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Analysis of Compelling and Constraining Forces Experienced by Georgia High School Principals Implementing Smaller Learning Communities

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AN ANALYSIS OF COMPELLING AND CONSTRAINING FORCES

EXPERIENCED BY GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IMPLEMENTING

SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES

by

MARTIN GREGORY WATERS

(Under the Direction of Barbara J. Mallory)

ABSTRACT

The research on smaller learning communities is extensive, and the benefits are
documented, compelling, and persuasive. While the practice can become the engine for
higher achievement, stakeholders must adjust to a new paradigm of school operations. In
many cases, prior procedures and traditions must be abandoned to achieve academic,
social, and school environmental goals.

Several unknown factors exist in Georgia's high schools as administrators attempt
to find programs and procedures to meet the needs of rapidly growing and diverse student
populations. First, little is known about the experiences of Georgia high school principals
implementing smaller learning communities, nor the forces surrounding the transitions.
Second, little is known of the strategies used by administrators for dealing with the
constraining forces of restructuring their organizations.

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with administrators in nine Georgia
high schools. Based on Kert Levin's work with force field analysis and using Bolman and
Deal's frameworks for categorizing restructuring strategies, the researcher analyzed the
compelling and constraining forces as well as strategies used by administrators to
overcome the constraining forces. The researcher categorized the strategies utilized by

administrators to overcome constraining forces into four categories of change: structural; human resources; political; and symbolic.

The researcher identified seven compelling forces for Georgia high school principals implementing SLCs, including: accountability; achievement; affiliation/belonging; data-driven decision making; equity; teacher attitudes and satisfaction; and truancy and dropouts. Seven constraining forces for Georgia high school principals implementing SLCs were identified, including: cultural expectations; demands on staff; fiscal and physical constraints; implementation strategies; large numbers within smaller learning communities; laws, regulations, policies, and procedures; and rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations. In analyzing the strategies utilized by administrators to overcome constraining forces, the researcher found that the majority of strategies fell within the human resource framework. The second largest group of responses fell within the structural framework followed by the symbolic framework and lastly the political framework. The analysis of these strategies for reframing organizations may provide a better understanding for administrators seeking to implement smaller learning communities or other forms of comprehensive high school reorganization.

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

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my father, Thomas W.

Waters. Through his faithful teaching of completing a task to the best of one's ability, I

have been able to complete this goal.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Change is not new, nor is the study of it. American society is moving to a more

global context. To adapt to this change of a global context, major institutions including

government, industry, and finance, are seeking ways to restructure that will increase their

flexibility and effectiveness. Education is often pointed to as the key sector of society that

prepares citizens for this new world and ensures the success of the society within it.

Educators have been addressing change since the inception of public education. For the

past fifty year national issues such as Sputnik, A Nation at Risk, and most recently, the

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) have catapulted the American educational

system into the national spotlight.

Fueled by *A Nation at Risk,* the American media and legislators in the 1980s

began to focus on the need to change for America's public schools (Gardner, 1983).

Describing the erosion of American educational foundations as "a rising tide of

mediocrity," the *Nation at Risk* report is often credited with jump-starting the wave of

educational reform (Miller, 2000, p. 1). With this publication, federal and state legislators

found strong pressure for better educational results. In 1986 the National Governors'

Association published a report, *A Time for Results*, that advanced the ideas that the most

appropriate benchmarks for American educational systems were international standards

(US Department of Education, 1997).   During the First National Educational Summit

(1989), six national goals were determined, including (1) students starting school ready to

learn; (2) increase the graduation rate to 90%; (3) exit exams for Grades 4, 8, and 12 for

core academic classes; (4) U.S. students first in math and science; (5) every adult American would be literate; and (6) drug-free, safe schools (Miller, 2000).

