that message to a variety of audiences. The project administrator is widely respected in the community, is knowledgeable about effective teaching and learning, is a creative problem solver, and has the perseverance and commitment to guide and facilitate the long, complex new school development process (Degnan, 2006; *New England*, 2008;



Palmer, 1994). According to the New England Small School Network Web site, the responsibilities for this position include but are not limited to acting as the point of contact for the new school, keeping the focus on equity and high achievement for all students, understanding the school development process, building positive relationships with the community and local district, staying current with small schools research, coordinating the design and implementation of school systems and programs, and using reflection and feedback to inform the design and implementation process.

Working closely with the change coordinator or project administrator is the leadership team of the school. The leadership team consists of the school, district staff, and others as needed (*New England, 2008*). As stated on the New England Small School Network Web site, the leadership team develops a common set of core agreements and/or guiding principles for small school design while keeping the focus on equity and high achievement for all students. Next, the leadership team must design strategies and processes for small school development and implementation and facilitate the process for assessing and allocating resources (Degnan, 2006; *New England, 2008*; Palmer, 1994). In addition, while leading small school development and implementation, the leadership team must have a constant open line of communication with all stakeholders. These stakeholders make up the design team that will move deeper into the planning process (*New England, 2008*).

One must note that small schools cannot be created in isolation from those who will be affected by them. The *New England Small School Network Planning Manual* (2008) observed that the design of small schools has greater integrity when crafted with the input of many. Including diverse representation of key constituencies on the

district leadership team and school-level design teams ensures that diverse voices are crafting the new small schools. The *New England Small School Network Planning Manual* (2008) reported that smallness and autonomies enable schools to focus on the essence of the educational experience for students—learning, teaching, and assessment. Small schools strive to ensure that learning is purposeful, challenging, and has value in the world beyond school, and every student is engaged in learning experiences that ensure students are fully prepared to be productive citizens in a democratic society (Degnan, 2006; Palmer, 1994).

The design team consists of representatives from all stakeholder groups and includes an administrator and at least two teachers and at least one community partner (*New England, 2008*). In addition, teachers in small schools are involved with the design of school policies, curriculum, and programs. Teachers work directly with the small school leader and change coordinator in the design of many components of the small school, especially in the design of curriculum. The design team is responsible for building a shared understanding of small school models and instructional approaches and maintaining high expectations, equity, and social justice in school design and implementation (*New England, 2008*). The design team defines the small school's mission, vision and beliefs systems, programs, and policies as well as determines the evaluation plan for the small school (Degnan, 2006; Palmer, 1994). Then, this team must plan and develop the agreements for special education and other support services. After that, there must be communication with students, parents, members of the community and staff, and feedback on issues must be solicited. At that

point, the team identifies staffing needs and related roles and responsibilities (*New England, 2008*).

In an effort to make sure the interests of all involved are upheld, all small schools should have an advisory council. This council should consist of key stakeholders in the community, and should reflect the demographics of the community and school (*New England, 2008*). According to the New England Small School Network Web site, the council is responsible for helping the school adhere to its stated mission and vision, supports professional development and school improvement, and provides insight into and advice on operations, programs, and communications strategies.

One administrator usually known as the principal leads most schools, small or large. This leader is responsible for aligning the school program with the vision, directing the day-to-day operations of the school, supervising staff, and providing appropriate professional development (Quint, 2005). Quint (2005) wrote that small school leaders are often the first staff members hired for the new small school. These leaders then empower others to lead by modeling collaborative processes, sharing leadership responsibilities, and providing training for those assuming leadership roles; this practice is known as distributive leadership (Quint, 2005). The leader communicates the vision and supports and holds staff and students accountable for designing and implementing programs and strategies that align with the vision (Brown & Hosking, 1986). A governance and decision-making model must be identified, communicated to all stakeholders, and followed by all (Quint, 2005).

Brown and Hosking (1986) observed that schools should set high, clear, and fair academic and conduct standards that define clearly what all students will know and be

able to do by the time they leave high school and at points along the way. Quint (2005) concurred, stating that performance on standards-based tests is linked directly to students' advancement and grading, driving curriculum and instruction in all courses, and is discussed regularly with students and their families. Adults and students agree on conduct standards, which are reinforced by adults modeling positive behaviors and attitudes and are sustained by clear benefits to students and adults for meeting the standards and consequences for violating them. Quint (2005) asserted that efforts should be made to provide enriched and diverse opportunities to learn, by making learning more active and connected in safe and respectful learning environments; to perform, by linking assessment strategies that use multiple modes of learning and tie performance directly to standards; and to be recognized, by creating individual and collective incentives for student achievement and by providing leadership opportunities in academic and nonacademic areas.

In addition, Quint (2005) declared that schools should equip, empower, and expect all staff to improve instruction by creating a shared vision and expectation of high-quality teaching and learning in all classrooms, supporting small learning environments' implementation of research-based instructional strategies to fulfill that vision, and engaging all staff in ongoing study to improve curricular and instructional approaches. Also, Quint (2005) observed that district administrators must allow for flexible allocation of available resources by teams and schools, based on instructional and interpersonal needs of students. These resources include student and staff instructional facilities, time for instructional planning and professional development as well as discretionary funds (Quint, 2005). Further, providing collective incentives and consequences for small

learning environments, schools, and central office staff that are linked to change in student performance ensures collective responsibility (Brown & Hosking, 1986; Quint, 2005).

*Best practices.* A review of small school transformation research identified on-the-ground strategies that are associated with positive student outcomes called best practices. The research base (Bomotti et al., 1999; Cotton & Raywid, 1996; Sicoli, 2000; Tharp & Gallimore, 1997) from which these best practices are drawn encompasses studies of small schools and career academies; houses; and schools-within-schools, which tend to be organized around curriculum themes (Oxley, 2001). In *New Small Learning Environments*, Cotton (2001) identified the following five key elements of successful small learning environments as self-determination, identity, personalization, support for teaching, and functional accountability. Self-determination is defined as autonomy in decision-making; physical separateness, self-selection of teachers and students, and flexible scheduling must all be present to allow small learning community members to create and realize their own vision (Cotton, 2001). Identity involves developing a distinctive program of study that originates in the vision, interests, and unique characteristics of their members, and personalization involves relationships. It requires making sure all community members know each other well (Cotton, 2001). Teachers are able to identify and respond to students' particular strengths and needs. Support for teaching involves creating an atmosphere in which teachers assume authority as well as responsibility in educating their students (Cotton, 2001). School leadership does not reside only in the administrative staff; administrators teach, and teachers lead (Cotton, 2001). Functional accountability occurs when communities use performance assessment

systems to demonstrate student achievement and to evaluate current practices (Oxley, 2005). In addition, Oxley (2005) wrote that five interrelated spheres of activities are key to transforming traditional comprehensive high schools into effective small learning environments. These dimensions are structural support, building and district support, and interdisciplinary teams, which encompass a rigorous relevant curriculum, inclusive program practices, and continuous program improvement strategies (Oxley, 2005).

*Shared facilities.* Efforts to improve student achievement have large comprehensive schools converting to smaller learning environments and sharing facilities across the nation (Cushman, 1999; Estwick, 2005; Van Dyke, 1970). This has created an issue in the form of space to operate. The majority of small schools must share a physical building with other schools and thus must negotiate the use of that shared space. Mathan (2002) found that the latest industry estimates show that about \$84 billion will be spent on school buildings over the next few years. This makes it a marvelous opportunity for many communities to rethink buildings and community collaboration (Mathan, 2002). Webster (2004), Estwick (2005), and Cushman (1999) observed that, even in a shared building situation, small schools should be as separate as possible. Schools should have physically separated areas of the building that belong to their own school. Whenever possible, each school should have its own entrance and gathering areas. This physical separation creates a sense of ownership and identity within in the school (Cushman, 1999; Estwick, 2005; Webster, 2004). If it is not possible to have physical separation of the schools, they should at least stagger schedules so the schools change classes at different times and do not share the gym and the cafeteria (Webster, 2004). Because of space and budget constraints in New York City, Miller

(2005) observed that schools are sharing buildings with other schools or with noneducational enterprises. The combination of the recent increase in the number of small schools and charter schools has created the need for this intervention (Miller, 2005). Miller (2005) stated that roughly half of New York City high schools share facilities, but only about a quarter of the high school population attends schools in shared facilities. This may be expected to rise, however, as the small school movement grows, and more schools open and existing schools grow to include more grades and, thus, more students (Miller, 2005). Most small schools start with either a set number of students or two grade levels, and then add a grade level each year, increasing the student population. This also means that the facilities that house more than one school face greater facility, administration, and safety challenges as the schools that comprise the building grow and increase their enrollment. Miller (2005) found that, due to this growth, many conflicts have arisen in the shared facilities in New York. These conflicts have occurred between students, teachers, school safety agents, and administrators and may stem from difficulties in planning and using space, as well as variations among the schools (Miller, 2005).

One way to reduce tension in shared facility situations is to maintain good working relationships between the principals or the administrators of the small learning environments (Miller, 2005). Webster (2004) wrote that there are several key characteristics to these strong relationships: the relationship between the principals, as well as the administrators of the small learning environments, of the schools sharing the facility must be a genuine relationship of commitment. The principals of the small learning environments of the schools must have a philosophical commitment and

investment in the concept of more than one school sharing the same physical building (Webster, 2004). This commitment lays the groundwork for the critical communication that must occur between principals. Webster (2004) found that in order to ensure that the decisions regarding shared facilities between the principals are egalitarian and provide equal access to the facilities for all students in the building, the principals should negotiate from equal positions. If one principal comes into discussions with more decision-making power than another over the use of physical school facilities, the relationship between the schools may become distorted (Webster, 2004). Before schools start sharing a building facility, the principals of the schools should engage in preliminary discussions about their assumptions, goals, and concerns about sharing physical space (Cushman, 1999; Estwick, 2005; *New England*, 2008; Webster, 2004). Webster (2004) asserted that advocates and administrators nationwide agree that the most important element for the success of any small school shared environment is the commitment to regular, ongoing communication among the various principals. Through regular meetings and communication, the principals can anticipate possible issues and resolve them before they lead to conflicts. By meeting on a regular basis to work through these issues, the principals create a team environment within the school building and between the various schools. By meeting on a regular basis, the principals will find that, when conflicts do arise, the conversations are less threatening, for a foundational relationship has already been developed (Webster, 2004). In agreement with Webster (2004), the *New England Small Schools Network Planning Manual* (2008) stated that in these weekly meetings, various issues can be covered, such as scheduling use of space, security issues, janitorial and maintenance issues, arrival and departure times of students, shared staff, and



equipment use. Weekly meetings allow for flexibility and the ability to change with the changing needs of the students and the schools.

In addition to communication at the school level, there needs to be communication from the district office. Webster (2004) observed that, for any shared facilities situation to work, schools need to hear from the highest levels of the school's district administration that the school district expects cooperation among the schools in shared facilities. The message from the higher administration that the school district, not the principals, owns the school building, creates the foundation for an equal relationship among the principals (Webster, 2004). This action allows for every administrator to understand that no one administrator reigns over the others. Interactions between leaders will undoubtedly lead to conflict, but weekly meetings and assurance from the district that all are equal does not eliminate conflict that arises from having several leaders in one location (Webster, 2004). Webster (2004) observed that a formal conflict resolution system with a neutral third-party arbitrator allows schools to negotiate disagreements from equal positions. The use of an unbiased individual in resolving disagreements gives the resolution more legitimacy with each of the schools. A shared facilities situation is most effective in a context where each school within a building has its own leadership, yet a separate person who is not affiliated with any particular school is a neutral facilities coordinator in charge of the physical building (Webster, 2004; *New England*, 2008). This facilities coordinator acts as a neutral scheduler of space, mediates disagreements between schools, and allows for an equal power dynamic among the principals. Webster (2004) wrote that the neutral facilities coordinator could take various forms under the different models of small schools. For example, in a multiplex situation, a neutral

facilities coordinator could be in charge of the physical building, and each small school within the multiplex might have its own principal to focus on specific administrative and curriculum issues (*New England*, 2008; Webster, 2004). In a freestanding situation with two small schools in one building, it may not make economic sense to have a neutral facilities coordinator within the building. Instead, the neutral facilities coordinator may be at the central office level and may have jurisdiction over several shared facilities situations (Webster, 2004).

Sharing facilities is essential to the formation of smaller learning environments but can occur in several different formats. Mathan (2002) observed that South Grand Prairie High School in Grand Prairie, Texas, a suburb of Dallas, was a typical suburban school that made such a conversion. The school had above-average test scores and graduation rates, and relatively few discipline problems (Mathan, 2002). However, Mathan (2002) discerned that, 6 years ago, without grants or community pressure, the administrators and faculty members at South Grand Prairie decided to convert the high school, which had more than 2,000 students, into five academies. The five academies focused on business and computer technology; communications, humanities, and law; creative and performing arts; health science and human services; as well as math, science, and engineering (2002). Mathan (2002) wrote that each of the five academies offered some Advanced Placement (AP) courses, so the number of students taking AP exams increased over the past few years from less than 70 to more than 300. Attendance, graduation rates, and achievement at the school remained well above the state average, and faculty members reported higher morale. The U.S. Department of Education has named South Grand Prairie a new American high school (Mathan, 2002).

Another example of a school moving to the shared facilities concept is the Boston public schools system. One of the first pilot schools, Fenway High School, initially was located at a local community college. Mathan (2002) observed that Fenway was one of the original members of Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools. The school enrolled significant numbers of low-income students and maintained a strong graduation rate and an excellent record of graduates going on to postsecondary education (Mathan, 2002). Fenway had a well-developed advising system, and graduation was based on demonstrations of skill and knowledge (Mathan, 2002). In the new location, Fenway shared space with two other organizations. The first was another pilot school, the Boston Arts Academy. This school worked closely with many nationally recognized arts organizations near the school building, providing internship and apprenticeship opportunities (Mathan, 2002). The third occupant of the building was a library that is shared by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Fenway, and Boston Arts Academy. The library's collection was much richer and broader because it was funded in part by the schools and in part by the orchestra (Mathan, 2002).

### *Instructional Themes*

Engaged students and collaborative faculties distinguish small high schools that are organized around themes (Cotton, 1996; Rodriguez, 2003). Themes are the hooks that lure students to a particular curriculum (Cotton, 1996). Some districts have set out to establish small learning environments and simply assigned teachers and students to the schools at random. Raywid (2006) asserted that, in doing so, the districts are missing a tremendous opportunity because themed schools can be enormously successful as high schools, and the themes can help bring together a group of teachers and students who will

make a good match. Small schools should begin with different themes, and let students select the theme that interests them enough to engage them in a full curriculum (Cotton, 1996; Klonsky, 1996; Rodriguez, 2003). It is possible to devise themes that are, at the same time, attractive to adolescents, broad, and significant enough to lead students into a full curriculum (Raywid, 2006; Snyder, 2003). Raywid (2006) stated that themes play an equally significant role for the faculty in providing educators with something around which to coalesce, be it an area of shared interest or a general approach to thinking. In addition, themes make collaboration necessary to provide coherence to an otherwise disparate array of subjects (Raywid, 2006).

One of the earliest themes used for a high school was at Middle College High School (Raywid, 2006). The model has since been widely adopted across the country and is commonly referred to as the early college theme. The school was designed to target high-risk and low socioeconomic students who were from a community that did not generally attend postsecondary education. Middle College High School was located on the campus of LaGuardia Community College in Long Island City, Queens, and New York. Raywid (2006) observed that the name and the location were integral to the idea, which was to introduce the students to the notion of higher education and to familiarize them with its environment and population. Students at Middle College High School enrolled in community college classes, and the students received high school and college credit for these classes simultaneously (Raywid, 2006). Raywid (2006) observed that students are selected for admission to the Middle College program partly because of prior poor attendance and course failure, yet about 85% of the students graduated from Middle College High School, and of these, 75% went on to college.

Districts seeking to meet the needs of students immigrating to the United States developed the theme of one of New York's most successful high schools. These students make up what is known today as the ESOL, or English as a Second Language, population (Raywid, 2006). Raywid (2006) observed that International High School is for students who have been in this country for fewer than 4 years and who score below the 21st percentile on the English version of the Language Assessment Battery. Some of the students at International High School had never been to any kind of school before. However, Raywid (2006) observed that even though more than two thirds come from families with incomes below the poverty level, the graduation rate in this school was 96%, and 97% of its graduates went on to college.

Finally, it should be clear that schools should not focus themes on either an academic discipline or a particular career. Raywid (2006) asserted that discipline-based themes tend to appeal largely to the most academically oriented students, which tends to create elitist institutions. In addition, Raywid (2006) stated that career-oriented programs simply duplicate the disadvantages associated with vocational education, leading us right back to tracking. Themes must be carefully chosen if schools are to avoid such pitfalls, but when themes are well chosen, they can greatly enhance the motivation of students and faculty members and greatly improve the outcomes for high schools (Raywid, 2006; Rodriguez, 2003; Snyder, 2003).

*Personalization of school environment.* Ark (2002b) wrote that personalization in small schools can be met in a variety of ways. First is the personalization of the organization, which deals with teacher-student relationships, class size and anonymity (Ark, 2002b; Falls, 2008; Jewell, 2006; Rodriguez, 2005). Ark (2002b) observed that

good small schools build personalization into their organization in at least four ways with houses and teams, including large blocks of time, small loads, and advisers or advocates. Houses and teams, as at Mission Hill School in Boston, should have teams with a small number of students, and each team should have curriculum and schedule autonomy (Ark, 2002b; Falls, 2008; Jewell, 2006; Rodriguez, 2005). High schools are moving toward operating on some type of block schedule. This movement has allowed thousands of secondary schools to slow the pace of the day and extend the student-teacher connection with longer blocks of instruction that allows for more student-teacher interaction (Ark, 2002b). The third way to increase personalization, small load, refers to the teacher-student ratio present at a school (Ark, 2002b; Falls, 2008; Jewell, 2006; Rodriguez, 2005). Ark (2002b) found that the Coalition of Essential Schools prescribed that the student-teacher ratio must not exceed 80:1 in a secondary school. This allows the teacher to focus more on the needs of the individual student. Yet another way to increase personalization is through advocates and advisers. Ark (2002b) wrote that powerful sustained adult relationships may be the most important countervailing strategy to poverty.

Personalization can also be achieved through instruction. Ark (2002b) found that good small schools have a coherent focus and philosophy of education, and offer a curriculum that is aligned with that focus. At the Met, or Minnesota New Country School, in Henderson, Minnesota, this was accomplished through student-centered instruction and a project-based curriculum (Ark, 2002b). Also, another example of this was the Minnesota New Country School. There were no bells, no hallways, no homerooms, and few traditional, teacher-led courses. Teachers helped students

complete independent and group projects that ranged from boat building to raising angora goats as part of a student-run weaving business (Ark, 2002b).

In addition, good schools intentionally layer multiple personalization strategies in unique ways to ensure powerful relationships (Ark, 2002b; Falls, 2008; Rodriguez, 2005). Good schools take steps to ensure that every adult knows every student, at least by sight, and every student has an advocate and the opportunity to pursue his or her passion and gifts (Ark, 2002b). Ark (2002b) observed that the Gates Foundation has sponsored the replication of four promising small high schools, including the Met, Minnesota New Country, and High Tech High, that started with a vision of personalized teaching and learning and created a shared pedagogy, curriculum, organizational structure, climate, and facility to reflect this priority (Ark, 2002b). This commitment is based on the encouraging results produced by the schools. Ark (2002) stated that test results from high school exit exams rank High Tech High third in English and writing and fifth in math for San Diego County. When compared on a statewide scale, High Tech High's results are even more impressive: 96% of students passed the English and writing tests compared to the state average of 64%. Seventy-eight percent of High Tech High students passed the math test compared to 44% of students statewide (Ark, 2002).

Unfortunately, personalization is not a term known to all, and students are continuing to struggle in these places. Thus, districts that attempt to increase academic pressure without improving personalization are seeing even higher dropout rates, especially among disadvantaged groups (Ark, 2002). Ark (2002) stated that the evidence is clear that there are no large nonselective comprehensive high schools that

work for all students. Creating schools that work for all students means starting small and staying focused on the students. It means making personalization fundamental to the organizational and instructional design of every school (Ark, 2002).

Lambert, Lowry, Copland, Gallucci, and Wallach (2004) asserted that there are four evolutionary stages along a personalization continuum. Schools work through the stages of the continuum until personalization is fully realized and measurably effective in advancing high levels of teaching and learning. It is important to note that not all schools go through the stages in the same order: some leap ahead in certain categories while others remain for a time in earlier stages to develop fully foundational elements (Lambert et al., 2004). Lambert et al. (2004) stated that stage one is a foundational stage, when school staff recognize the need for personalization, begin to leverage the benefits of smallness, and start to develop and extend structures to support personalization. In stage two, Lambert et al. (2004) observed that staff continue to design and adapt supportive structures; both teachers and students begin to perceive positive differences in relationships. The roles of the teacher and the professional community begin to evolve and expand; concurrently, teachers begin to talk about how they might adapt or change their instruction to meet the needs of learners. Lambert et al. (2004) wrote that stage three builds on each of the characteristics of stages one and two as individual teachers begin to practice instructional changes to meet learners' individual needs, often with the support of professional development. The last stage begins when staff members design and adapt structures to support personalization as needed. Teachers and students continue to acknowledge the effects of positive relationships, the roles of individual teachers and their professional community continue to expand and evolve, and teachers collectively



create instructional practices to meet the needs of individual learners, supported by ongoing professional development (Lambert et al., 2004).

*Advisement.* Advisement is at the core of the effort to make a large comprehensive school a successful small school (Flowers, 1995; Levin, 2005; Smith, 1976). Decreasing the size of the school is only the first step in the transformation process; students must be given support to reach the desired result. Advisement provides students a venue to develop strong and secure relationships with each other and with a caring adult in a small-group setting (Flowers, 1995; Levin, 2005; Smith, 1976). Levin (2005) discerned that every certificated staff member, including administrators, should be assigned 25–28 advisement students. The students are randomly assigned by grade level, and the same group of students meets with the same teacher throughout their stay in high school (Levin, 2005).

Burns (2006) found that there were five attributes of satisfying advisories. First, advisories should have integral placement. Burns (2006) stated that satisfying advisories are integral components of the larger plan for learning. Excellent programs are connected to teaming, curriculum selection, classroom management, and community service. Adviser authenticity is the second portion, which means that the teacher-advisers feel comfort and *authenticity* within the role of adviser (Burns, 2006). Such authenticity is a result of good preparation and being granted substantial latitude in selecting activities to meet advisee interests and needs. Burns (2006) asserted that authentic advisers describe themselves as both well prepared and encouraged to discover what works best with their particular group. Even in programs with clearly defined goals, satisfied advisers report substantial freedom in selecting and scheduling activities to meet the advisers' goals.

Also included in the five attributes are common aims. Burns (2006) stated that a core of recognizable aims should guide all advisory tasks. Professionals in schools with satisfying advisories can easily identify the purposes of advisory, as can the students. In contrast to this clarity of aims, program purposes in less-than-satisfying advisories are most often murky or unknown (Burns, 2006). Additionally, Burns (2006) found that effective advisories should have assertive leadership and tangible results. These result in frequent celebrations highlighting advisory accomplishments in academic achievement and community service, combined with prominent displays such as an advisory “wall of fame” of photographs and news clippings, provide tangible proof of successes (Burns, 2006).

Levin (2005) observed that at Tesoro High School freshmen have advisement every Thursday after the first block period of the day and other grades have advisement every other Thursday, alternating with tutorial. School counselors and a small group of teachers develop advisement topics and activities for each grade level. For example, freshmen topics include surviving in high school, respecting one another, bullying, and resolving conflicts and academic integrity, while topics for sophomores and juniors include character counts, summer jobs, and scholarships (Levin, 2005).

Every 9 weeks, or parallel with progress reporting periods, advisement teachers should hold individual grade conferences with students. At this time, students should be offered practical suggestions and encouragement for students who are struggling, and individual praise to students who are doing well (Levin, 2005). Levin (2005) wrote that the school community needs to strive to communicate to each student that at least one adult on campus notices and cares how the student is doing.

*Continuous program improvement.* Continuous program improvement involves analyzing data to determine the effectiveness of practices. Data should be reviewed on a regular basis to determine if there is a need for change (Wasley et al., 2000). Wasley et al. (2000) observed teacher teams that spend common preparation time actively discussing and planning curriculum and instruction improvements, as well as troubleshooting student progress, contribute to small learning environments' effectiveness. At present, standardized test scores, attendance rates, and dropout rates are the selected indicators for school achievement (Oxley, 2005). The actual data collected should be a product of the unique conditions and needs of the particular teams and students involved. Therefore, the implementation of curricula and learning activities require long-term refinement and adjustment as conditions and needs are continually changing (Wasley et al., 2000). Oxley (2005) discerned that in successful small schools and communities, teams engage in a continuous cycle of program improvement efforts. Teams assess their practice by analyzing student work and soliciting feedback from students, parents, and SLC partners, develop their own professional development plans, and are better able to apply the training to program needs (Oxley, 2005).

*Distributive leadership.* One of the pillars of transformation to smaller learning units is distributive leadership (Cotton, 2003). Due to the increase in demands on administrators, many school districts are beginning to institute the phenomenon called distributive leadership. Some schools distribute the leadership power between two administrators, while other schools involve teachers and parents, creating a group where there is no central leader in charge (Allen et al., 1998). As a result, numerous aspects of the schools or educational systems are attended more fully, and improvement

is significant (Allen et al., 1998). Allen et al. (1998) asserted that distributing the leadership allows administrators to focus on a few areas and really make an impact.

Cotton (2003) revealed that this type of shared decision making is inversely related to student achievement and success. Students in schools run by principals with more collaborative approaches do better than students in schools run in a more authoritarian manner (Cushman, 1997). Cotton (2003) asserted that the use of teacher leadership brings decision-making authority close to the classroom and gives teachers a new sense of responsibility and ownership in the school. Teacher leaders have responsibilities ranging from setting agendas and facilitating regular staff meetings to documenting the work of the small school and keeping statistics on overall student development (Cotton, 2003). Cotton (2003) found that teacher leaders are important liaisons between staff, parents, and administrators and keep stakeholders abreast of all information related to action research, professional development, events, and policies. Teacher leaders generally receive a stipend and additional training to assume these responsibilities (Cushman, 1997).

### *Instructional Changes*

*Interdisciplinary teaching.* The fundamental building blocks of schools in the 21st century are interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams (Wasley et al., 2000). Interdisciplinary teams are organized around the students the team shares in common, much like the concept of teaming used in middle schools (Oxley, 1997). As the central feature of a high-functioning small learning environment, an interdisciplinary team works closely together with a group of students shared in common for instruction (Oxley, 1997). Oxley (1997) found that traditional schools organize teachers based on subject areas.

Small learning environments organize teachers across subject areas to create a more student-centered form of schooling. Wasley et al. (2000) asserted that researchers have found that small learning environment teachers enjoy greater interdisciplinary collaboration and consensus and instructional leadership, including program coordination, than teachers in traditional schools.

The student group is kept small by design, never exceeding more than a few hundred members. Oxley (2005) stated that the size of the learning community affects the quality of students' relationships with their peers and teachers and ultimately students' educational outcomes. In small schools, students are more likely to form relationships that bind the students to the school, and teachers are better able to identify and respond to students' needs (Wasley et al., 2000). In addition, Oxley (2005) asserted that small learning environments are most effective when interdisciplinary team members share students and are able to pool their knowledge of students, communicate consistent messages, and create coherent curricular programs. Teachers need common planning time to maximize collaboration efforts. Darling-Hammond, Aneesh, and Ort (2002) asserted that successful small learning environments do not appear to depend on extraordinary individuals as much as on regular collaboration. Collegial exchange among team members serves to broaden input and deepen consideration of the educational problems the team members face (Wasley et al., 2000). Sharing ideas and observing each other's work provide effective forms of professional development by expanding individual members' teaching repertoires and socializing new team members (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). Team members' collaboration also engenders a sense of shared responsibility for their students' success (Wasley et al., 2000). Teams able to pull

together in the same direction across disciplines and grades felt more efficacious and committed to students' ongoing learning than teachers working in traditional schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). Administrators should dedicate building space for this collaboration and have specific times designated for this activity (Cohen, 1995). Also, it is important to note that as the schools and communities operate in isolation identification by students is reinforced (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). Cohen (1995) affirmed that researchers have repeatedly found that physical proximity is instrumental to key small learning community functions. The physical proximity of teachers' classrooms facilitates teacher collaboration, promotes interaction among teachers and students, and helps to establish a separate identity and sense of community among members (Raywid, 1996). Further, Howe (2007) observed that the benefits that resulted from collaboration were targeted discussions, integrated curriculum, improved instruction, strong relationships, and constructive disagreements. However, Howe's (2007) study also found that the challenges to collaboration included external demands, the physical layout of the school, lack of targeted professional development, and weak administrators. This is an integral part of creating an atmosphere where students take ownership of their education and pride in the whole that they are a part of.

Integrated or interdisciplinary curriculum may take many forms: teachers of two subjects planning together to coordinate the content and process of instruction for the same students, jointly taught classes spanning two disciplines, and blending content from two disciplines into one course taught by a single teacher for twice the length of time as a single course (Howe, 2007). Interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams design student work that is both challenging and personally meaningful to students (Howe, 2007). Given

a large block of time, an interdisciplinary team can organize fieldwork, involve community partners, and allow students to go where their questions lead them (Oxley, 2005). Teams should create opportunities for learning content in different contexts, and connection to real-world issues (Howe, 2007). Oxley (2005) observed that successful small learning environments have created engaging interdisciplinary curricula through collaboration with community-based partners and established high standards for student proficiency in key discipline-based content areas. Howe (2007) pronounced that the most powerful programs encompass at least half the student's instructional day and more than 1 year of study.

### *Looping*

During the transformation to small school settings, teachers also have to follow the tenets of the part of the reform effort known as looping. Looping, which is sometimes called multiyear teaching or multiyear placement, occurs when a teacher is promoted with his or her students to the next grade level with the same group of children for 2 or 3 years (Kerr, 2002). This form of classroom organization was described in 1913 by the U.S. Department of Education under the name teacher rotation (Grant, 1996). Other terms include family-style learning, two-cycle teaching, student teacher progression, and multiyear instruction (Gaustad, 1998). Forms of looping have long been used in the private Waldorf schools and in other nations, including Germany and Japan (Simel, 1998).

What results is the continuity of a relationship with a teacher that enables children to flourish (Kerr, 2002). Teachers and students in looping classes need not start from scratch every fall, learning new sets of names and personalities and establishing

classroom rules and expectations (Gaustad, 1998). Most teachers find that students remain on task far longer at the end of the first year; accordingly, teachers estimate that they gain a month of learning time at the start of the second year (Grant, 1996). Spending several years with a class enables teachers to accumulate more in-depth knowledge of students' personalities, learning styles, strengths, and weaknesses (Gaustad, 1998). This longer contact reduces time spent on diagnosis and facilitates more effective instruction. Such contact also helps teachers build better relationships with parents (Simel, 1998). For students, having the same teacher and classmates for 2 or more years provides stability and builds a sense of community. Looping reduces anxiety and increases confidence for many children, enabling them to blossom both socially and as learners (Simel, 1998).

However, not all aspects of looping have been positive. Gaustad (1998) stated that longer contact could amplify the negative as well as the positive aspects of relationships. The greatest concern of parents is that their children might spend 2 years with an ineffective teacher (Gaustad, 1998). Time can also exacerbate problems with student and teacher personality clashes, unreasonably demanding parents, problematic mixtures of students, and specific weaknesses of a generally good teacher (Simel, 1998). Simel (1998) reported that joining a looping class is hard on newcomers, and that introducing five or more new students in the second year can be disruptive enough to reduce the benefits of looping for the original students. Additionally, some students and teachers also experience emotional difficulty leaving their classes at the end of a loop (Simel, 1998).



### *Performance-Based Assessment*

Engaging students in rich learning experiences requires a variety of assessment tools, which are identified in the form of project-based instruction (Cater, 2005; McKinley, 2004; Starnes, 2002; Tilton, 1995). Small schools seek to move beyond the standardized tests that have dominated the curriculum in traditional schools in recent years to performance-based assessments that provide learners with opportunities to demonstrate learning in practical applications (Cater, 2005). At the Media and Technology Charter School in Boston, all ninth graders take a class in media and technology, where they learn about programming, digital video, and audio and then use those skills to create autobiographical Web sites (Cater, 2005). Cater (2005) asserted that one important aspect of the kind of performance-based assessment central to these schools is that students are able to publicly exhibit their growth in learning and readiness for moving on. Washington State has facilitated a consistent capacity for demonstrating this kind of success through the state's E-Folio System, a Web-based portfolio that provides an option for students preparing to meet the state's graduation exhibition requirement (Cater, 2005). Students plan, monitor, and reflect upon their learning experiences and receive coaching feedback as the students prepare for their culminating senior exhibition.

### *Project-Based Learning*

The recent shift in education has been due to the increased emphasis on standards, clear outcomes, and accountability (Beckett, 2000; Higgins, 1993; Ravitz, Mergendooler, & Markham, 2004; Sidman-Taveau, 2005). This shift has created the need for education to adapt to a changing world and is the primary reason that project-

based learning is increasingly popular (Ravitz et al., 2004). Project-based learning is a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks (Beckett, 2000; Higgins, 1993; Ravitz et al., 2004).

Research supports the use of project-based learning in schools as a way to engage students, cut absenteeism, boost cooperative learning skills, and improve test scores (Beckett, 2000; Higgins, 1993; Ravitz et al., 2004; Sidman-Taveau, 2005). Project-based learning is not only a potentially effective instructional approach but also an essential component of several current school reform models (Ravitz et al., 2004). A series of studies showed substantial school wide gains for schools adopting project-based learning methods in Iowa, Denver, Boston, and Maine (Ravitz et al., 2004). Ravitz et al. (2004) discerned that research on the restructuring of Chicago public schools provides compelling evidence for the importance of engaging students in the deep thinking and problem solving that characterize project-based learning. Also, Ravitz et al. (2004) discussed a 5-year study by University of Wisconsin–Madison researchers who analyzed data from more than 1,500 elementary, middle, and high schools and conducted field studies in 44 schools in 16 states between 1990 and 1995. The researchers found that innovative school reforms, such as portfolio assessment and shared decision making, are more effective if combined with meaningful student projects and assignments demanding deep thinking and inquiry from students.

The small schools movement relies heavily on project-based learning as the instructional methodology of choice, but a recent evaluation highlighted the difficulty of designing project-based learning environments from scratch (Beckett, 2000; Higgins,

1993; Ravitz et al., 2004; Sidman-Taveau, 2005). Many successful small public schools of choice, such as charter and magnet schools, pride themselves on personalizing instruction, through such techniques as emphasizing in-depth projects (Ravitz et al., 2004). Ravitz et al. (2004) asserted that teachers require a systematic, standards-focused planning process and implementation and evaluation templates. This reduces the risk and the fear of failure teachers often experience when departing from the traditional delivery of information to students. This process can be completed by offering classroom-proven strategies for meeting academic standards and engaging students in cognitively demanding and socially productive projects (Beckett, 2000; Ravitz et al., 2004).

Ravitz et al. (2004) found that there are five steps to effective standards-based problem-based instruction. First, the teacher should begin with the end in mind: This means to plan for the end result. Then, the teacher should craft the driving question and define the outcomes and assessment criteria. Next, the teacher should map the project or decide how to structure the project. Lastly, the teacher should manage the process by providing guidance and necessary resources (Ravitz et al., 2004).

### *Benefits of Small Learning Environments*

Increasingly, educators, policymakers, and parents are looking at reduced size to raise student achievement, influence positive relationships, increase equitable opportunities for all students, and implement school wide reform (Galletti, 1998). Galletti (1998) observed that while it can be argued that not all small schools are the best schools, and that some large schools are excellent schools, it can also be argued that, overall, smaller schools are demonstrating better results, and that small size facilitates a school's ability to reform. While small size doesn't ensure a school's success, small size allows a

school much greater ability to achieve success; small schools, when effective, resemble communities rather than bureaucracies (Miles et al., 1997).

Chicago, New York City, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles are at the forefront of the cities exploring the advantages of small school size. New York City recently published a report indicating that small schools are cost-effective when one takes into account dropout rates (Galletti, 1998). The first study of Chicago's small-schools effort concluded that small schools make a difference overall and are having an impact on teaching and learning (Galletti, 1998). Academic achievement is by far the benchmark for determining the success of the small school movement. While the relationship between size and student achievement is not clear, research indicates that smaller schools facilitate higher achievement. Galletti (1998) found that while research indicates that small schools produce equal or better achievement for students in general, the effects of small schools on the achievement of ethnic minority students and students of low socioeconomic status are the most positive. Also, teachers in small schools are more likely to form teaching teams, integrate their subject matter content, employ multiage grouping and cooperative learning, and use alternative assessments (Galletti, 1998). In these schools, there is also a greater emphasis on learning that is experiential and relevant to the world outside school (Galletti, 1998).

As with achievement, Galletti (1998) asserted that the research indicates that low socioeconomic students and minority students are especially sensitive to school size, and the students' attitudes improve greatly when the students attend small schools. The move to smaller environments improves the social climate of the school and decreases negative behaviors such as classroom disruption and deters some criminal activity (Galletti, 1998).

This improved social climate is directly related to another benefit of small schools known as student participation or attendance. Galletti (1998) asserted that not only do students in smaller schools have higher attendance rates than those in large schools, but also students who change from large schools to small schools exhibit improved attendance. This has a positive effect on the graduation rate, which is a second indicator of performance for most high schools according to the No Child Left Behind Act and Adequate Yearly Progress (Galletti, 1998).

Researchers have also found a much greater sense of belonging among students in small schools than in large comprehensive schools (Galletti, 1998). Galletti (1998) stated that this increased sense of belonging has been shown to reduce or eliminate students' sense of alienation and, consequently, positively affects confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of responsibility for self-direction. In addition, Galletti (1998) found positive correlations between small schools and favorable interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. This is also true for parent involvement in smaller schools, which is often cited as a positive influence on student achievement and attitudes.