By the late 1990s, researchers' findings reinforced the need to improve education. Data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (1999) indicated the general level of achievement in U.S. high schools:

- Only 40 percent of 17-year old high school students could read and understand material such as that typically presented at the high school level, and only six percent could synthesize and learn from specialized reading materials;

- Fewer than half of 17-year old high school students could evaluate the procedures or results of a scientific experiment and just ten percent could draw conclusions using detailed scientific knowledge;

- Only eight percent of 17-year old high school students could use basic algebra or solve math problems with more than one step;

- In the 1996-1997 school year, 3,792,818 ninth graders in the nation comprised the high school class of 2000;

- In the 1999-2000 school year, of the 2,781,701 twelfth graders, 2,546,102 received diplomas, a 73% completion rate and a 67% graduation rate.

To respond to the competency and graduation rate of high school students, high schools are under pressure to change. To address the national, state, and local standards and measures of accountability currently placed on high schools, building principals are frequently involved in leading change efforts by themselves or in collaboration with

others (Zimmerman, 2005). Several authors have linked the leadership and reform efforts of principals to improved school culture and instructional practices (Short & Greer, 2002; Stover, 2005; Trump, 2002). According to Trump (2002), three basic assumptions exist concerning school reform efforts: (1) previous innovations have often been superficial; (2) innovations have not been adopted in a systemic-interrelated totality; and (3) change must be personalized to the school environment. The systemic change process involves basic, interrelated changes beginning with the school principal. In the contexts of schools, systemic change is not so much a detailed prescription for improving education as a philosophy advocating reflecting, rethinking, and restructuring (Trump, 2002). Fullan (2001) refers to basic operational and procedural changes as first-order change. Fullan continues to encourage "reculturing" of organizations through providing a moral purpose, understanding change, building relationships, building knowledge, and establishing coherent moral intelligence; processes he refers to as second-order change (p. 1). Together, these first and second order change processes will create sustainable change within educational organizations.

In the popular press, articles informing readers about the impressive benefits of small high schools continue to be written and read, but for many people in and outside the education profession, this is old news. According to Rockman (2004), the problem is, "our [high school] reform efforts have dealt with practically every instructional issue one-at-a-time, and still we persist in our belief that schools are not performing as well as we would like and are in need of additional reforms" (p. 2).

One example of high school reform involves smaller school designs. Research conducted over the past 15 years has demonstrated that small schools are superior to large

ones on many measures and equal to them on the rest (Barton, 2004; Cotton, 1996a;

Cotton, 1996b; Cotton, 2001; Cotton, 2004; Klonsky, 1995a; Klonsky, 1995b; Klonsky,

2002; Klonsky & Klonsky, 1999; Lee & Smith, 1994; Lee & Smith, 1995; Meier, 1995b;

Oxley, 1989; Oxley, 1994; Oxley, 1996; Oxley, 2001; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1995,

Raywid, 1996, Raywid, 1998; Raywid, 1999). Small school researcher Raywid (1999)

has written that superiority of small schools has been established "with a clarity and at a

level of confidence rare in the annals of education research" (p. 1). These findings,

together with strong evidence that small schools provide a means to narrow the

achievement gap between white, middle class, affluent students and ethnic minority and

poor students, have led to the creation of hundreds of small schools in large cities around

the United States, including Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and

Seattle. Many of these schools have been in operation long enough that these schools

have been the focus of research projects (Cotton, 2001; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, and

Ort 2002). The findings are quite positive, and many more of these small, urban schools

are being planned and implemented (Raywid, 1999). As Ancess (1997) stated, "the

creation of schools as educational communities that consciously intend to provide all

students with the kind of rigorous, intellectually challenging education that used to be

restricted to an elite is a radical notion and an even more radical endeavor" (p. 19). The

notion of educational communities has risen from the open systems research, which

attempts in theory to explain the dynamic process in which multiple stakeholders within

and without schools exchange expectations, regulations, and results (Sergiovanni, 1994).