Although few studies have been conducted on the school-within-a-school model itself, proponents infer that the benefits of a school-within-a-school closely parallel those found in small schools, which have been widely investigated (Oxley, 2001). In 1996, a report by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recommended smaller schools and smaller classes as essential for student improvement. Research has shown that smaller learning environments create happier, safer, higher-achieving students (Oxley, 2001). Smaller class sizes and interdisciplinary methods allow greater contact between student and

teacher, and the greater sense of belonging that students feel in small schools fosters more caring through interpersonal relationships (Capps, 1999). Also, small schools generally have fewer discipline problems than larger schools, and the strong parental support and adult connections often create a safer environment for students. McCombs (2000) affirmed that strangers are spotted more easily in small schools, which further promotes safety. Some early results at small schools offer a great deal of encouragement. Ark (2002) found that recent test results from high school exit exams rank High Tech High third in English and writing and fifth in math for San Diego County. When compared on a statewide scale, High Tech High's results are even more impressive: 96% of students passed the English and writing tests compared to the state average of 64%. Seventy-eight percent of High Tech High students passed the math test compared to 44% of students statewide (Ark, 2002). Quint (2005) observed that First Things First schools had academic outcomes that included increased rates of student attendance and graduation, reduced student dropout rates, and improved student performance on the Kansas state tests of reading and mathematics. The estimated effects on student test scores reflected double-digit increases in the percentage of students who scored at levels deemed proficient or above by the state and double-digit reductions in the percentage of students who scored at levels deemed unsatisfactory (Quint, 2005). For example, Quint (2005) noted that on the most recent state reading test for spring 2004, small learning community high schools experienced an 11.1% relative gain in the percentage of student scores that were proficient or above. In other words, the increase in the percentage from its initial level 3 years earlier was 11.1 points greater for small learning community high schools than for the comparison schools. Even larger relative improvements were

observed for the percentage of student scores that were unsatisfactory (Quint, 2005). Quint (2005) observed that, in spring 2004, this percentage dropped by 15.5 points more for small learning community high schools than for comparison schools. The findings for small learning community middle schools showed a relative increase of 13.7 points in the percentage of student scores that were proficient or above and a relative decline of 13.6 points in the percentage of scores that were unsatisfactory (Quint, 2005). Thus, overall, there was a pronounced and consistent pattern of relative improvement in the reading performance of small learning community high school students and middle school students.

Evidence has been mounting in favor of small learning environments, but there are critics. Conant (1967) and Barker and Gump (1964) opposed these learning environments. Conant's study, funded by the Carnegie Foundation and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, examined questionnaires from 2,024 high schools with enrollments between 750 and 1,999 students (Fowler, 1992). Fowler (1992) concluded that comprehensive high schools offer a wider program of foreign languages and Advanced Placement courses at lower cost. Conversely, Fowler (1992) also concluded that students in smaller schools excelled at all social and psychological attributes observed. Finally, Fowler (1992) wrote that students generally learn more in small schools.

According to the Small Schools Workshop in Chicago, Kennedy (2005) noted that a small school can lead to better student performance, improved attendance and graduation rates, reduced violence and disruptive behavior, and increased teacher satisfaction. Kennedy's study results were confirmed by Royer (2007), whose study

found positive trends in absence, disciplinary referrals, and graduation rates of at-risk students in Indiana. In addition, there was a statistically significant difference in the number of credits earned by students in small schools (Royer, 2007). Many of the nation's large urban districts are creating smaller schools, especially at the high-school level, to combat the dropout problem and boost student achievement. In an extensive review of the literature, Cotton (1996) identified several benefits of small schools, including the following: small schools can be cost beneficial to operate, academic achievement is equal to or superior to that of large schools, student attitudes toward school are more positive, student behavior is more positive, student attendance is better, fewer students drop out, students have a greater sense of belonging, and interpersonal relationships are better among students, teachers, and administrators. Supovitz and Christman (2005) observed that in Philadelphia, teachers felt their schools to be safer and more orderly, partly because learning community coordinators monitored student behavior and followed up with parents. In addition, students felt more connected to their learning communities and had more pride in what others thought of the students' school. A recent study by Lee and Smith (1994), based on a large national data set, the National Education Longitudinal Study, of more than 11,000 students enrolled in 820 high schools nationwide, showed clear links between school restructuring and improved student learning. Lee and Smith (1994) observed that small communal schools were found to increase teacher collaboration and team teaching, while giving teachers more input into decisions affecting their work. Rather than tracking students, the schools tended to group students of diverse talents and interests together for instruction. The study found that



large-school emphasis on specialization increased the number of possibilities for conflicting goals held by different people (Lee & Smith, 1994).

Myatt (2004) found that qualitative studies of smaller schools have observed a genuine sense of belonging for both students and teachers, higher expectations for student engagement, and fewer distractions within the learning environment. These are precisely the conditions under which teachers can help students take greater responsibility for their own learning and establish both the culture and tools of inquiry-based instruction (Myatt, 2004). Moreover, Myatt's (2004) findings suggest that disadvantaged students perform far differently in small schools and appear more dependent upon them for success than do more advantaged youngsters. Myatt's (2004) research found that while all students tend to have better learning experiences in minischools, African American students benefit from smaller learning environments to a greater degree than White students, but all benefit. A study by the American Legislative Exchange Council, the *Report Card on American Education* (1994), found that higher outcomes on standardized tests such as the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and the ACT, as well as higher graduation rates, may be connected more to school size than with race, and that minority children in small schools outperform their counterparts in areas where large schools predominate. Copland and Boatright (2004) found that students included in another study of smaller schools also were responsible for fewer disciplinary infractions than their counterparts in large schools. Toby (1993) concluded that the first step in ending school violence must be to "break through the anonymous, impersonal atmosphere of jumbo high schools and junior highs by creating smaller communities of learning within larger structures, where teachers and students can come to know each other well" (p. 46). A 2-year study of

Chicago's small schools found the district's small schools to be safer than larger schools and linked this positive effect to the "increased sense of identity and community" that small schools promote (Wasley et al., 2000, p. 35). "Students feel safer in their schools because they are learning the skills of conflict management and democratic citizenship" (Wasley et al., 2000, p. 35). Klonsky (2002) observed that small schools create the opportunity for knowing students and for professionals to intervene before problems reach a crisis stage—before students resort to violence, suicide, or other forms of destructive behavior. Klonsky (2002) stated that the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, which serves a student body of 41% White, 38% Latino, 18% African American, and 3% Asian (with half qualifying for subsidized lunch) has one third the dropout rate, one-third the absentee rate, and one-eighteenth the rate of disciplinary suspensions.

Copland and Boatright (2004) also found that students in small schools had higher grade-point averages and better attendance records than their peers in larger urban schools. In addition, Lee and Smith (1994) have stated that small schools are a better investment than large schools when the broader costs to society associated with high school dropouts are factored in. Cutshall (2003) found in a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education that large comprehensive high schools have 52% more violent crime, 270% more vandalism, 378% more theft and larceny, 394% more physical fights or attacks, 3,200% more robberies and 1,000% more weapons incidents. Howley (1995) found that small schools benefit students of low socioeconomic status in improving attendance and achievement. In addition, Garrett (2006) found that, in a study of more than 1,000 Texas high school students, the statistical data showed that, in the categories

of gender and socioeconomic level, school violence increased as school size increased. Analysis also revealed that men show a slightly higher tendency than women for incidents of school violence.

The problem large comprehensive schools pose is that only a small group of students is able to join a subgroup where the adults are significant people to the students (Meier, 1996). Meier (1996) observed that these students are the academic stars, who are in the honors and Advanced Placement classes, leaders of the student government or debating society, or editors of the school newspaper and the star athletes who belong to various sports teams. The faculties know these students, and the students and teachers thrive on their mutual admiration and respect. The students are connected to the teachers who help the students achieve, and that achievement in turn benefits the teachers (Meier, 1996).

Meier (1996) asserted that there are at least seven reasons that smallness, 300 to 400 students, works best and offers probably the only chance of carrying out serious reforms in pedagogy and curriculum. First, governance, ideally a school's total faculty, should be small enough to meet around one common table (Meier, 1996). Whether hammering out a solution to a crisis or working through a long-range problem, sustained attention over time is required of everyone. Meier (1996) found that studies of in-group efficacy suggested that once you have more than 20 people in a group, you've lost it. Some people will be marking papers, some writing their lesson plans, and others silently disagreeing. Next is respect. Students and teachers in schools of thousands cannot know one another well (Meier, 1996). Families, teachers, staff, and students may assume disrespect where none was intended. Ignorance of a student's background is the most

likely reason for these types of infractions. Then there is simplicity, which applies to keeping the organizational side of things simple (Meier, 1996). In most schools, there is a complex bureaucracy of the organization, and then simplified or standardized curriculum for the students: teaching them a one-size-fits-all curriculum so that the teachers can more easily grade, measure, and categorize the students. The larger the school, the greater the temptations to treat one another like interchangeable parts, and the subject matter as discrete and unconnected (Meier, 1996). Safety is another reason noted by Meier (1996), who stated that anonymity breeds not only contempt and anger but also physical danger. Small schools offer the safety and security of being where you are known well by people who care for you (Meier, 1996). Next, parent involvement was listed as one of the reasons. Schools are intimidating places for many parents that make them feel like intruders, strangers, and outsiders (Meier, 1996). When kids reach high school, schools usually give up on parents entirely, but high school students don't need their parents any less, just in a different manner than elementary students (Meier, 1996). Accountability is the next reason for the success of small schools (Meier, 1996). With accountability reports such as Adequate Yearly Progress, it's not hard to know how many students graduated, who went on to college, and how many dropped out along the way. In a small school, the principal can take the temperature of the school on a given day and monitor the actions taking place in a school (Meier, 1996). This smallness allows for more accountability to be placed on the individual school as well as teachers. Lastly, Meier (1996) stated a sense of belonging has been identified as a reason for the success for small schools. In small schools, every child is known, and every child belongs to a community that includes adults.

Facing severe financial shortfalls, urban school systems have been under pressure to shut down small schools or school buildings that are underutilized, even when these schools have successful programs (Carter, 2005). The claim often heard is that large schools operate more efficiently because of economies of scale and that closing down small schools might appeal to the legislature as an efficiency measure (Carter, 2005). Collaboration with other public agencies to incorporate small schools into multiuse facilities could make better use of costly public investments (Nachtigal, 1992). Other potential cost savings through small schools can be found through imaginative organization of school space. Nachtigal (1992) stated that missing in most cost studies is any analysis of other indirect costs or social costs of large schools or school districts in terms of communities. Large-school consolidations have robbed many local communities of one of their key resources while large impersonal learning environments cost more in a nontraditional sense—separating schooling from the community as well as other costly social problems (Nachtigal, 1992). Nachtigal (1992) also found the economies of scale argument to be short sighted because it ignores the indirect costs associated with the academic failures of large schools. It has been well established that anything that keeps students in school is an excellent long-term investment. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1988) estimated that each year of secondary education reduces the probability of public welfare dependency in adulthood by 35%, and that a single year's class of dropouts, over their lifetimes, costs the nation about \$260 billion in lost earnings and foregone taxes alone.

### *Opposition to Small Learning Environments*

Because of the magnitude and scope, the Gates Initiative inevitably raises concerns (Miner, 2005). Some are intertwined with the initiative itself, such as the sustainability of the project over time and the focus on small schools and learning communities as the most important prerequisite for improved teaching and learning (Miner, 2005). Miner (2005) observed that educational leaders wonder whether Gates is paying sufficient attention to overarching issues such as the legacy and role of racism in urban education; funding inequities and budget cuts; severe segregation by race and income; the shortage of experienced teachers, especially in math and science; tracking and racial stereotyping that often keeps students of color from honors courses; the growing mania with standardized testing that has accelerated with the No Child Left Behind Act; and the dangers of privatization. Rivera (2007) found that these issues led to schools struggling in key areas, including maintaining high expectations for students and preserving a tradition of staff involvement while managing high staff turnover and increasing numbers of novice teachers.

In addition, Miner (2005) observed that, in the case of African American students, there is concern that Gates looks only at racial outcomes, such as disproportionate dropout rates, and not at how race and racism affect every aspect of what goes into urban education. Gary Orfield of the Harvard Civil Rights Project, who has done groundbreaking work on the relationship between hyper-segregation and academic achievement, noted that the small schools approach in general does not attack the issue of segregation by race and poverty, which is the core problem. In addition, Miner (2005) observed that small schools needed to grapple with the historical tendency of school

choice to increase stratification and segregation unless policies are instituted as a counterbalance. Further, Bobby (2007) stated that many of the African American students who graduate from small schools are not ready to do college-level work if the students make it that far, and many simply drop out.

Supovitz and Christman (2005) observed that, in Philadelphia, each learning community had a unifying theme that provided opportunities for the teachers to plan and teach intellectually engaging units of study together. However, themes were most often addressed through isolated events, such as field trips and special assemblies that did nothing to promote the intended collaboration around instruction. Also in Cincinnati, Supovitz and Christman (2005) found no significant differences in instructional practices between team-based schools and other schools in the district. The reforms in these two cities failed to increase instructional focus, largely because the learning communities did not spend enough time discussing instruction (Supovitz & Christman, 2005). Ponto (2006) observed that unless attention is focused on the teaching, learning, and the act of creating engaging learning environments schools would continue to produce disengaged students.

Oxley (2005) stated that, although the route to improved student performance may be found in transforming schools, finding the means to do so is difficult. An inconvenient fact of small learning environments is that they cannot be simply added on to the existing school organization (Oxley, 2005). Traditional building-level practices often compete with effective small learning community practices (Oxley, 2005). When administrators, counselors, and special education staff members continue to operate at the school level, rather than in small learning environments, the staff do so without the knowledge of

students that small learning community staff members have (Oxley, 2005). This action removes autonomy from the small school, robbing it of its purpose. In turn, small learning community staff members are unable to engage in decision making and student support that maximize their responsiveness to student needs (Oxley, 2005).

Oxley (1997) also observed that small learning community teams combine teachers from academic departments whose preferred pedagogical approaches may differ, and the teachers' efforts to develop authentic curricula often lead the teachers to deviate from the pacing and content of standardized discipline-based curricula. These teams' curriculum development work also requires large blocks of time while planning time must also be allocated to departments and school-wide staff meetings (Oxley, 1997). This places a burden on administrators to resolve these issues and could lead to hostile feelings toward implementation of the small learning community (Oxley, 1997).

Kennedy (2005) stated that one common obstacle that prevents some schools from carrying out the totality of the small-school concept is what to do about science facilities. To create a full-fledged smaller learning community, each school-within-a-school should have its own science labs and equipment. Also, several staffing issues arise when large schools are carved into smaller units. Gewertz (2001) observed that some teachers worry that they may have to transfer from one school to another, may lose seniority in doing so, may have to teach out of their specialty in a school with fewer course offerings, or may not truly gain the autonomy the teachers desire in the downsizing of schools. Further, to avoid segregation along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines, care must be taken when assigning students to smaller learning communities (Gewertz, 2001).



In addition, Robelen (2006) reported that the school-closing initiatives may be sparking a new wave of school violence and the move to small high schools has caused an influx of special-needs students to other city high schools and has exacerbated overcrowding in some schools. Robelen's finding was confirmed by Klonsky's (2006) observation that, in several urban districts, including New York and Chicago, this model of school reform, which attaches itself to the small schools movement but is really focused on closing neighborhood schools and opening new privately run charter schools, has led to thousands of special-needs kids being dumped back into large neighborhood schools. Many large urban high schools in Chicago are reporting swelling percentages (25%–40%) of special-education students among the entering freshman classes (Klonsky, 2006). Klonsky (2006) observed that the Gates scope is limited and too focused on size as a necessary prerequisite for reform, which renders the foundation unable to complete its goal. Miner (2005), perhaps the most widely known proponent of small schools and author of books such as *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons from a Small School in Harlem*, worried that Gates is overly preoccupied with increasing the number of small schools, with insufficient attention to quality. Miner (2005) stated that those who have taken Gates' money are in a serious quandary because they don't see how they can pay attention to what they have started and still keep starting new schools. Wallach and Lear (2005) concurred, and observed that while the bulk of planning time was focused on structural changes and how they might affect the daily lives of teachers and students, far less attention was given to considering ways that leadership structures and expectations would need to change. The development of teacher-leader positions has most often proceeded independently of any rethinking of administrative leadership roles and

responsibilities (Wallach & Lear, 2005). In addition, Wallach and Lear (2005) stated that assistant principals are still mired in building-wide issues, especially discipline, instead of acting as instructional leaders to one or two small schools. Further, Wallach and Lear (2005) found that core academic area teachers and foreign language teachers have from one-half to more than one additional preparation per year in their small school than they had in their comprehensive high school. In addition, Wallach and Lear (2005) uncovered that some schools did not take into account the need to staff so that students could be graduated from their own small school without taking crossover courses, causing students to move across schools for classes and diminishing identity with one school.

It is also important to note that all small schools have not been success stories. Gerwertz (2006) wrote that the Manual Education Complex in Denver would close its doors in June 2007. The school opened in 2001 with grant assistance from the Seattle Gates Foundation and since then has not lived up to the hopes of the school board and community. Gerwertz (2006) observed that evaluators had found significant improvement in teacher relationships with students and attendance rates had increased, but the curve at which a school is judged is steep at best. Gerwertz (2006) stated that since 2001 only 20% of the ninth graders who entered the school as ninth graders had graduated. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, this percentage does not come close to the percentage rate needed for the graduation rate as a second indicator of performance. In addition, Gerwertz (2006) discerned that in 2003, 2004, and 2005 not one of these students scored above the state average on standardized tests in math or language arts. In a study conducted in Pennsylvania, Greenaway (2006) found that the overall academic performance and the performance of student subgroups related to school size contradicted

much of the existing school size research that favors small schools. Also, Gilmore (2007) concluded that, regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status, students attain higher achievement at very large schools compared to small schools in a study conducted of more than 1,000 middle school students. Cramer (2006), in a study of 58 high schools, found that the effects on dropout rates and preparation for postsecondary education on students attending small schools were not statistically significant. These are not isolated cases, and further study should be conducted before the education world dives into small schools headfirst (Cramer, 2006). This researcher found a need to investigate failed small schools in an effort to determine mistakes made to ensure future success in these types of endeavors.

Moreover, different researchers have challenged other aspects that define the success of the small schools movement. Hampel (2002) observed that differences matter more than similarities in a school and found that nothing was more troubling about small schools than their ungraded organization. Students should be grouped by ability and not just interests. Hampel (2002) stated that the small school seems unable to sort and divide students adequately. Further, Hampel (2002) questioned whether small schools could offer sufficient tracks, ability-grouped sections, and other fare to match the many crucial ways young people differ. In addition, the notion of appropriate classroom space and facilities use has come into question (Hampel, 2002). Small schools have regular classroom space but not specialized rooms and large multipurpose rooms. Hampel (2002) stated that a large school could more readily provide space and equipment for vocational courses. Art, music, and drama could be taught in smaller schools, but they lacked space for storage and performances. Athletics also call for inventive measures by small schools.

Hampel (2002) wrote that rooms designed to serve the entire school were more readily justified when educators could cite how many students would use the rooms. Libraries, lunchrooms, auditoriums, swimming pools, and study halls were considered too expensive if not frequently used by hundreds of students. Economies of scale seemed compelling, although educators acknowledged that financial savings were not guaranteed by larger size (Hampel, 2002). Hampel (2002) observed that what matters most is class size, not school size, and the individual classroom should be stressed as the place in which learning happened.

### *Summary*

This literature review has exposed the reader to the concept of high school transformation that has grabbed the attention of school districts nationwide. High school transformation is defined as the creation of smaller learning units from a large comprehensive high school. As the pressures associated with No Child Left Behind mount, school districts are forced to search for ways to improve student attendance, graduation rates, and performance on standardized tests. High school transformation offers a way to provide a more personal environment that school leaders hope will assist in achieving the goals mandated by the public for our nation's children. Through this review the researcher has identified change processes and discussed how teachers accept change. This will give the reader background information on how teachers in the study reacted to change. After reviewing aspects of change, the researcher examined different eras of education leading to the current state of reform. Educational reform is the type of change most often experienced by teachers and is the focus of this study. This section of the literature explains the changes teachers have made in the past due to reform and

assists with creating a foundation to understand the changes associated with this study. Interconnecting the literature concerning change and reform eras for this study is the connection to the latest reform known as high school transformation or the small schools movement. The literature defined the transformation and provided a discussion of the different types of smaller learning environments. The review highlighted the origins of the transformation movement and identified pioneers in the field. During the implementation portion of the review, agents of change were identified, and their roles in the process were discussed. In addition, changes in instruction were exposed in the literature. The benefits of smaller learning environments were reviewed through the lens of the literature as well as opposition to the phenomenon known as high school transformation. The following chapters will explain how the study was conducted, reveal findings, and discuss future implications of this work.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

#### Introduction

Conducting qualitative research is most appropriate to explore and generate understanding about the experiences of a specific group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To explore, collect, examine, and analyze the personal narratives and reflections of participants experiencing the transformation to smaller units, an understanding of their experiences must be created (Creswell, 1998). According to Weiss (1994), qualitative interviews are appropriate sources for data collection when the researcher seeks to (a) develop detailed descriptions, (b) integrate multiple perspectives, (c) describe the process, (d) develop holistic description, (e) learn how events are interpreted, and (f) bridge intersubjectivities. Thus, utilizing informal semi-structured conversational interviews produces rich data about the lived experiences. Therefore, exploring the lived experiences of teachers experiencing the transformation to smaller learning environments may be understood best by conducting phenomenological research within the qualitative paradigm (Creswell, 1998). This theory is supported by the foundational assumptions of qualitative measures, which are (a) determinism—that phenomena have causes, (b) empiricism—that theory about phenomena is verifiable, (c) parsimony—that theory is refined by way of economical explication, and (d) generality—that refined theory is readily generalizable toward prediction and control (Cohen & Manion, 1994, pp. 13–14).

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research methods used to select participants and collect and analyze data for this study on teacher experiences during the transformation to small learning environments. The role of the researcher in this study is

to create a safe nonjudgmental atmosphere for teachers to share their experiences. The researcher guided the participants through the interview process utilizing probing questions to gain a greater understanding of the concepts presented. This chapter will discuss research methodology, design and methods, research ethics, and the validity of the study.

### *Research Design*

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of teachers involved in the high school transformation process. This study examined teachers' experiences during the transformation, and identified commonalities as well as differentiated the experiences during the process. Creswell (1998) observed that qualitative methods are best when creating understanding of an occurrence through the interpretation of others. Unlike the quantitative approach, this study did not utilize surveys or statistics to highlight variables or test hypotheses. The intent of the study is to examine personal experiences, which require data that cannot be obtained through such measures. In the spirit of exploration, this study viewed the phenomenon through the lenses of the participants. The phenomenological approach and qualitative design were appropriate for this study in that they highlighted the perceptions of multiple individuals rather than reporting on a life history or a single subject matter. Strauss and Corbin (1990) maintained that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. Therefore, phenomenology was selected as the sub-design.

Phenomenology is concerned with understanding and describing people's lived experiences with a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Van Manen, 1997). The word

phenomenon means “to bring to light, to place in brightness, to show itself in itself, the totality of what lies before us in the light of day” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). The phenomenon in this study is the transformation of large comprehensive high schools into smaller learning environments. The aim of a phenomenological study is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description. This understanding of the experience that the participants share is then transferred to other individuals who currently are experiencing, or have experienced, a similar phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). While other research methods fill a valuable role, to achieve the purpose of this study, the stories and perspectives of individuals need to be taken into account.

This phenomenological study had a qualitative nature and thus did not begin with a preconceived set of expectations, but allowed the data to unfold into meaningful themes and concepts. Unlike the quantitative approach, this study did not utilize surveys or statistics to highlight variables or test hypotheses. This study allowed new teachers in small learning environments to describe their experiences and to explore the phenomenon of high school transformation. Through phenomenological interviewing, participants described their experiences, explored their perceptions, and attached meaning to them. Phenomenological interviewing involves in-depth, semistructured interviews, at times requiring follow-up interviews to obtain a deeper understanding of concepts (Creswell, 1998).



### *Phenomenological Interviews*

The use of phenomenological interviews is best for exploring lived experiences. A phenomenological study aims to understand what it is like to walk in another person's shoes, or to see the world through his or her eyes; phenomenology describes people's worldviews, what their experiences are, and the meaning they give to their thoughts, feelings, understandings, or interpretations (Andrews, Sullivan, & Minichiello, 2004). In this study, phenomenology is ideally suited to provide a rich picture of the lived experience of teachers in schools transforming into smaller learning environments. According to Patton (2002), an interview guide lists the main questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview. Giorgi (1989) observed that a hermeneutic phenomenological interview is an interpretive conversation wherein both partners reflectively orient themselves to the interpersonal or collective ground that brings the significance of the phenomenological question into view. The art of the researcher in the hermeneutic interview is to keep the question open and to keep himself or herself and the interviewee oriented to the substance of the thing being questioned (Giorgi, 1989). Thus, a series of interviews may be scheduled or arranged with selected participants that allows reflection on the text, such as interpretations of transcripts of previous interviews to aim for as much interpretive insight as possible.

Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) stated that illustrating how individuals live this experience requires sufficient descriptive detail and, just as importantly, provides an experientially based understanding of the phenomenon in question. One recent example is the work conducted by Cave, Eccles, and Rundle (2001), which involved a comparative study of the attitudes toward entrepreneurial failure between

U.S. and U.K. entrepreneurs. The study of critical incidents was also particularly beneficial in phenomenological terms, as “focusing on specific events enables the participant to provide a fuller, more detailed description of an experience as it was lived” (Thompson et al., 1989, p. 138). However, Thompson et al. (1989) recognized that the phenomenological interview “is perhaps the most powerful means of attaining an in-depth understanding of another person’s experience” (p. 138). Methodologically, the phenomenological interview is ideographic, in the sense that the interview “stresses the importance of letting one’s subject unfold its nature and characteristics during the process of investigation” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 6). When the interviews were conducted, the description of phenomenological interviewing as first proposed by Thompson et al. (1989) provided clear direction. The researchers specified that the goal of the phenomenological interview is to gain a first-person description of some specified domain of experience, where the course of the dialogue is set largely by the participant. The role of the interviewer is to provide a context in which participants feel free to describe their experiences in detail. The participant is required to play a very active role during the interview, as the dialogue generated during the discussion forms the basis for any subsequent questions that are asked by the interviewer (Thompson et al., 1989). As Thompson et al. (1989) stated, “the ideal interview format occurs when the interviewer’s short descriptive questions and/or clarifying statements provide an opening for a respondent’s lengthier and detailed descriptions” (p. 139).

### *Sampling*

Purposeful sampling is the dominant strategy in qualitative research and was the method used in the selection of participants for this study (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling seeks information-rich cases, which can be studied in depth (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling is used to identify potential participants with certain characteristics. For example, this study listed teaching experience and work within a school that has been transformed to a smaller learning environment. That is, purposeful samples are cases that are selected because they are “information rich and illuminative” (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

Patton (1990) identified and described types of purposeful sampling that include but are not limited to extreme or deviant case sampling, typical case sampling, maximum variation sampling, snowball or chain sampling, and convenience. Convenience sampling was used for this study in an effort to gain participants available for the interview process. Patton (1990) asserted that any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program. Concurring, Merriam (1988) explained that purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher must select the sample from which the most can be discovered and understood as insights are gained. The purpose of sampling in qualitative studies is to maximize information, not to facilitate generalization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The interview site was selected based on Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) recommendation and Taylor and Bogdon’s (1998) explanation that the ideal research setting is one in which the observer obtains easy access, establishes immediate rapport, and gathers data directly related to the research questions. To understand and gain

insights into teachers' reflective perspectives as they implemented a new program, choosing a site where teachers were provided time and encouragement for reflection was important.

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were 10 classroom teachers with more than two years' teaching experience at a school before it was transformed into a smaller learning environment. Miles and Huberman (1994) found that qualitative studies should not exceed 14 participants if there is an expectation of in-depth knowledge. Ten participants allow the researcher to follow up on responses from initial interviews for deeper understanding. Sample sizes tend to be smaller in qualitative research because the aim is to provide a thick description of a phenomenon—a “description that goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act, but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” (Denzin, 1988, p. 39). Two years of experience was selected as a criterion to ensure that an educator had been exposed to the norms of the school and was more likely to be able to speak about the changes that were occurring. Additionally, participants possessed more than 3 years' teaching experience to remain in alignment with what the state of Georgia indicates is an experienced educator according to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. The educators were employed in a Metro Atlanta school district at schools that had been transformed into smaller units. This allowed the researcher to examine the experience of the educators from the inception to the end of the process. Each educator interviewed became a source of data or unit of analysis. The qualitative datum or unit of analysis is defined as a string of words capturing information about an incident, which represents an

instance of a concept coded and classified during the coding process (Van de Ven & Poole, 1989).

### *Instrumentation*

The researcher was the dominant instrument used for this study. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) observed that the use of the researcher as the instrument provides perspectives and insight into education that often complement, further define, and explore what has been previously researched. The researcher selected phenomenological interviews in reference to Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) observation that these interviews would allow for more in-depth data. The interviews began with set questions that allowed for probing questions related to the participants' answers in an effort to gain a better understanding. The semistructured interviews not only accounted for physical events and behaviors but also illustrated how participants make sense of their behaviors and how self-meaning influences the participants' decisions (Glesne & Pershkin, 1992). Unlike interviews for other types of qualitative research, phenomenological interviews are lengthy and in depth and thus employ open-ended questions that allow the participants to give an open and deeper account of the experience. This form of interviewing provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject (Patton, 2002). Additionally, the researcher maintained a certain structure in each interview, and allowed for the development of unplanned and unpredicted topics, which provided flexibility, spontaneity, and responsiveness to individual differences and situational changes (Patton, 2002).

Data were obtained for this study utilizing portions of the interview guide from a previous study conducted for Georgia State University on clinical nurse educators and the lived experience of the grade appeal process. This was a qualitative study utilizing phenomenological interviews to conduct research on 13 participants. The researcher identified common challenges and support structures among the participants. The researcher modified the questions to address the experience of the transformation from a large comprehensive high school to a smaller learning environment (see Appendix I).

Methodology experts from Georgia Southern University reviewed the interview guide questions to begin validating the questions. To ensure that the interview guide produced data useful for the study, a pilot test was conducted. This researcher sent a request for participation via email to five teachers at a school that had been transformed to obtain two participants for the pilot. The request for participation had a response time of two days. Willing participants responded via email and indicated their intention to complete a face-to-face interview at a convenient location. At that time, an initial interview session was scheduled. The interview session did not last longer than one hour. The researcher reviewed the notes and transcripts for data that could be utilized in the study. Questions that did not produce rich data on the lived experience of educators through the transformation process in relation to the research questions for this study were revised or eliminated.

#### *Data Collection*

This study was conducted with IRB approval from Georgia Southern University. There was no need for school district approval for this study. District test data or students were not involved in the study, and participants were interviewed at a time of

convenience that did not interfere with their work environment. A request for participation was issued via email to teachers formally employed at schools that had been transformed into smaller learning environments. The request was sent to 30 teachers and instructed willing participants to respond within seven days. A letter of informed consent explaining the purpose of the study accompanied the request for participation (see Appendix B). Using a purposeful selection process, the first 10 respondents meeting the criteria became participants in the study. Participants indicating a willingness to participate were asked to give preference for phone interviews or worksite visits by the researcher. During the selection of the participants and immediately upon their agreement to be involved in the study, each received a letter of informed consent, specifying the purpose of the study and informing him or her of the researcher's affiliation with the College of Graduate Studies at Georgia Southern University, hand-delivered via school mailboxes. The researcher collected the letters of informed consent during the interviews or asked that the letters be returned using the school mail system.

Qualitative interviewing generally refers to in-depth, loosely or semistructured interviews that are often used to encourage an interviewee to talk about a particular issue or range of topics (Flick, 1998). Flick (1998) asserted that this distinguishes interviews from the classical tradition of social survey work, such as a questionnaire-based survey in which interviews are standardized to claim direct comparability between interviews with different people and to interview enough people so that the samples and results could be statistically representative of a particular population. The qualitative research interview seeks to describe the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees reveal

(Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996) stated that a qualitative research interview seeks to cover both a factual and a meaning level, though it is usually more difficult to interview on a meaning level. McNamara (1999) asserted that interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences.

The general interview guide approach is intended to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting the information from the interviewee (McNamara, 1999). McNamara (1999) found that the researcher should get the respondents involved in the interview as soon as possible. Bertrand and Hughes (2005) observed that, before asking about controversial matters, the researcher should first ask about some facts and intersperse fact-based questions throughout the interview. Semistructured interviews often start with a basic checklist of areas to be covered in the interview in the form of questions. The interviewer guides the interview, but permits the various aspects of the subject to arise naturally and in any order (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005, p. 79). It is characteristic of semistructured interviews that more or less open questions are brought to the interview situation in the form of an interview guide (Kvale, 1996). Flick (1998) found that, during the actual process of interviewing, the interviewer should try to mention certain topics given in the interview guide, and at the same time be open to the interviewee's individual way of talking about these topics and other topics relevant to him or her. Furthermore, the interviewer should not stick rigidly to the guide because this will restrict the benefits of openness and contextual information (Flick, 1998). Questions about the present before questions about the past or future should be asked during the process (McNamara, 1999).



Additionally, McNamara (1999) stated that the last questions might allow respondents to provide any other information they prefer to add and their impressions of the interview.

An interview guide approach (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) in conjunction with the in-depth, phenomenological interview guidelines provided by Seidman (1991), was used to conduct interviews for this study (see Appendix C). The interviews were conducted in the three phases identified by Seidman and took place at a time and location most convenient for the participant. Lincoln and Guba (1985) confirmed that this is the best procedure because the focus of qualitative research is on individual, person-to-person interactions, and the setting for qualitative research is naturalistic, which means that interactions occur in places where people live their everyday lives. The interviews were conducted through a series of phases during each session. In the first phase, the researcher focused on context and background. The participants were encouraged to discuss life experiences and what factors led the participants to the employment positions the educators currently hold. These experiences can have a profound impact on how individuals view their world and cope with change. The second phase of the interview focused on the details of the participant's experiences during the transformation process. This phase began the identification of the themes involved with the process of transformation to smaller learning environments. The third phase encouraged the participants to explore the meaning of their experiences and allowed the participant to reflect on his or her understanding of these events. The researcher informed the participant of the answer given and asked probing questions in an effort to obtain a deeper explanation. This allowed for clarification of the meaning behind concepts and themes, minimizing the possibility of researcher misrepresentation of information.

The length of the interviews varied according to the explanations given, but was limited to no more than two hours. Interview questions revolved around the lived experiences of teachers during and after the transformation process. The interviews were conducted during the fall semester of the 2009 traditional academic year. The researcher traveled to the school site and conducted the interviews after school. The interview questions were emailed to participants before the interview session to allow participants to have time to reflect on their experiences before responding. The interview sessions were audio taped and transcripts were created utilizing Microsoft Word. Analytic notes were taken immediately following the interview sessions. Analytic notation is a type of data analysis that contributes to the process of problem identification, question development, and the understanding of patterns and themes in studies (Tai, 1999). In an effort not to lead or bias the interview, the questions were open-ended and semiguided. In instances where more detail or clarification was needed, follow-up questions were asked. Respondents received transcripts of their interviews to review for accuracy two to four days after the interview was conducted. This process is known as member checking. The participants were asked to reflect on the researcher's interpretations and express any concerns the participants had about possible misrepresentation of the data the participants provided. This correspondence was delivered to the participants' school mailboxes for convenience of the participant. The researcher asked that the participants confirm their responses within a 1-week period. Any misrepresentations of data were corrected before the analysis process began.

*Ethics and Validity*

Trustworthiness in the qualitative research paradigm is parallel to validity, reliability, and objectivity found in quantitative research (Patton, 2002). As a measure of trustworthiness, credibility is the probability that “credible findings and interpretations will be produced” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). The use of member checking in this study affirmed that the data were credible. The researcher conducted participant reviews of the data by providing a written summary of the interview that was submitted to the participant to review for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), inquiry is confirmed when research participants aid in the review of the data and clarify claims and categories developed as part of the analysis of data.

Transferability of data involves purposeful sampling, which was used for this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). The participants represented a purposeful sample based on teaching experience and working at a location that had been transformed. Qualitative studies are also trustworthy when dependability is established through an audit of procedures, or an audit trail of data for others to follow is created (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the dependability of this research, the researcher maintained all notes, transcripts, audio tapes as emails or phone logs collected during the study.

Due to the nature of this qualitative study, keeping participant information confidential is important. As participants divulged sensitive information possibly about their current employer, pseudonyms were used at all times. Additionally, no information is provided that will allow for the identification of the school or schools in question. Because revisiting past experiences could cause stress, participants understood that, at

any time during the process, they could terminate their participation without cause or explanation.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis is the process of reviewing the data from transcripts of the interviews and identifying themes. This researcher has employed a basic interpretive strategy with three iterations of coding for this phenomenological study. The first iteration began with the researcher analyzing the data for patterns or commonalities between participants. In the second iteration the researcher reviewed the patterns and separated the data into themes. During the third iteration of coding, the researcher analyzed the themes and interpreted the dominate concepts from the data. These concepts influence the conclusions and implications that will be discussed in Chapter 5 of the study.

The researcher employed the process of theoretical sensitivity to analyze data and reach conclusions. According to Glaser (1992), “Theoretical sensitivity is the ability of the researcher to generate concepts from data and to relate them according to the normal models of theory in general (p. 27).” The researcher must give meaning to the data based on his or her insight (Glaser, 1978), and the researcher’s professional judgment should aid the researcher in deciding which data are meaningful to the research and which are not (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This researcher’s insights were influenced by his professional experience as a teacher, a school administrator, and a system curriculum coordinator. As he interviewed participants concerning their experience with the transformation, the researcher was sensitive to the data relevant to reflection and the change process. Other data, such as comments about student attitudes

and motivation were discarded that may be relevant to other fields of inquiry. Analysis of the transcripts began with identification of the themes emerging from the raw data a process sometimes referred to as coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During the first iteration of coding, the researcher identified and tentatively named the conceptual categories of commonalities observed. The researcher read the transcripts and made notes on three separate occasions for understanding. The researcher employed the concept indicator model to continue the process of analyzing the data. In this model, the comparison of indicator to indicator generates a conceptual code first, and then indicators are compared to the newly emerged concept, further defining it (Glaser, 1978; Lehmann, 2001; Urquhart, 1997). During the second phase of coding, the researcher reexamined the data in a search for links between the patterns. The researcher determined whether patterns were separate themes of different categories or variations of the same. During the third phase of coding the researcher engaged in selective coding in which the dominant themes were recorded. He grouped the themes into like categories and identified a title for each group of dominate themes excavated from the participant data.

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of teachers through the transformation process. To respond to the research questions, a synopsis was written of the findings from each participant. The synopsis identifies the lived experiences of each participant in response to the research questions. The findings were placed into chart form and were expounded upon by the researcher in the conclusions portion of the study. The major concepts or themes identified in the study are presented in chapter four of this dissertation in an effort to promote future studies on the subject.

## CHAPTER 4

### REPORT OF DATA & DATA ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers involved in the transformation to smaller learning environments. This chapter will discuss the concepts that emerged while the qualitative data collected through interviews with the teachers described in Chapter 3 were analyzed. As the researcher analyzed the data, information was divided into emerging themes that were combined to form major concepts. These concepts form the framework for the heart of the analysis in efforts to answer the research question and sub-questions, (1) What are the experiences of teachers during the transformation process into smaller learning units? (a) What challenges do teachers face during the transformation process? (b) What supports do teachers receive during the transformation process? (c) What benefits do teachers perceive come from the transformation to small learning environments? This section begins with an identification of participant characteristics (see Table 1). To set the stage for discussion of the concepts, the researcher will begin the analysis with a synopsis of the interviews with each participant. This will be followed by an identification of the concepts identified in the study.