Forces for Change

In implementing the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB),* the U.S.
Department of Education has developed a strategic plan that serves as a map for all
Departmental activities and investments. The writers of the plan specifically focused on,
among other areas, improving the performance of high school students and holding
educators accountable for raising the academic achievement level of all students (Harvard
Graduate School of Education, 2002). The U.S. Department of Education has set forth to
work with states to ensure students attain the strong academic knowledge and skills
necessary for further success in postsecondary education and adult life; to encourage
students to take more rigorous courses, especially in the areas of math and science; and to
commit to ensuring the nation's schools are safe environments conducive to learning
(D'Amico, 2003).

Through *NCLB,* members of the U.S. Department of Education also seek to
pressure local educational agencies to close achievement gaps between various
subgroups, including economically disadvantaged, black, and students with disabilities,
compared to their peers. The legislation seeks to influence the culture of America's
schools to support high-quality instruction all students need to meet higher expectations
(US Department of Education, 2001). Under the Act's accountability provisions, states
must decide how they will close the achievement gaps and insure that all students,
including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency.

Emphasis on educational standards, equity, continuous improvement, and
accountability now drives high school reform, which is also fueled by widespread
recognition that schools must become high-performing communities if administrators and

teachers are to prepare all students to succeed in the 21ˢᵗ century (Noguera, 2004). Today, students represent an unprecedented level of diversity in abilities, learning styles, prior educational experience, attitudes related to learning, work habits, language and culture, and home situations (Cooper, Ponder, Merritt, & Matthews, 2005; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; McAndrews & Anderson, 2002; Meier, 1997a; Mullen & Sullivan, 2002; Oxley, 1994; Raywid, 1999; Stockyard & Mayberry, 1992). According to Gruenert (2005):

> the challenges of educating these students require new capacities for schools and new orientations for the educators who make decisions that influence students' lives. A commitment is required to base these decisions on sound information and strategies rather than assumptions and subjective perceptions. The capacity to access and effectively use many types of data from multiple sources is critical to realizing a vision of high school education embracing the belief of high expectations for all students. (p. 51)

The diversity of student learners is just one of many factors impacting the need for reforming American educational standards and systems.

Designed in response to different demographic and economic conditions, the infrastructures in today's high schools lack the capacities necessary for responding to multiple demands for accountability (Monk & Haller, 1993). The lack of infrastructure, the inexperience of administrators and staff in dealing with change, and the lack of academic rigor and performance call for a transformation of the America high school to match the realities of contemporary life (Ark, 2002). Too many high schools are

characterized by large, compartmentalized, and impersonal school settings, low expectations for student performance, and curricula guided by dated and autonomous departmental priorities (Buechler, 2002). The student's role in the educational process is often passive and subordinate. A pervasive over-emphasis exists on teacher-directed instruction, and a fragmented curriculum prevents students from seeing the connections between the content learned in school and real life (Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995). The vast majority of these high schools and their administrators find ways to divide students on some measure of ability, which diminishes opportunities to learn for some students and contributes to increasing inequalities among students over time (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002).

In contrast some researchers have found increasing returns in academic achievement in larger schools and more efficient use of taxpayers' monies due to economics of scale (Ferguson & Ladd, 2000; Kenny, 2004; Magnuson, 2001). Klonksy (1995a) reports evidence that students in high socioeconomic status communities perform better in larger schools. Berry (2003) reported some of the strengths of comprehensive high schools are (1) centralization of authority; (2) school professionals tend to influence decisions more than community opinion; (3) highly specialized instruction; and (4) better facilities. Many of these cited reasons were responsible for the movement for school consolidation (Andrews, Duncombe, & Yinger, 2002). However, the majority of these successful comprehensive high schools have little diversity and are located in high socioeconomic areas (Lamdin, 1995).