#### Participant Characteristics

Table 1 below expresses the characteristics of the participants of the study. The participants were selected through a purposeful selection process. Participants meeting the criteria of the study were emailed a request for participation and the first ten respondents were included in the study.

Table 1

*Participants' Characteristics*

Gender	Teaching Experience	Transformation Type	Subject Taught
Female	5	Small School	Science
Male	8	Small School	Social Studies
Male	14	Small School	Social Studies
Female	22	Small School	Math
Female	10	Small School	Social Studies
Male	12	Learning Community	Social Studies
Male	5	Learning Community	English
Female	13	Learning Community	Science
Female	12	Learning Community	English
Female	15	Learning Community	Math

The participants of this study included six female and four male teachers from schools that had been transformed into small learning environments. Table 1 above indicates the years of teaching experience, subject area taught, and type of setting the participants' schools were transformed into.

## Findings

Data for this study were obtained from ten participants utilizing open ended semistructured interviews. The interviews lasted no longer than one hour and were conducted at the school site of the participants at a time of their convenience. The researcher attempted to create a safe environment where the participant felt he or she could engage in open dialogue about the transformation to smaller learning environments. The researcher guided the participant through the interview guide, asking probing questions to obtain rich data for the study. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed for accuracy. Findings for this study were derived with data taken from the transcribed interviews that was placed into chart form to locate initial codes or themes.

Miles and Huberman (1994) indicated that a qualitative researcher should show regularities in the data during this process to ensure the credibility of the findings. This researcher has excavated data for that purpose and has indicated regularities from participants that are the themes for the study. The process also provided internal triangulation to the study by indicating the number of participants indicating similar data.

The participants of the study were the single source of data for the study. To ensure ethics and truthfulness of the study, participants received a transcript of their interview as a member check two to four days after the interview. During the interview the atmosphere was collegial in efforts to obtain the most data possible. Once the transcribed data had been affirmed by the participant a synopsis was created for each. The researcher has added the synopsis for each participant to this chapter to shed insight into the experience of the teachers through the transformation.

The researcher has employed a basic interpretive strategy with three iterations of coding for this phenomenological study. The first iteration began with the researcher analyzing the data for patterns or commonalities between participants. The transcripts were read only at first. Then the researcher read the transcripts and made notes from each participant. The notes consisted of statements that could later form patterns. For instance, the researcher noted when a participant stated how they felt or an occurrence that transpired during a time period of the transformation. In the second iteration the researcher reviewed the patterns and separated the data into themes. This process involved taking the notes from the first iteration and placing them into categories of like patterns of comments. Additionally the researcher indicated which themes were connected to particular participants (see Table 2). During the third iteration of coding, the



researcher analyzed the themes and interpreted the dominate concepts from the data. This involved analyzing the thematic categories and condensing the data into one dominate concepts that were all inclusive in title. The concepts identified from the data analysis were “Employment Concerns,” “District Support,” “Teacher Involvement in Planning,” and “Instructional Changes.” These concepts will be further discussed within the chapter. The researcher again indicated the connection to the participants during this iteration of coding (see Table 3).

### *Participant 1*

Participant one indicated that he experienced the transformation from a comprehensive high school to small schools. He has been a teacher for eight years but has worked in the district for twenty-five years. The workload for this participant has not changed, he is currently teaching ninth grade social studies as he did before. However, the transformation moved him from the school where he was working to a new location. The participant indicated that several teachers at his previous location experienced the same fate. The replacement of these teachers created feelings of resentment and resistance to the change.

The transformation brought on feelings of apprehension due to rumors spreading throughout the district about the change. The participant indicated that the district held community meetings to inform the community and teachers about the transformation. This action helped to ease fears but made him feel cautious since neither he nor other teachers were truly involved in the planning process of the transformation. However, the participant did indicate that he was allowed to work as a part of the design team for the small school once the decision had been made. In the end the participant was left

unfulfilled as he felt that the ideas of the teachers were not utilized. He added the “the district asked us what we thought and then did what they wanted.” The employment process presented more challenges for this participant. He indicated that teachers were first asked to complete survey as to which school they were most interested and then told they would be interviewed by the new principals. According to the participant, teachers felt that the new principals were instructed to hire less experienced teachers from the districts alternative certification partner Teach for America. This created more feelings of hostility and removed most teachers from the worksite where they had vested years of service. Additionally the participant indicated that there was a need for more training surrounding the transformation. He stated that he did not know exactly what was expected of him as a teacher in this new environment. There was acknowledgement of the districts intermediary partner the Institute of Student Achievement and information form the district, but the participant made it clear that ongoing professional development was necessary.

Participant one indicated that teachers including him-self were resistant to the change. There was apprehension about employment due to the fact that they were attempting to gain employment with administrators that had not been hired. Also, there was a feeling that the process of selecting principals was not fair. This participant indicates that several qualified candidates from the school were past over for promotion while the district employed two administrators that were not fully certified in leadership. The participant indicated that this action left him with a serious concern for the plans of the school and added to the hostile feelings he reserved for the district.

In the end, the participant indicated that the transformation with all of its shortcomings would have been better received if he and his colleagues felt that they were more involved in the planning process. He indicated that the district should have included more vocational opportunities in the themes for the schools. The participant felt that this would have occurred if the district had included teachers in the process since they are more intoned with the needs of the student. He ended by indicating that he felt that the transformation limits teachers' professional growth and access to all the students on a particular school site.

### *Participant 2*

Participant two is a fourteen-year veteran teacher that experienced the transformation from a comprehensive high school to a complex with four small schools on one site. She indicates that at times she felt confused about the change because information was not disseminated timely and often changed. Teachers received initial information from the administrator on site, which was then contradicted by the district at community meetings. She also indicated that she felt that teachers should have received the information before the public. She stated "I felt confused, uninformed and disrespected that others received information when we did." Additionally, she was disappointed at the fact that if teachers did not attend the community meetings they would not have known the facts about the transformation.

Participant two completed the transformation employed at a new location due to the transformation and indicated that the process was not conducted in the best interest of the children. She had a pre-law background and had worked with the debate team but due to the late hiring of the administrators human resources was forced to place teachers and

she was not selected for the school of law. She indicated that she had worked in smaller learning environments previously and was excited about the possibilities. The process of the transformation left her with less than impartial feelings toward the district. She indicated that there was confusion about employment due to the fact that teachers were placed in positions before administrators. Also, she indicated a belief that the selection process for administrators was predetermined. The participant stated "the process was a waste of time, they hired who they wanted." Confusion led to anger as the teachers received letters indicating that teachers should make selections about which school they wanted to work in accompanied by a brief description of the school but no indication as to who the leader would be. The participant indicated that the flame of disappointment was fueled by the fact that teachers were confused about what subjects they would be teaching.

This participant found some resolve when she was allowed to serve as a member of the design team for one of the new schools. The Institute of Student Achievement and the districts' Office of High Schools supported the teams. This led the participant to believe that adequate support was provided for the transformation. However, in the end she indicated that she felt the district only gave the illusion that teachers were involved in the planning and did not take any of their recommendations. The participant also indicated that as a form of resistance teachers did not attend professional development over the summer.

There are positives to her experience. The participant indicated that class sizes decreased and that the personalization with students is a positive. There was extensive professional development surrounding the instructional changes that the transformation

brought creating a sense of calm as she felt that her students could benefit from the change. Also, there was a greater sense of team spirit and community that came with the transformation. Conversely, her experience exposed several negatives associated with the process. There was an indication that disciplinary problems increased because students were not know all of the new administrators. Teachers were not able to work with each other and the building was not conducive to the new environment. Additionally, the resources once limited for one school now had to be shared by four schools. Teachers never had an opportunity to see a model small school to have a point of reference and there was an unhealthy competition that began between the schools. Another note indicated by the participant was that the structure of small schools left a void in elective courses for students causing increased workload for the remaining teachers and a shortage of advanced placement offerings. The participant ended by indicating that the process could have been improved with better communication to the teachers and more inclusion in the initial planning.

### *Participant 3*

Participant three is a teacher with six years experience in the field that transitioned from a comprehensive high school into a small school setting. The transformation left him at a new school site teaching a different subject and questioning the fairness of the process. In the beginning his school began to transition as if the transformation would be to small learning communities but later transformed to small schools. He indicates that their was a desire to transform to small learning communities to eliminate the need to re-apply for a position but the process moved to small schools at his work site.

The participant indicated that the formal announcement was presented to him at a faculty meeting and that the district conducted several community meetings to introduce the concept to the public and to the teachers. He received professional development from the Institute of Student Achievement and representative from the districts' Office of High Schools. The bulk of the professional development centered on the instructional changes surrounding the transformation. This training left the participant with an understanding of the change but no indication of what it meant in terms of employment.

Participant three indicated that the process of re-applying for employment was not a smooth transition for him. He indicated that the teachers from his school were told the day of the districts transfer fair that they had to attend if they desired to work at that location the next year. Earlier they were informed that the administrators would be in place before the transfer fair but this was not the case. The participant stated that representatives from the transfer fair awaited him at the transfer fair to inform him that an observation of his class would take place before he could secure employment. He left stating that he "felt played." Later in the process the participant indicated that human resources was forced to place teachers due to the fact that the administrators had not been hired. This led to a situation where alternative certification teachers were hired first then veteran teachers leaving him without a position at the school. This caused great mistrust for the district due to the fact that some of the teachers allowed remaining at the school did not attend the transfer fair.

The participant indicated that he was not involved in any of the planning for the transformation and that the communication of the process was "horrible" with a slam of his fist on the desk. He felt that the district was not upfront and truthful about intentions

for the transformation. Also, he indicated that those who were involved in the planning were roused because none of their suggestions were utilized. Between his disenchantment the participant indicated the smaller classes are a benefit of smaller learning environments. Stating that he moved to a transformed environment of small learning communities causing him to reflect on the fact that in the comprehensive school “ I had thirty two ninth graders with puberty running all over the place and now the environment is more personal with a sense of ownership and accountability.”

#### *Participant 4*

Participant four is a thirteen-year veteran that experienced the transformation in the form of conversion to small learning communities on one campus. The participant stated that she was happy to hear that her school would not be small schools and that she would not have to re-apply for employment. She indicated that in the small learning community concept teachers were given a survey to indicate their preference of community to become a part of. However, due to limited advanced placement offerings she was placed into a community not of her preference.

The time leading to the decision of the fate of her school was stressful. She indicated that community meetings were held and pamphlets were distributed about the change but she knew from the previous transformation that small schools meant that teachers would have to re-apply and several of her colleagues were move from the worksites. She tearfully commented that “the district was going to do what ever they wanted and that teachers did not have a voice in the process” so she protested by not attending summer workshops and not attending trips to view transformed schools in other states. However she did indicate that teachers had training for instructional changes from Instructional

coaches and an outside partner known as the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

The participant indicated that she was not involved in the planning process and felt that nothing would change in the mind of the district due to what teachers had to say. She indicated that one of her challenges was being placed in an academy before an Academy Leader was selected. Additionally, she felt that the constant moving from place to place in the building prohibited the building of relationships. Also, she indicated that the scheduling caused her to teach courses she was not comfortable with and she ended up with three courses, which was an increased workload. On the other end of the spectrum, the participant concluded that the transformation left her with better class sizes and a team concept amongst her colleagues. The improved personalization led to improved discipline campus wide. However, she concluded with a concern that the transformation isolated teachers and students to their community and that she felt disconnected from her previous students.

#### *Participant 5*

Participant five is a twelve-year veteran teacher that experienced the transformation from a comprehensive high school to a small learning community. She indicated that the transformation left her with an increased workload due to the extra duties demanded on teachers with a smaller staff. She had been placed in a position created for small learning communities called a teaching learning specialist that requires that she monitor instruction, establish partnerships and facilitate testing. However, she is required to maintain a full load of classes while completing these tasks without receiving any extra compensation.



As with others that have transformed to small learning communities she did not have to endure the reapplication process but this does not mean her experience was without challenge. The participant indicated stress from being placed in a community not of her choice and obtaining the position before the administrator was selected. She stated that the district was going to place teachers wherever they wanted even she expressed “that this will kill me.” The participant stated that even with the placement of the academy she was in favor of the transformation but admits that this was not the case for all teachers. She stated that at the first small learning community meeting “it was ugly people were screaming at each other it was hard to believe that this was a professional environment.” She felt that this was because people did not understand and were afraid of the change. Support came from outside partners but mostly from the Office of High Schools’ Small Learning Communities Implementation Specialist. These individuals were accessible and a calming element in the midst of the change.

The participant reported that relationships with teachers have been improved because of the interdisciplinary teaching. Family meetings “causes us to meet more through the planning of units” and made me interact more with teachers from other content areas. She stated that the train the trainer model used to train to introduce instructional changes, which assisted with strengthening relationships. The team concept and the smaller group of students also assist with increasing the personalization of the community. The participant revealed that the greatest challenge was fear and apprehension about un-known, which caused most of the resistance from teachers. Also, the worst part of the transformation is the competition between the academies. She

concluded by stating that the process could be improved by allowing more teachers be in the focus groups or in the initial planning.

*Participant 6*

Participant six is a fifteen-year teaching veteran that experienced the transformation to small learning communities from a comprehensive high school. The transformation left him working on the same school site but removed him from the colleagues he previously worked with. He indicated that his workload has increased due to the interdisciplinary teaching that is required since the school has transformed. Meetings with teachers on his team to plan units have added to the planning time needed to create lessons. He indicated that it is often difficult to plan according to where other content areas should be on their pacing guides.

This participant indicated that his school began an unofficial transformation to small learning communities before the official launch in an attempt to avoid becoming small schools. He received initial information pertaining to the fate of the school at a faculty meeting and was relieved that the school would become a campus of four small learning communities. This meant that he would not have to re-apply for a position and most likely remain at the same worksite. The participant indicated that he was instructed to select the academy he wished to become a part of but was not placed there. He stated that he was not expecting this action since he had been told that extra teachers would need to be hired for the transformation. He was involved in the planning process for a fine arts academy in the unofficial move to small learning communities and admitted that he was very upset when the district made the decision not to continue the particular theme. He felt that it was a high performing academy that addressed student needs and

wants with buy-in from a significant number of teachers. His anger was fueled by the fact that teachers were not involved in the decision of what academies would remain on the campus. He stated that the planning of the communities appeared to be a “closed operation” excluding teachers and the selection of the themes did not match what the parents and students indicated as themes of interest.

Participant six shared that the district provided several workshops over the summer with paid stipends for teachers. However many did not attend in protest of the change. The bulk of the support for the transformation came from the district office. These persons were called Small learning Community Implementation Specialist and conducted workshops and were available to meet with teachers to address any concerns. Additionally, the district had contracted the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory to assist with the transition. The participant stated that representatives from the organization only observed what was incorrect and never gave examples of satisfactory work. He stated “they would only tell us what was wrong and then we would never see them again.”

The transformation has affected the participant in several different ways. He stated that now he does not know or rarely sees the other faculty on the complex. Additionally, he was the only person teaching his assigned subject in the community. Creating a situation where collaboration is nonexistent. He stated that the school has lost some of the course offerings from the previous years and that there is a feeling of division between the academies. This division has led to unhealthy competition and elitist attitudes are beginning to develop. He indicated also that the students are separated which makes it difficult to have clubs that formerly included the entire campus. For example, he

was the sponsor for the Model United Nations and now feels that he will not have enough students to continue this year. Additionally, content specific fairs would now be a challenge due to the fact that there are no departments.

The participant did indicate that there were some positives associated with the transformation. Increased personalization was a major gain of the transformation according to the participant. He states that working on a grade level team has made it easier to interact with students and learn about their motivators and distractions. He concluded by stating that teachers needed to see examples of the expectations and that planning should involve more teachers.

#### *Participant 7*

Participant seven is an English teacher with five years of teaching experience. Her transformation experience was from a comprehensive high school to small learning communities. She indicated that the transformation has drastically reduced her class size and her relationship with the teachers on her team has grown on a professional level due to the grade level or family concept. However, the relationship with other teachers on the complex is nonexistent due to the fact that there is no interaction between teachers from different communities.

The participant indicated that she learned of the transformation in a faculty meeting. The principal showed data and representatives from the district office explained the concept. She admitted that the first thing she was focused on was if the school would be small learning communities or small schools. The teachers had knowledge of the transformation from colleagues and were not receptive to the possibility of re-applying for positions. Participant seven was relieved to find that her school would be divided into

communities and excited to begin the process. She was instructed to make a selection of academies that she would prefer to work in and was placed in her first choice. Outside partners of the district and representatives from the High School Office provided summer professional development and support for teachers during the transformation.

The participant noted that the transformation was not a smooth process noting that several teachers do not want to change and resisted openly in faculty meetings as well as by not attending professional development sessions. She discerned that most of the resistance was due to the fact that teachers felt that “the district had already made up their mind what was going to happen and they did not try to sell us on it, they basically said this is what we were going to do.” She admits to inclusion with the group of teachers that felt that way but stated that she just went along with it to make life easier because nothing was going to change.

Participant seven stated that the transformation has caused division in the school for teachers as well as students. She asserted that “the students believe that, well the ones that perceive that they are in the better community, they feel more elitist and they talk down to other students who are not in their community, or they may not even associate with them. Also she has heard teachers criticize students stating “Just because you’re in this SLC, don’t get it twisted.” She stated that the community really is small and the personalization is top notch, it is truly difficult to not see or know what is happening with the remainder of the school. The participant concluded by stating that she hopes that the district would be more honest about the transformation. Also, that making sure teachers meet as a discipline or a content area and the physical set up is crucial to making the transformation work. Her last statement was teachers that are ten years in or more seem

to be the most difficult to change and that in the future districts should focus on that group.

*Participant 8*

Participant eight is an English teacher with fifteen years of experience in the field. The transformation moved her from a comprehensive high school to a campus of small learning communities. She indicated that her workload has increased due to the transformation. She now has additional courses to teach and responsibilities including but not limited to discipline, instructional observations and conferences. Her position as Department Chair has been dissolved “and now I am responsible for all testing in the community.” The participant expressed anger at the fact that the Department Chair duties remained the same but the position was eliminated thus there is no compensation for the work.

The participant has indicated that the transformation has separated teachers and made them lose their sense of community. It has caused a division amongst the teachers, there is minimal sharing and the sense of family is gone. There is a prevalent feeling of “I have to be better than everyone else.” Additionally, the participant stated that teachers do not get to see other teachers unless a mass faculty meeting is taking place and you do not know what is going on in other communities.

Once the decision was made that the participants school was going to become small learning communities, teachers were told what the communities would be and that the decision came from surveys sent to the community. The participant indicated that resistance from teachers came because they were not involved. Teachers felt that change was pushed down our throats. “There were not attempts to gain buy in”, the participant

avowed “We felt as if the train is coming get on or get ran over”. In this situation teachers did not have to reapply for employment at the school. Teachers completed a survey with their top three choices of academies to work in. At this point the participant stated that teachers were placed in academes by human resources, which caused a lot of dissention.

The district provided professional development on the structure of small learning communities and changes in instruction. However, teachers resisted by not attending the workshops held over the summer months. The participant felt that the breakdown occurred in the communication with teachers. She indicated that teachers felt disrespected that they found out about the transformation once it was already in progress.

Additionally, she indicates that the change would have been better received if teachers were more involved in the planning process. The participant has experienced some positives associated with the transformation. She noted that the transformation allows her to work closely with students that have the same teachers, which allows more collaboration. Also, core teachers having the same planning periods for interdisciplinary planning has been a plus associated with the transformation. She concluded by reiterating that district leaders should consider things teachers go through in the change process and provide more opportunities in place for teachers to become involved in the planning process. She stated “I think they should consider things that teachers go through and I think when they start making some of the requirements, they should make sure they have the professional development in place to take the teachers along in the process but now just have one day of it, follow up and come back and say, how’s that going?”

*Participant 9*

Participant nine is a math teacher with twenty-two years of experience teaching. Her experience with the transformation was from a large comprehensive high school to a campus consisting of four small learning communities. Her workload has remained the same as to the number of courses she teaches, however her class size has decreased. She is currently employed on the same campus but she was not placed in her desired small learning community and has been removed from the team of teachers she previously worked with.

The participant indicated that she was informed at a faculty meeting about the transformation of the school. At that point, community meetings were held to inform the public about the events occurring at the school. The participant indicated that at this point teachers including her were angry. They felt that they were not included in the selection of the themes and that they were simply being told what was going to happen. According to the participant teachers felt they knew best what the students needed from the transformation but were never asked or included in the planning process. She did not have to reapply for a position and was happy to make a selection as to which community she wanted to work in. However, the leaders of the academies were not in place and human resources placed the teachers into academies and not necessarily by the choices indicated as preferences. The participant was angered that she had an engineering degree and was placed in the communications and journalism academy.

There is an acknowledgement of the positives the transformation brought for the teacher. The participant indicates that personalization has improved and that disciplinary infractions as well as class sizes have decreased. The cost for those positives according to



the participant is the teacher relationships on the campus. The participant indicates that there is a feeling of isolation for teachers on the campus. She stated that collaboration in the content areas has suffered due to the structure in place. She collaborates with members of her team from other disciplines but is no longer able to discuss issues or plan with teachers from other communities teaching the same subject.

*Participant 10*

Participant ten is a social studies teacher with ten years experience in the profession. Her experience with the transformation to small learning environments moved her from a comprehensive high school to a campus with four small learning communities. She has indicated that the four by eight block schedule associated with the small learning community has increased her workload, as well as the interdisciplinary structure of teaching. Additionally, she has added the duties and responsibilities associated with the assignments of Grade Level Family Leader and Advisory Liaison for the community. The participant is classified as a teacher and thus does not receive any compensation for these assignments.

The journey began for this participant with the acknowledgement that her school would become learning communities and not small schools. She acknowledges that there were several community meetings held as well as faculty meetings and representatives from the high school office to inform teachers of the events. Consultants were flown in from outside the district and there was professional development over the summer. She indicated a concern that teachers had no input on the themes for the academies or the preliminary planning. At that point instead of re-applying for a position she would only need to indicate which academy she preferred to work in. The participant indicated that

she would have like to have been involved in the planning process and the selection of the themes for the academies. She suggested that there should have been academies focused on international affairs. The participant indicated that she was made aware of her placement before the Academy Leader was hired, which caused a little apprehension.

Once the transformation had occurred the participant began to see benefits from the process. She indicated that working on a grade level team has improved her relationship with other teachers. However, “she missed working with my core area teachers and being able to plan and discuss issues.” The participant also stated that there was a feeling of isolation since she was the only eleventh grade teacher in her subject area in the community. However, she indicated that “the best part of being in the small learning community is that it addresses the needs of the students, there is more technology, smaller classes, and there is increased personalization of the environment.” She concluded by stating that there should be ongoing professional development for the transformation and the expectations for teachers.

#### *Patterns and Themes from Initial Coding*

Data for this study was derived from the review of transcripts of interviews from ten participants. This researcher has employed a basic interpretive strategy with three iterations of coding for this phenomenological study. The first iteration began with the researcher analyzing the data for patterns or commonalities between participants. In the second iteration the researcher reviewed the patterns and separated the data into themes. During the third iteration of coding, the researcher analyzed the themes and interpreted the dominate concepts from the data.

After transcribing the interview sessions the researcher began the process of analyzing the data. The transcripts were reviewed and field notes were created for each participant. The notes formed the data base for the content in the two tables that following in the chapter. The researcher placed the notes from the sessions into like categories, which are shown in Table 2. The categories were then analyzed for similarities in the notes that could be formed into concepts. Table 3 expresses the concepts that were grouped together to form the dominate themes the researcher extracted from the data.

*Level One Coding.* Table 2 is a thematic code map that indicates the patterns the researcher identified in the first phase of coding. The patterns are aligned in columns according to similar categories identified during the second phase of coding. Table 2 indicates that there are seven categories that the themes can be organized. The patterns are grouped into categories representing themes from the interview data. Each pattern in Table 2 is referenced with its data source thereby providing triangulation of results.

Table 2.

## Code Map

Keeping a job	Changes at work	involvement	Feelings	Assistance	School changes	challenges
workload has not changed very much (P1,7)	teachers to worry about jobs (P1,2)	Involvement on the design team for business small school but my ideas were not utilized (P1,2)	District presented community meetings (P1,2,4,7,10)	PD on instruction (P1) PD for instructional changes/ rigor relevance and content structure (P2)	Improved discipline (P1,4,5,7)  The class sizes decreased (P2,3,5,7)	Limits personal growth and access to students (P1)
Moved to new school (P1,2,3,8,9) I was not placed in the academy of my choice(4,6,8,1)	Teachers selected before administrator--ators (P1,2,3,4,5)	Need more training (P1)	Summer workshops (P1,3,4,8) - I did not go on the PD trips (P2,4)	Training from ISA (P1,2) --Sent to NY with ISA for PD (P3) -training centered around instructional changes (P7)	Improved personalization (P1,2,3,4,5,6,7,10)  --feeling of ownership and accountability (P3,5)	Teachers isolated (P2,4,6,8,9,10) -Division between teachers (P7) Competition between schools / Academies (P2,5,7,8)
Replaced with TFA teachers/ disrespect (P1)	Leader selection not fair/ Qualified teachers overlooked for leadership positions (P1,2,4) - Did not know about the Academy Leader (P4)	Decisions were made and teachers followed direction teachers were not involved (P1,3,4)	Felt confused and uninformed (P2,5) Communication problems and presented to public before teachers (P2,3,5)	HS Transformation office (P2) -- We had training for instructional changes/ GPS training/ Instructional coaches/ NWREL (P4,10)	Separated from old students (P2) --moving from room to room (P4)	Building not set up for transformation (P2,7)
teachers to worry about jobs (P1,2,3)	Teachers did not know where they would be working and confused about what subjects they would be teaching (P1,2)	Would have been more buy in if teachers were involved in the process (P1)	Information given in emails and through principals (P2,6,7,8,9) - I would hope that the district would be more honest about it and tell us this is what we are going to do (P7)	instructional coaches to provide support two per school (P2) -- Training from NWRELL (P4,5,6,8) -- Greatest assistant came from SLC implementation specialist (P5,7)	Relationships with teachers have been improved because the interdisciplinary teaching causes us to meet more through the planning of units/ made me interact more with teachers from other content areas (P5,7)	Did not have the opportunity to view a small school (P2,6)

Keeping a job	Changes at work	involvement	Feelings	Assistance	School changes	challenges
some teachers would have been better suited for school aligned with their background (P2,9) Not happy about the placement of H/R into a new academy (P4,6)	Teachers had to go through a process of rehire (P2) -Selected academy that you wanted to work in but placed by H/R (P3,4,5,6)	The process should be a shared between teachers and leaders (P1)  -- Let more teachers be in the focus group or let teachers be more involved in the planning (P5)	Received a letter stating that you could make choices for your school you wanted to go to with a brief description of school (P1,2)	Interdisciplinary units was an instructional change (P2,3,5,6,8)  - Workload increased due to working with the other teachers on my team on interdisciplinary teaching (P6,7)	Changed to the 4X8 schedule, changes in delivery and, students travel between four or five classes in a particular area/ interdisciplinary planning was new (P5,7,8,10)	Difficult to do Fairs etc... because you do not have departments anymore/ it is difficult for content areas to collaborate. (P6)  - we can not collaborate in departments (P7,9,10)
Looking for jobs in other districts (P2) -lost position as department chair (1,6,8,)	Teaching extra courses not enough elective offerings (P2)	Almost like a force you did not have a say (P4,9)	I was upset that we were not included in the planning because we do all the work/ Just go along with it makes life easier (P7)	Instructional changes— teaching on block, interdisciplinary, differentiation, diagnostics If you were there you got the training (P7,8,10)		
Worried if SLC or SS (P1,2,3,4,5,6,7,10) -Did not have to reapply (P4,5,6,7,8) Forced to attend transfer fair (P3)	Scheduling causes you to teach courses you are not comfortable with/ you may end up with three preps (increased workloads) (P4,6) -other duties increased (P5,6,7,8)	Told where we were going to be and who we were going to work with which caused a hectic situation and stress/ teachers are really stressed about all the changes (P4,8,9)	I was not involved in the official planning of the communities it seemed as if it was a closed door operation (P6,8,9)	We now deliver instruction in a standards based format and that is were the PD is lacking (P9,10)		

*P followed by a number indicates a participant making a similar statement*

### *Dominant Themes from Third Level of Coding*

Table 3 indicates the dominant themes of this study. After the second phase of coding where the themes were organized into categories those clusters of themes were identified as dominant concepts and displayed in the table.

Table 3.

#### *Dominant Themes*

<b>Employment Concerns</b>	<b>District Support</b>	<b>Teacher Involvement in Planning</b>	<b>Instructional Changes</b>
workload has not changed very much (P1,7)	District presented community meetings (P1,2,4,7,10)	Involved on the design team for business small school but my ideas were not utilized (P1,2)	PD on instruction (P1) PD for instructional changes/ rigor relevance and content structure (P2)
teachers to worry about jobs (P1,2)	Summer workshops (P1,3,4,8) - I did not go on the PD trips (P2,4)	Need more training (P1)	-training centered around instructional changes (P7)
Teachers selected before administrators (P1,2,3,4,5)	Felt confused and uninformed (P2,5) Communication problems and presented to public before teachers (P2,3,5)	Decisions were made and teachers followed direction teachers were not involved (P1,3,4)	HS Transformation office (P2) -- We had training for instructional changes/ GPS training/ Instructional coaches/ NWREL (P4, 10)
Moved to new school (P1,2,3,8,9)	Information given in emails and through principals (P2,6,7,8,9) - I would hope that the district would be more honest about it and tell us this is what we are going to do (P7)	Would have been more buy in if teachers were involved in the process (P1)	Interdisciplinary units was an instructional change (P2,3,5,6,8)
Replaced with TFA teachers/ disrespect (P1)	Received a letter stating that you could make choices for your school you wanted to go to with a brief description of school (P1,2)	The process should be a shared between teachers and leaders (P1) -- Let more teachers be in the focus group or let teachers be more involved in the planning (P5)	- Workload increased due to working with the other teachers on my team on interdisciplinary teaching (P6,7)
Leader selection not fair/ Qualified teachers overlooked for leadership positions (P1,2,4) -Did not know about the Academy Leader (P4)	Training from ISA (P1,2) --Sent to NY with ISA for PD (P3)	Almost like a force you did not have a say (P4,9)	Instructional changes— teaching on block, interdisciplinary, differentiation, diagnostics If you were there you got the training (P7,8,10)

<b>Employment Concerns</b>	<b>District Support</b>	<b>Teacher Involvement in Planning</b>	<b>Instructional Changes</b>
Teachers did not know where they would be working and confused about what subjects they would be teaching (P1,2)	instructional coaches to provide support two per school (P2) -- Training from NWRCELL (P4,5,6,8)	Told where we were going to be and who we were going to work with which caused a hectic situation and stress/ teachers are really stressed about all the changes (P4,8,9)	We now deliver instruction in a standards based format and that is were the PD is lacking m(P9,10)
Teachers had to go through a process of rehire (P2) -Selected academy that you wanted to work in but placed by H/R (P3,4,5,6)	-- Greatest assistant came from SLC implementation specialist (P5,7)	I was upset that we were not included in the planning because we do all the work/ Just go along with it makes life easier (P7)	Relationships with teachers have been improved because the interdisciplinary teaching causes us to meet more through the planning of units/ made me interact more with teachers from other content areas (P5,7)
Teaching extra courses not enough elective offerings (P2) Worried if SLC or SS (P1,2,3,4,5,6,7,10) -Did not have to reapply (P4,5,6,7,8) Forced to attend transfer fair (P3)		I was not involved in the official planning of the communities it seemed as if it was a closed door operation (P6,8,9)	Changed to the 4X8 schedule, changes in delivery and, students travel between four or five classes in a particular area/ interdisciplinary planning was new (P5,7,8,10)
Scheduling causes you to teach courses you are not comfortable with/ you may end up with three preps (increased workloads) (P4,6) -other duties increased (P5,6,7,8)			
some teachers would have been better suited for school aligned with their background (P2,9) --I was not placed in the academy of my choice/ Not happy about the placement of H/R into a new academy (P4,6)			
Looking for jobs in other districts (P2) -lost position as department chair (1,6,8,)			

*P followed by a number indicates a participant making a similar comment*

Table 3 displays that there were four dominate themes of this study. Those themes are employment concerns, district support, teacher involvement in planning, and instructional changes. The themes associated with the concept are located in the column below and are then represented with the participants that made like statements by the number associated with the participant following.

### Concepts Development

During the process of conducting this study to explore the experiences of teaching during the transformation to smaller learning environments, four major concepts became apparent. These concepts are “employment concerns,” “district support,” “teacher involvement in planning,” and “instructional changes.” The concepts first emerged as themes identified by the participants as they were interviewed. These themes were analyzed for overlap, and commonalities. The final step required the researcher to form concepts from the combined themes that are the findings of this study.

#### *Employment Concerns*

The first concept identified with this study was labeled employment and status by the researcher. This concept was identified through the themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants. Noting that teachers relate to change in terms of what it will do for them (Hord et al., 1987), waiting for the initial decision from the district concerning the fate of the school was a major issue for the participants. Loucks and Hall (1981) found that teacher acceptance of reform moves through the stages of concern and all employees are concerned with there employment status. Teachers waited for direction regarding whether their school would be a small school or a small learning community. A small school transformation meant that the teachers would have four new principals and



that teachers would have to reapply for employment. In contrast, a small learning community transformation meant that the school would be split into four academies under the current principal. Teachers expressed concern about the selection of the leadership personnel at their locations. There was concern that the principal and academy leaders were selected late in the year. This did not allow enough time for proper planning, in the eyes of the teachers. Additionally, teachers expressed concerns that in haste the district did not select the best leaders possible for this transformation. There were implications that the leaders were not qualified, not knowledgeable about the transformation, and not trained in how to operate as separate leaders on one campus. Additionally, the participants in this study observed a feeling of disrespect since several of the new leaders selected were from other districts.

After the leadership was in place, faculty and staff needed to be hired for each location. Teachers observed that this situation was a source of discontent with the district that lingers to this day. The district informed teachers that they would need to reapply for employment during the spring semester of the school year. Craine (2007) contended that at this point educators often become psychologically paralyzed at the news of change in their work lives and the shock immediately affects their performance. This change caused scores to drop at schools during the transformation year. However, the source of the problem was that the principals or academy leaders had not been selected yet. Teachers, who already felt disrespected by having to reapply for jobs they already possessed, were forced to interview multiple times to stay at the same location. The discontent turned to anger and resentment as teachers were told that they were the reason the children were failing. This was compounded with the district partnership with an alternative

certification program for teachers. Teachers noted that the new principals (some of whom were graduates of the alternative certification program) opted to hire new uncertified teachers. The feeling was that the principals had been instructed to do so by the district. This caused several teachers to seek employment outside the district. Additionally, there was a feeling of resentment toward the district for selecting young inexperienced administrators and teachers over veterans.

Once teachers had obtained employment, there were more changes in store for the teachers involved in the transformation process. Several teachers were not hired at their previous location and were spread throughout the district. Work commutes increased as much as 40 minutes as teachers were forced to drive to schools on opposite ends of the district. Teachers noted that this made them feel very insignificant and told them their well-being was not a concern of the district. Once arriving at the new employment locations, several teachers were faced with starting all over again. The reputations the teachers had built and the bonds created with coworkers, students, and administrators were severed. All teachers involved in the process who had held department chair positions lost that status because either the teachers were new to the schools they transferred into or the structure of the small learning environment did not possess such a position. Those who stayed on the campus of the school that had been transformed also endured changes. The division of the facility meant many teachers had to change classrooms. Some were forced to teach subjects such as math in classrooms designed for chemistry labs.

Conversely, the transformation was not a negative experience for all the teachers involved. Several teachers observed that they welcomed the change and felt that it was

best for the children. Others stated that it gave them the opportunity to leave an administrator that they did not feel was competent or to teach a course that would have been otherwise relegated to senior teachers. Additionally, some teachers were appreciative of the opportunity to apply for leadership positions, which were provided by the transformation.

### *District Support*

The teacher is the most important component of educational reform (Fullan, 1993), thus support for any change must be provided to the teacher. The second concept identified through the themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants was district support. Teachers felt that it was the district's responsibility to keep them informed about the process and to provide the professional development needed to make the transition. Murphy (1999) found that leadership is critical to enact change, and there is a need for communication about the change process reinforced by training and resources during the period of change. The district employed a transformation team led by a change agent referred to in this particular district as the project administrator. This person formed a team at the district level that secured the grant funds for the transformation, selected the themes, decided what type of small environment would be implemented, and monitored the process. However, participants of this study indicated that several teachers did not attend professional development provided by the district as a type of protest.

The transformation team began the journey to small learning environments with a series of community meetings. These meetings were held on the school site and involved principals, students, and the project manager. The intent was to inform the public of the

plans for the particular school site. Food and beverages were provided as other schools displayed academies and or small school successes on other campuses. Teachers observed that this was very helpful in understanding the process. Several stated that they had attended the meetings for schools that were transitioned before the teachers' own site to know what the transformation would mean for them. However, not all questions were answered in the open forum, which led some to think that the district was hiding information from the teachers and parents. Sessions were broken into groups led by principals to answer the remaining questions. The participants in this study observed that the principals who led the sessions had questions that needed to be answered.

The next form of district support noted by teachers was the professional development provided. The Office of High Schools utilized videos and training sessions to train teachers on "the essence of smallness." These training sessions included topics ranging from why the transformation was needed for students to what instruction should look like in a small school. Teachers felt the training was necessary but were not enthused about the meeting times. The transformation team could not override the regular faculty meetings or meet during the school day; thus, the professional development sessions were held after school on a day other than the usual Tuesday afternoon reserved for faculty meetings. The meetings started at four and ended at six. Food was provided, and teachers were expected to be active participants in the training. Teachers felt that the district was not valuing their time, and that led to resentment toward the transformation.

Experts were flown into the district to educate the teachers on small learning environments. The district flew in different groups to provide professional development according to the type of transformation that was taking place. If the transformation was to

change a school into small learning communities, experts from the Northwest Regional Laboratories from Portland worked with the school. Conversely, if a school was transformed into a small school site, the district employed the services of the Institute of Student Achievement from New York. These groups came into the schools on a monthly basis to provide professional development and make observations on the progress of the school. These experts met with teachers during their planning periods or observed classes. Also, many sessions were conducted after school, and there were some on Saturdays. Teachers received stipends to attend Saturday sessions, but the sessions were presented as mandatory by the district. Teachers felt that the prescribed training was not what they needed. For instance, the Institute of Student Achievement provided several professional development sessions on inquiry-based instruction. The teachers at the school site felt that it was useless because their students needed to improve their reading and comprehension skills. Additionally, there was concern among the teachers concerning the goal of the transformation. The feeling was that there was a push for more interdisciplinary teaming, which is a middle school concept. The teachers expressed great concern for the performance of their students on standardized tests since high school assessments focused on the standards of a particular course.

Between the district trainings and the outside entities resided the instructional coaches and model teachers for the purpose of professional development. The persons in these positions monitored changes between visits of the outside entities and provided training to the teachers on a one-on-one basis. Teacher received this group better but felt a need to be involved in the type of professional development needed. The district provided opportunities to view other schools that had been transformed in different states

to those in leadership positions and a small number of teachers. However, teachers noted that more ground-level employees needed the opportunity as well as time to evaluate the type of professional development they felt is needed.

### *Teacher Involvement in Planning*

Data from the interviews indicate that teachers felt that they should have been more involved in the planning process of the transformation. The background of this study illustrated the need to involve teachers in planning to decrease resistance to change. Administrators must also be willing to broaden the base of decision makers to include those affected by decisions in efforts to improve achievement for students (Payne, 1984). Once the district made the decision to transform schools, teachers felt they should have been included in the process. Craine (2007) stated that when people can no longer deny the inevitable they move to the next stage in the change process, which is anger. The lack of inclusion in the planning of the change became the source of fuel for that anger. There was consensus that the decision regarding the type of transformation rested on the school district. However, teachers felt that the themes for the academies or schools should have been selected by teachers or the district should have at least included them in the decision-making process. The district announced the themes to the teachers and parents at the same time during the community meetings. Again making teachers feel as they were not a part of the process. Teachers observed that they knew the interest of the students and could have positively enhanced the process of theme selection. The district sent out surveys to the parents and students concerning possible themes but teachers were not included. Additionally, there was a feeling that the results of the survey did not matter,

and as one teacher put it, “the decision was already made, they are just going through the motions to be politically correct.”

One aspect of involving teachers in the planning process fared a little better than the selection of the themes. This item that emerged from the sea of themes was the use of teachers in the design teams. Once the community meetings were completed and the themes for the schools or academies were selected, the design teams were supposed to plan the elements of the school. Teachers were initially excited that they would have a voice in how the new schools or academies would function. This is important to note because Meyer (1988) exhorted that if educators are not involved in the planning process, then only 15% of any change will be implemented. That excitement quickly turned to despair when the teachers were informed that they would have to interview to be a part of the team. This added to the teacher resentment of the district that already included resentment due to the need to reapply for their jobs, exclusion from the selection of the themes, and controversy over the community meetings. However, participants indicated that it was fair noting that the team would be compensated an hourly rate for the after-school meetings. The great idea that had indications of relieving tension between the two sides started as a bust. Teachers noted that they began the teams before the principals or academy leaders were hired. This was a source of tension because a large amount of work was completed before the principals or academy leaders joined the design teams. The stress originated in the fact that these persons were slated to be the leaders of the teams and held final decision-making power. Hence, many of the efforts of the teachers were discarded weeks into the process. Others observed that their plan was not changed, but simply not implemented by the district. Again, the teachers felt that district was going

through the motions and the district already knew what it was going to do. In the end, the cost did not outweigh the gains, and the teachers were grateful to be included on the design teams. The teachers noted that their voices were heard at least among each other, and they attempted to do what was best for the children. Teachers seemed at peace until the hiring portion of the process began, and many of the teachers who had been “mavericks” on the design teams found that their services were not required by the principal or academy leader. Needless to say, teachers were not delighted at these circumstances. They felt that if they were assigned to design a particular school or academy, then that is the place where people should work.

Teachers also noted that there were several items that would have been different had the teachers been involved in the planning efforts at the onset. The first issue on the agenda would have been the facility itself. Teachers stated that the physical facilities are not made for the transformation. A teacher observed that he or she could be walking down a hallway and pass classrooms from three schools without noting a barrier or distinction. Additionally, the value of outside entities to plan and assist with the transformation was questioned. Teachers felt that the consultants came in with a “cookie cutter” prescription for how to achieve the transformation goals. The process should have allowed teachers to research what needed to be done and ask for assistance in areas of weakness. Teachers observed that they were forced to watch videos of classrooms where students were model citizens and willing participants in the educational process and asked why this was not the case in their classes. The teachers were impressed and wanted to see this type of environment with their student population.



### *Instructional Changes*

After all the meetings and planning, the actual implementation of the transformation took place. Once the leaders had been selected and they in turn selected their staff, the vision and mission of the school came to life. The true purpose of the transformation reared its head from the shadows. All stakeholders put down their differences to make the transformation work for the children. The purpose of the transformation was to create a better learning environment for students, thus improving instruction through improved pedagogy, smaller classes, and personalization. This would involve second order change for teachers. Second-order change should address how teachers utilize instructional time in their classrooms from both a theoretical framework and a sound pedagogy (Cuban, 1990).

Teachers agreed that eventually the transformation yielded small class sizes, which assisted with the instructional process. The smaller classes allowed for greater personalization that allowed teachers to better understand factors that motivated students and their preferred learning styles. However, teachers noted that because of the transformation several teachers were now teaching courses they were not familiar with. This caused a greater need for planning time, which was being occupied by the district and consultants for professional development. Fullan (2001) affirmed that deep change demands the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for teachers, and transformative learning that affects their beliefs about teaching and learning.

Also, there was an indication that the number of advanced courses dwindled because there were not enough certified teachers for each school or academy or not enough students to create a class because of the separation. Additionally, teachers spoke

of an emerging theme of division between students and faculty. Teachers noted that they could no longer share resources with colleagues because they were in a different school or academy. Teachers said, “The students in my school do not act like that” or “Our students are the smartest on the campus and will always score higher than the others.” Also, there was resentment among teachers concerning resources. One teacher said that because of the location of her academy she lost the use of the LCD projector that had been in her room. Others noted that there was no equity in the distribution of resources, citing that if a school or academy had previously been a magnet program, then that school possessed the lion’s share of the resources on campus. Students began to fall into the same position as their teachers. The uniforms began to resemble gang paraphernalia, as one teacher noted. Students separated themselves in the common areas and fed into the concept of one school or academy being better than the other.

The transformation occurred at a time when the state was going through the implementation of performance standards in the core subject areas. This means that teachers have a prescribed curriculum that must be taught in every core area class. Teacher observed that this was a problem because the consultants and the district were pushing interdisciplinary teams and planning. The teachers felt that they were held accountable for student achievement on tests that were based on the state-prescribed curriculum but forced to teach interdisciplinary units that did not correspond with the requirements. Additionally, teachers felt a strain from not being able to meet and plan with core subject teachers. The interdisciplinary teams were based on grade levels, which meant planning was conducted with teachers who taught different subjects. Teachers wanted to go back to the professional learning communities they had created with the

other core teachers of their subject. This would allow them to pace themselves together and provide common assessments. The teachers would also be able to share strategies that were effective in teaching particular lessons.

All of the changes associated with the transformation left one lasting effect on the teachers. An increased workload was a theme that emerged among the participants of this study. Teachers stated that due to the transformation several were teaching not only extra subjects but also subjects that the teachers had never taught before. Additionally, there was the “chore” of teaching advisory. Some teachers had three subjects to teach and an advisory class, which at this point had no real curriculum. Advisory is a type of homeroom for students, but it lasted 30 to 35 minutes so a teacher needed to do something constructive with the students. Teachers noted that the advisory session had turned into another subject that they had to prepare to teach. Adding to this, teachers observed that schools or academies operated with one counselor and one assistant principal for the entire campus. This left all student needs and discipline to the teachers. Teachers said that the paperwork had increased along with the expectations, but the support had not been “parallel.”

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers in schools that had been transformed into small learning environments. This chapter discussed concepts that emerged while the qualitative data were analyzed. The data revealed four core concepts relevant to teachers in schools that were transformed into small learning environments. A synopsis was provided for each participant to provide insight regarding the origins of the concepts. The researcher felt this was necessary to

accurately portray the teachers' perceptions, frustrations and needs. The concepts that were revealed by the data were expounded upon using statements from each teacher to give a true sense of the experience. These findings drive the conclusions and implications that will be discussed in chapter five of the study. Chapter 5 will introduce the conclusions made by the researcher and discuss implications of the findings for educational leaders in the future.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers in schools that had been transformed into small learning environments. This qualitative, phenomenological study captured the voice of teachers to share their attitudes and perceptions. The following research questions served as a guide throughout the process:

(1) What are the experiences of teachers during the transformation process into smaller learning units? (a) What challenges do teachers face during the transformation process? (b) What supports do teachers receive during the transformation process? (c) What benefits do teachers perceive come from the transformation to small learning environments?

Through a series of open-ended questions, teachers recalled detailed accounts of challenges, concerns, and needs the teachers had encountered during the transformation to small learning environments. A total of 10 teachers from the metro Atlanta area were interviewed. In completing the interviews the research questions were answered. Questions from the interview guide were aligned with the research questions to ensure data collected was germane to the study. When the collected data were analyzed, four major concepts arose, as discussed in chapter 4. That data formed the base for the researcher's conclusions and implications. The researcher reviewed the transcripts and concepts in efforts to form conclusions then composed the implications the findings would have for educational leaders. This final chapter will discuss the conclusions and

implications of the study. This chapter will emphasize the central points and implications for educators, administrators, and district leaders.

### Conclusions

This study yielded four major conclusions: (a) the transformation was challenging for teachers, (b) teachers wanted to be included early in the planning process, (c) teachers have an increased workload and instructional changes due to the transformation, and (d) district support was lacking for teachers during the transformation. These conclusions will be discussed in the following sections.

#### *Challenges for Teachers*

As indicated in the background of the study, change is a difficult process. It involves the reconstruction of what one believes to be true and valid into an error or not the best solution for a problem. Therefore, it is not a stretch of the imagination to understand that teachers would experience challenges with the transformation to smaller environments. The first challenges that teachers dealt with involved their employment with the district. Teachers waited to find out if their school would be transformed into small learning communities or small schools. This would be the difference between interviewing with a principal one knew and interviewing with a new person who was not familiar with one's skill set.

Feeding the tension in this scenario was the teachers' feeling that the district made the change because they were inadequate teachers. Additionally, teachers were disturbed to find that they would have to reapply for positions that they currently held. Several teachers observed that this caused a feeling of disrespect and sent a large number of their colleagues to other districts for employment. The selection process and hiring of the

principals were also sources of tension for the teachers. The principals selected were from other districts or possessed limited leadership experience. This was a slap in the face to many of the teachers who had leadership credentials and had completed the district's leadership program. Combining those factors with the fact that the district has a partnership with an alternative certification program contracting several positions to new teachers, and the scene was set for bad blood. Veteran teachers were the last to be hired in lieu of the new alternate certification teachers.

The transformation came at a great cost to some of the veteran teachers. Many were moved to other schools in different corners of the district. This caused increased travel times to work and a strain for those with children in childcare programs who needed to be picked up before a certain time. Others lost their classrooms due to the new design of the school or were removed from their colleagues they had worked with for several years. Teachers were moved from the students the teachers loved and had mentored through the years. Additionally, the teachers who moved to new locations lost the status and respect they had earned at previous schools. Those who had held department chair and other leadership positions were stripped of the responsibilities and forced to start all over again.

#### *Including Teachers in Planning*

As stated in previous chapters, teachers are more apt to accept change if they are included in the process. In this situation, teachers were included in the planning process. There is general agreement that the transformation decision rested with the district to act in the best interest of the students. However, teachers felt that the inclusion should have taken place at the onset of the process.

At the community meetings, the transformation team informed the public and the teachers the fate of the school in regard to transformation and the themes for the schools or academies. Teachers felt that before this took place the planning meetings should have included teachers. They hold vital insight into the interest of the children and the factors that motivate students. Teachers will also carry out the implementation of these themes; therefore, not including teachers in the selection process is seen as an oversight. Additionally, informing the teachers at the same time as the public was another source of disenchantment with the district for the teachers.

The design teams increased the popularity of the change with the teachers. Teachers involved in the planning of the new schools or academies were elated about having a voice in how the school would operate. Actually, providing compensation for the members of the team implied that the teachers' time was valued. The joy was tainted, however, by the late selection of the principals who led the teams after weeks of work had already been completed. Teachers also felt that their voices were not heard when they noted that the facilities did not fit the transformation that was taking place. Eventually, the design teams proved to be yet another challenge for teachers. Interviews were held for teachers to become a part of the design teams, which eliminated several candidates. The district, not the principal or academy leader, selected the teams. Moreover, not all of the participants in the design teams were assigned to the school or academy they had designed.

Teachers also wanted to be involved in deciding what type of professional development was needed for the transformation in regard to instruction. The district chose to use outside entities that had prescribed ideas of what the teachers needed before



entering the schools. The overview of concepts was initially received; however, the teachers wanted to see examples of inner-city kids and learn strategies for improving reading and comprehension. Over and over, the theme of involving the teachers resurfaced throughout the transformation process.

#### *Increased Workload and Instructional Changes*

Change implies that things will be conducted in a different manner, and that is what happened with the transformation. Instruction was at the core of the change and was the focus of the district policy. The transformation was to create smaller, more personalized environments to make it easier for the teacher to improve instruction. This part of the transformation has been deemed a success. Teachers are reporting that classes are smaller, and the teachers have a better relationship with their students. Additionally, school has become a safer environment, and outsiders are easily recognized.

However, the cost of that change must be analyzed in terms of the teachers' experiences. Many teachers are now teaching courses they do not feel proficient in or have never taught before. This has caused great strain when added to the fact that the district now wants to see instructional changes such as differentiation, project-based learning, and inquiry-based instruction. Teachers also find themselves teaching more than the previous two courses from years past. The limited number of teachers in each school or academy has placed three subjects to teach and an advisory class on the backs of teachers. In addition, teachers now are asked to plan in interdisciplinary teams to form units of study. This has removed the support of planning with core teachers and producing common assessments as well as pacing guides. This middle school concept has

caused concern, as teachers are held accountable for achievement on standard specific state-mandated tests.

The structure of the small school or small learning community has also caused change for teachers. There is only one counselor for each academy or school, and this person could not conceivably complete the entire task demanded. The remaining responsibilities fall on the teachers, who are expected to make the proper phone calls, counsel, and assist with ensuring all registrations and requirements are met. Additionally, one assistant principal now supports each campus. This leaves teachers in charge of most of the disciplinary issues, field trips, lunch duties, and other school functions. This increased workload has manifested itself in a form of division among the academies in schools. Teachers feel the need to deal with the students in their academy and to promote them over the others. Those who once shared resources now hoard them, and there is always a competition to see who is the best on campus.

### *District Support*

A transformation at a school level cannot take place without district support. This study found that this school district provided support at various levels. The intent was to keep all stakeholders well informed of the process and to provide the proper tools necessary for teachers to improve instruction through the process. The district began this process with the transformation team. The project administrator and members of the district high school office, also known as the school reform team, comprised the team that led the transformation of the schools. The team began by selecting the schools that would be transformed and creating a timeline for the transformation. Surveys were sent to the students and parents soliciting information on the types of themes the students and

parents would like to see at their schools. Once the themes had been decided and the decision had been made about the structure of the school, the public was informed through community meetings. At this point, the true transformation began. The transformation team guided the design teams on the expectations and outcomes of their work. In addition, the transformation team selected the principals or academy leaders who would serve as the leadership for the design team. These persons were provided with professional development by the transformation team.

In an effort to directly support the teachers through the transformation process, the district took several measures. Instructional coaches and model teachers working as members of the transformation team were employed to meet with teachers on an individual and departmental basis to discuss expectations and changes to expect. The coaches and model teachers provided professional development on the instructional changes that were inherent in the transformation. Additionally, the district contracted the services of the Institute of Student Achievement and Northwest Regional Educational Laboratories to assist teachers with structural and instructional changes. The Institute of Student Achievement worked with schools that were transforming into small schools, while the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratories focused on small learning communities. Also, the district supplied implementation coaches to work directly with the staff of schools transforming into small learning communities. There were opportunities to travel and observe other schools in the country that had completed the transformation process. However, those opportunities were mostly for those in leadership positions, leaving the teachers feeling the need to observe the same measures.

## Implications

Awareness has been identified as a major implication of this study. The researcher recommends that administrators and policymakers seek out venues to discuss and evaluate needs and concerns of teachers involved in the transformation process. This study is intended to further the discussion on teacher experience through the transformation process. Further research should be pursued that expands such studies across other regions and various demographics to drive policy and practice to meet teacher needs, and to ensure the voices of teachers are considered in the change process.

Transformation is a type of change, and thus, at times anger is a part of the process. This process should eventually lead to acceptance without animosity between those implementing the change and those enduring it. This study has unearthed items that a particular district as well as future districts should consider when entering into the transformation process. First, teachers should be involved in the process as early as possible. In this case, the teachers should have known the fate of the school with regard to the transformation before the community meetings. In addition, the teachers should have been made a part of the community meeting to inform the public. This would have provided buy-in from the teachers and given a clear indication to the community that there was a united front to produce this change. Parents and community members rarely see district officials, but the community has full confidence that the teachers represent the best interest of the children.

Many times during change, educational leaders think of celebrating the new and forget about respecting the efforts that move us to the point where change was possible. This seems to be the case with district actions regarding employment strategies for the

new schools or academies. The process needs to be reviewed so that it can be conducted in a manner that is not so offensive to teachers. The current process makes teachers feel as though their efforts were inadequate. Additionally, forcing teachers to reapply for positions was not received well. The principal or academy leader should have the discretion to select his or her staff, but every effort should be made to select from the veteran teachers first and then to fill the other positions later. Additionally, some concern must be paid to the needs of the teachers during the process. The change of work location has caused many hardships, including travel time to work, loss of status, and childcare issues.

Keeping teachers involved during the process is also an implication of this study. Teachers are the most knowledgeable entity about the culture of their schools and student population. Teachers can identify needs and concerns that would best benefit the teachers' school setting. The transformation aims to look at each student individually and needs to do the same for each school. Experts on transformation are excellent support systems to bring in to support teachers. However, experts should address the needs of the school on an individual basis, not come in with a prescribed fix for problems that the experts are not aware of. The teachers should drive the professional development needs as they vary from school to school.

Every change comes at a cost, and in this case, the cost of smallness is increased workload for the teachers. This study has shed light on the problems with the structure of small learning environments. Schools or academies operating with one counselor and one assistant principal for the entire campus cause increased work for teachers. They are pressed to complete portions of the counselor work during advisory session and are now

the deans of discipline in their academies. Schools that once had three to four assistant principals now operate with one, while the principal or academy leader is focused on improving instruction, leaving the teacher to control discipline. Additionally, the lack of staff has caused teachers to teach more courses. This is compounded by the fact that in addition to these extra courses an advisory class has been added to the schedule. The transformation has teachers teaching more courses on an individual basis, but the schools or academies are offering fewer advanced courses.

Another cause for concern was the indication that division had begun on the campuses of schools that had been transformed. Teachers' feelings that there is inequity of resources across schools or academies is an issue that should be visited by future districts as well as teachers indicating that one academy has better students than others. This could lead to the overcrowding of academies due to factors such as the number of special education students in one academy. Additionally, the notion of students dividing themselves according to schools or academies has frightening possibilities. Most of the schools or academies distinguish themselves with uniforms, and teachers have already observed that students wear their colors as if they were representing a gang.

This study also provides implications for other organizations other than public schools. Schools of Education at the college level must now begin to train leaders in the art of distributive leadership and how to work collaboratively with teachers. The theories linked with top down management must be replaced with those lending themselves to the creation of new age instructional leaders. These leaders must have the ability to set a vision, share a facility, empower teachers, and created more personalized environments. Additionally, the preparation of teachers must be reviewed. Certification programs must

now address the need for teachers to serve multiple roles. Teachers in smaller learning environments will require broad field certification as well as the ability to lead their peers, and conduct student discipline. There will be a need to ensure that new teachers are proficient in standards based education, project based learning, and alternative assessment.

This study also calls for change outside the walls of schools and universities. School Boards will now need to seek funding to train the new leaders and teachers for smaller learning environments. Additionally, support will need to be ongoing until the changes are institutionalized. This means that consultants will needed on a regular basis and support positions for instructional changes will need to continue. Also with smaller environments comes the need for more administrators. This will cause great strain on school districts in the weakened economy of the United States. Revenue for these positions may lead to increased taxes for city residents. Communities will need to brace for students sharing spaces that were intended for other use but should benefit from the neighborhood concept of smaller learning environments.

Once the acceptance stage has been reached in the change process, the positive effects of the change begin to come to light. The findings of this study indicate that class size decreased due to the transformation, and there is an improvement in teacher-student relationships. Teachers feel safer at work, and there is an increased sense of ownership of the school. The reduced class size has enabled teachers to focus on the needs of the students, and the focus on instructional changes has brought needed resources to the classroom. Such an endeavor cannot take place without support and guidance at the district level. This study found that the formation of a transformation team that provided

the outline for the transformation is essential. This team secures the funds, hires the leaders, and provides support throughout the process. Experts from other areas were used to support teachers as well as members of the transformation team. Support was provided not only for the structure of smaller learning environments but also for the instructional changes necessary to achieve the goal of student academic success. These efforts should be reviewed to build on a successful support system. Districts must strive to adapt and change with the needs of the students to inspire achievement.

### *Researcher Reflections*

Reflecting on the experience of teachers during the transformation process has provided new insight into the phenomenon for this researcher. Teachers are the heart of any change or reform in an educational setting and as educational leaders we should be aware of the effects changes have on the persons implementing the change. A teacher cannot be expected to perform at the highest level when concerns such as employment location or status haunt them. Additionally, to reduce resistance to change inclusion of the teachers in the process would be the best measure. The interviews conducted for this study led this researcher to discern that teachers will accept any change they feel would help their students succeed. The research clearly indicates that there is merit in smaller learning environments with respect to improved achievement, attendance, and behavior. In fact, a school located in the participants' district moved from the lowest performing school to the highest in four years. However, teachers feel that they have the best gage of what will assist the students with achieving academically. Inclusion into the decision making process will increase buy in and possibly create more successful reforms. The tears that were shed in several of the interviews informed the researcher of the extent that



teachers wanted to be included in the process and how devalued the process left them feeling. Changes for teachers are often made by persons not in the classroom and that do not have a true understanding of the needs of the students. The answer seems so simple yet it is so hard, if one wants to know what a teacher needs to be successful just ask a teacher. Education is one of the only professions where persons not in the field can make decisions causing a major reform. This study has led this researcher to realize that educational leaders should be more aware of how change affects teachers and be more inclusive in the decision making process. The findings of this study have raised awareness of the change processes of teachers causing him to be more inclusive in decision making and to be intentional towards building the leadership capacity of teachers working with him. Additionally, the researcher recommends that a similar study be conducted examining the experiences of students and through the transformation examining factors such as school pride and perceptions of safety and personalization. There are no guarantees that this will create success but we will not change student outcomes until we change the way we conduct the process of reaching those outcomes. As Henry Steele Commager stated, "Change does not necessarily assure progress, but progress implacably requires change" (Lewis, 2006).

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## Appendix A

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

**To:** Reginald Lawrence  
2349 Magaw Lane  
Powder Springs GA 30127

**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:** June 17, 2009


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

After a review of your proposed research project numbered H09274 and titled "**High School Transformation: The Lived Experience of Educators**", 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.

*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 the first phase of your proposed research. The second phase approval will be provided upon submission of the survey produced based upon pilot data as a proposal amendment.*

**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

## Informed Consent



**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION**

Dear Educator,

I am an employee of a Metro Atlanta school district, and a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a study of teachers involved in the high school transformation process of converting comprehensive high schools into small schools. The purpose of this study is to gain information about the experiences of teachers involved in the process. This study will gather information about the challenges and triumphs teachers endure during the transformation as well as advise to changes that need to be made for future implementations.

Your school has recently completed the transformation process and thus you have the opportunity to participate by participating in an interview session. There will be no compensation for participation in this study. The interview will be held at a time and location of your convenience and may be followed by a shorter session to further explore your answers. A written synopsis of your answers will be provided for your review to ensure there are no misrepresentations of your experience. This letter will serve as a formal request for your assistance with the study. There is no penalty should you decide not to participate or withdraw from the study. However, should you decide to participate you will provide invaluable information that will assist with the enhancement of the

transformation process for districts across the nation as the small schools phenomenon continues to spread.

Be mindful that all information collected for this study will be kept confidential. Data for this study will be collected through semi-structured interviews. The researcher will maintain the field notes and transcripts from interview sessions and pseudonyms will be utilized to secure the identity of the participants. This data will be held in a secure location for a period of three years after the study and then destroyed. By replying to this request for participation you are agreeing to be included in this study. Please complete your response by (Date to be determined).

If you have any questions or comments concerning this study feel free to contact me at [rmlawrence@bellsouth.net](mailto:rmlawrence@bellsouth.net) or call me at (770) 222-0298. Additionally, my faculty advisor for this study is Dr. Brenda Marina, who can be contacted at [bmarina@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:bmarina@georgiasouthern.edu). Any concerns that you have concerning your rights as a participant in this study should be addressed with the Internal Review Board Coordinator at the Georgia Southern Office of Research Services and sponsored Programs. The telephone number for that office is (912) 681-5465.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: HIGH SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATORS

Principal Investigator: Reginald Lawrence, 2349 Magaw Lane Powder Springs GA 30127  
(770) 222-0298 rmlawrence@bellsouth.net

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Brenda Marina bmarina@georgiasouthern.edu

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

RQ is a notation for Research Question and the alphabet refers to a sub-question

1. Tell me about your educational background and why you became a teacher.
2. Describe your current assignment in relationship to workload and relationships to other teachers compared to your previous assignment. (RQ A)
3. Describe what happened at the beginning of the transformation of your school?
  - Describe the process for obtaining employment for you.
  - What have been your biggest challenges? Can you give me examples?
  - How has the transformation influenced your work? (RQ A,B,C)
4. What has been the greatest help to you in working through these challenges?
  - Have you received any support from inside or outside the district? (RQ A,B)
5. What has been the best part of changing to a small learning environment? What has been the worst? (RQ C)
6. If you could change one thing from your experiences, what would it be? Why?  
(RQ A,B)
7. Is there anything that I did not ask that you wish to tell me, or that you think would be important to this study? (RQ A,B,C)



## Appendix D

### Literature Matrix

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of teachers who have completed the transformation process from a large comprehensive high school to a small learning environment.

#### Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of teachers during the transformation process into smaller learning units?
  - A. What challenges do teachers face during the transformation process?
  - B. What supports do teachers receive during the transformation process?
  - C. What benefits do teachers perceive come from the transformation to small learning environments?

#### Chapters of Literature Review

*Change:* This chapter explores how people move through the process of change, identifies stages associated with those processes and identifies characteristics of teachers in the change process.

*Educational Reform:* This chapter identifies changes teachers have endured in the past, identifying challenges and supports during a particular reform period.

*Small Schools Movement:* This chapter identifies types of small learning environments, the process of transforming to those environments as well as benefits and oppositions to the process.

## Correlation of Interview Guide to Research Questions and Literature

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Correlation to Interview Guide Question</i>	<i>Major Chapters in Literature</i>
1. What are the experiences of teachers during the transformation process into smaller learning units?	3,5,6,7	Change Educational Reform Small Schools Movement
A. What challenges do teachers face during the transformation process?	2,3,4, 6,7	Change -Small Schools Movement
B. What supports do teachers receive during the transformation process?	3,4, 6,7	-Educational Reform -Small Schools Movement
C. What benefits do teachers perceive come from the transformation to small learning environments?	3,5,7	Small Schools Movement

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	
<b>1, a,b (Change)</b>	Fullan (1993)	Change is a constant process	
	Fullan (2001)	Teachers play key role in change	
	Quinn (1996)	Change requires new ways of thinking and behaving	
	(Sarason, 1990)	School Reform is nothing more than cosmetic changes	
	Cuban (1990)	second-order change is necessary	
	Reeves (2004)	change is never convenient	
	Chin (1985)	three basic change strategies	
	Bennis et al., (1985)	depends largely on the leader to push the change	
	Sergiovanni, (1992).	Need stakeholders involved	
	Sashkin and Egermeier (1993) Deal and Kennedy (1982) Sashkin & Kiser, (1991)	Top down change and cultural prospective	
	<b>1, a,b (Change processes)</b>	Fullan (1999)	complexity theory and evolutionary theory
		Guskey, (1990), Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall (1987)	Gradual change over time
		Schein,(1985)	process of change is the integration of new perceptions
Hord et al., (1987).		Teachers relate to change in terms	
Miller, Cohen, & Sayre, (1985)		Lasting change must not be sanctioned	
Craine, (2007), Fullan, (1993)., Kubicek, (2006)		that individuals experience phases of change	
<b>1, a,b (Change Models)</b>		Hall & Rutherford, (1975), Lieberman, (1995) Berman & McLaughlin, (1977).	Concerns Based Adoption Model and Rand Change Agent study
	Ansah & Johnson, (2003). Horsley & Loucks-Horsley, (1998). Hall, (1974) Wesley & Franks, 1996)	Stages of Concern, Levels of Use and the Innovation Components	

Research Question	Researcher	Contribution
	Fullan & Stiegelbauer, (1991). Huberman & Miles (1984) Fullan and Miles (1992) Huberman & Miles (1984) Sarason, (1971) Louis & Miles (1990) (Beach, 1993)	Implementation dip
<b>1,a,b (Teachers and Change)</b>	Payne, (1984) Anyon (2005) Perry, 2003; Noblit, (1986) Fruchter, (2007) Darling-Hammond, (2003) Elmore, (2004).	teachers are essential agents of change
	Noblit, (1986) Payne, (1984) Fruchter, (2007) Cochran-Smith & Lytle, (1999) Chin & Benne, (1969) Rogers, (2003).	teachers are solely responsible for the effective delivery of any reform
	Blasé and Blasé (1998) Costa and Garmon, (1994)	stated that teachers are constantly making decisions that affect change
	Sparks-Langer & Colton, (1991) Richardson & Placier, (2001).	professional knowledge comes both from sources outside the teacher and from the teachers' own experiences
	Graham, Wilson, Gerrick, Frass, and Heiman (2002).	there are variables that reduce resistance or would assist with the implementation of the change
	Loucks and Hall (1981) Richert (1991) Cuban (1990) Richardson and Placier (2001) Berliner (1994)	teacher acceptance of reform
	Senge, (1990)	The Theory of Organizational Change

Research Question	Researcher	Contribution
	Richardson (1994) Valdez, (1992) Richardson, (1998) and Williams (2003)	educators adopt change according to student needs in efforts to increase learning
	Morimoto (1973) Richardson (1998) and Fenstermacher (1994)	that forced or mandated change makes educators feel threatened
	Meyer (1988) Colton & Sparks-Langer, (1993) Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, (1987) Barth, (2001)	-educators are not involved in the planning process - teachers assume leadership roles
	Reeves (2004) Pajak, (1993). Hatch, Eiler-White, & Faigenbaum, (2005) Urbanski & Nickolaou, (1997)	five points about change in efforts to debunk educational myths regarding teachers and change.
<b>1,a,b Educational Reform</b>	Ashby (2005) Bush, (2005), Houston, (2006) Diplomas Count, (2006) Harvey & Housman, (2004), Thornburgh, (2006) U.S. Department of Education, (2000). Murphy & Hallinger (1993) Tharinger, Bricklin, Johnson, Paster, Lambert, Feshbach, Oakland, and Sanchez, (1996) Villaverde, (2003) Conant, (1959) Friedman, (2004)	discerned that as demands on schools continue to rise -need for reform
	Lancaster (1973)	Lancastrian Reform Plan in the early 1800s
	Tharp, (2007)	post- <i>No Child Left Behind</i> era
	Cope & Kalantis, (2000)	global interdependency driven by a workplace that emphasizes the skills of a knowledge economy

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Contribution</b>
<b>Educational Reform 1,a,b</b>	Sizer, (1992) Thernstrom & Thernstrom, (2004)	Schools continue to be a model of the Industrial age
	Gutek (1981) Denham (2002) Parker and Parker (1996) Jorgenson, (1987) Butts, (1973). (Cremin, 1951)	Classical period focused on education for religious purposes
	Corti, (1959) Bhavnagri and Krolikowski, (2000) Stebner (1997) Theobald and Nachtigal (1995). Wojcik (1999) Tyack, (1974) Oakes (1985)	The Progressive Education Movement
	Gutek (1981) Merritt (2005) Orfeild and Lee, (2004).	The Civil Rights era of education
	Cawelti (1994) Canady, (1995) Vinovskis, (1999). Ornstein & Levine (2003) Whitaker (1993) Hansen (1989) Houlihan, (1991) Mitchell & Beach, (1993) Murphy & Hallinger (1993) Goodman, (1995). Goldman, Dunlap, and Conley, (1991) Lare, Jablonski, and Salavatterra (2002) Justiz, (1984) Retting & Canady,( 2001). Canady and Rettig (1995) The Oregon Department of Education, (1996)	Restructuring schools

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Contribution</b>
<b>Educational Reform 1,a,b</b>	Cuban, (1990)Darling-Hammond, (1988) Mojkowski & Fleming, (1988) Cotton, (1992) Murphy & Hallinger,1993). Meier (1987) Corcoran, Walker, & White, (1988) Darling-Hammond, (1999) Whitaker, (1993). Corbett and Wilson, (1995) Page (1998), Lieberman (1989) Murphy et. al (1998) Kuriloff (2002) Gramlich & Koshel (1975) Tyack & Cuban, (1995). Innerst, (2002)	shifts within the educational system, from centralized to decentralized structures,
	Borman, Overman and Brown (2003) Noblit & Johnston, (1982). Fossey (2003) and Edmonds (1979) Noblit, Berry and Dempsey, (1991). Karp (1997) Wells and Oakes (1998) Smith, 1991, Samiroden, 1990). McNeill (2000) Borman et al, (2003) Smith, (1991)	Standards Based Reform -accountability - reforms also did little to affect real change for students
<b>Small Schools Movement 1,a,b,c</b>	Hess, (2007). Meier, 2006) Allen (2002), Rydeen (2004), Lamar and Dukes (2006), Oxley (2005), Wasley, et. al (2002) by Baker, Gump (1964), Cotton (2001), Lee, and Smith (1994)Goldberg, (1991).Ark (2002) Wasley et al (2002) Bomotti, Ginsberg, & Cobb (1999)	Small Schools movement -a belief that smaller learning environments provide an increase in student achievement - types of small learning environments

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Contribution</b>
<b>Small Schools Movement</b> <i>1,a,b,c</i>	Luker & Luker, (2007) Sicoli (2000) Coffee and Prestridge (2001) Tharp & Gallimore, (1997). Cotton (1996) Raywid (1996) Cawelti (1993) Boloz and Blessing (1994)	Small Schools movement -a belief that smaller learning environments provide an increase in student achievement - types of small learning environments
<b>Transformation to smaller environment</b> <i>1,a,b,c</i>	Raywid (2002), Raywid, (1998); Palmer, (1994) Degnan, (2006) New England Small School Network manual, (2008) Quint (2005) Brown & Hosking, (1986) (Cotton, Raywid, 1996; Tharp, Gallimore, 1997; Bomotti, Ginsberg, Cobb, (1999) Sicoli, 2000) Estwick, (2005) Cushman,(1999) Van Dyke, (1970) Mathan (2002) Webster (2004) Miller (2005) Cotton, (1996) Rodriguez, (2003) Klonsky, (1996) Snyder, 2003 Jewell, (2006) Rodrequez, (2005) Ark, (2002b) Falls, (2008) Ark (2002b) Lambert, Lowery, Copland, Galluci, and Wallach, (2004) Smith, (1976) Flowers, (1995) Levin, (2005) Burns (2006) Levin (2005) Wasley et al., (2000)	Transformation to Small Learning Environments -implementation -Design team Change agents Structure Best practices Shared facilities Changes in environment



<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Contribution</b>
<b>Transformation to smaller environment</b> <i>1,a,b,c</i>	Allen et al (1998) Cotton (2003) Cushman, (1997)	One of the pillars of transformation to smaller learning units is distributive leadership - Teachers as leaders and changing role
<b>Instructional Changes</b> <i>1,a,b,c</i>	Wasley, et al. (2000) Oxley (1997) Oxley (2005) Darling-Hammond, et al. (2002) Cohen (1995) Howe (2007)	-interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams - stated that the size of the learning community affects the quality of students' relationships
	Grant, (1996) Kerr, (2002). Gaustad, (1998) (1998).	Looping, which is sometimes called multiyear teaching
	Cater, (2005) McKinley, (2004) Starnes,( 2002) Tilton, (1995) Ravitz, Mergendooler, &Markham, (2004) Higgins,(1993) Sidman-Taveau, (2005) Beckett, (2000) Oxley (2005) Dukes and Lamar (2006) Dougherty (1994) Miner (2005) Dukes and Lamar (2006)	Performance Based Assessment -Project Based Learning -Inclusive programs personalizing the environment
<b>Benefits of Small Learning Environments</b> <i>1,a,b,c</i>	Galletti (1998) Miles et. al, (1997). Oxley (2001) Capps (1999). McCombs (2000) Ark (2002) Quint (2005) Fowler (1992) Kennedy (2005) Royer (2007) Cotton (1996) Supervitz and Christman (2005)	Benefits of Small Learning Environments -reduced size to raise student achievement, influence positive relationships, increase equitable opportunities for all students, -greater ability to achieve success, -fosters more caring through interpersonal relationships

	<p>Lee and Smith (1994)  Myatt (2004)  Copland&amp; Boatright (2004)  Toby (1993)  Klonsky (2002)  Wasley et al., (2000)  Cutshall (2003)  Howley (1995)  Garret (2006)  Meier (1996)  Nachtigal (1992)  Carter, (2005)</p>	<p>-strangers are spotted more easily in small schools  -reduced violence and disruptive behavior, and increased teacher satisfaction.  - genuine sense of belonging for both students and teachers</p>
<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Contribution</b>
<p><b>Opposition to Small Learning Environments</b>  <i>1,a,b,c</i></p>	<p>Miner (2005)  Rivera (2007)  Bobby (2007)  Supervitz and Christman (2005)  Ponto (2006)  Oxley (2005)  Kennedy (2005)  Gewertz (2001)  Robelen (2006)  Wallach and Lear (2005)  Gilmore (2007)  Cramer (2006)  Hampel (2002)</p>	<p>-sustainability of the project over time in question  staff turnover and increasing numbers of novice teachers.  significant differences in instructional practices  learning environments cannot be simply added on to the existing school organization  ng-level practices often compete with effective small learning community practices  requires large blocks of time for planning time  -what to do about science facilities  -teachers worry that they may have to transfer  -may have to teach out of their specialty area  -overcrowding in some schools  -additional preparations per year  ability to offer sufficient tracks, ability-grouped sections  space and equipment for vocational courses</p>