Large schools cannot meet the diverse needs of their populations without changing operational structures (Ark, 2002). Often district policies, state laws, and higher

educational expectations make it difficult for restructuring. Restructuring today's high

schools to meet the diverse needs of students takes leaders with strengths in setting

visions, curriculum design, participatory leadership, technology, and facilities (O'Donnell

& White, 2005). According to Mullen and Sullivan (2002), the following elements were

identified as traits necessary for secondary school reform: (1) shared governance; (2)

sustainability of leadership; (3) identified core values that drive all decision-making; (4)

high expectations for students to be productive citizens and lifelong learners; (5)

expectations to teach all learners; (6) faculty-administrative visits; and (7) continued

learning. Noguera (2002) concluded that implementing reform efforts independently will

not bring about results without stakeholder buy-in and training. O'Donnell and White

(2005) further concluded that principals must begin with first order change by conducting

comprehensive assessments of their own instructional leadership behavior before

working with their teachers to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to

facilitate change before moving into second order change. Buechler (2002) added that

"school transformation utilizing a program does not necessarily lead to changes in the

classroom practices and can lead to a new type of tracking" (p. 60).

According to Bolman and Deal, "the proliferation of complex organizations has made

most human activities collective endeavors; too often policies make things worse,

students fail to learn, products are flawed because many organizations infuse work with

so little meaning" (2003, pg. 5). In an attempt to explain the breakdown with some

organizations, Bolman and Deal offer four lenses through which managers,

administrators, and leaders should view their organization in attempts to reframe their

organizations.   These perspectives include the structural frame, the human resource

frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame. Bolman and Deal enumerate organizational characteristics for each frame. For the purpose of this study, the researcher interpreted the frameworks according to the following: structural framework – issues dealing with processes, procedures, and operations of the organization; human resource framework – issues dealing with stakeholders' needs, concerns, and relationships within the organization; political framework – issues dealing with distribution of resources, power, and influences internal and external to the organization; and symbolic framework – issues dealing with meaning and defining culture for the organization.

The structural framework reflects a belief in rationality and that the right arrangements minimize problems and maximize performance (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Six assumptions, according to Bolman and Deal, exist when dealing with the structural framework. Organizations: (1) exist to achieve established goals and objectives, (2) increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and a clear division of labor, (3) have appropriate forms of coordination and controls that ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh, (4) work best when rationality prevails over personal preferences and extraneous pressures, (5) must have structures designed to fit an organization's circumstances, and (6) can remedy problems and performance gaps arising from structural deficiencies through analysis and restructuring (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

The human resource framework operates from the belief that an organization can be energizing, productive, and mutually rewarding. Bolman and Deal (2003) provide four assumptions concerning the human resource framework. According to them:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the reverse.

2. People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent. People need careers, salaries, and opportunities.

3. When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization –or both become victims.

4. A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed.

The political frame views organizations as "living, screaming" political arenas that host a complex web of individual and groups interests (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 186). Five propositions summarize the perspective: (1) Organizations are coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups. (2) There are enduring differences among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perception of reality. (3) Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources – who gets what. (4) Scarce resources and enduring differences make conflict central to organizational dynamics and underline power as the most important asset. (5) Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders.

The final frame is the symbolic framework that seeks to interpret and illuminate basic issues of meaning and belief that make symbols powerful. The symbolic frames have five assumptions, according to Bolman and Deal:

1. What is most important is not what happens but what it means.

2. Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events have multiple meanings because people interpret experience differently.

3. In the face of widespread uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, increase predictability, find direction, and anchor hope and faith.

4. Many events and processes are more important for what is expressed than what is produced. They form a "cultural tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories that help people find purpose and passion in the personal and work lives" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 243).

5. Culture is the glue that holds an organization together and unites people around shared values and beliefs.

Together these frameworks provide a basis for managers and leaders to understand organizations and affect positive change. "The consequences of myopic management and leadership show up every day, sometimes in small and subtle ways, sometimes in catastrophes like the collapse of Enron or WorldCom" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 18). Learning multiple perspectives can provide maps that aid navigation through organizational change and tools for solving problems and getting things done.

<p align="center">Smaller Learning Communities</p>

Background

The problems of large high schools and the related question of optimal school size have been debated for the last 40 years and are of growing interest. While the research to date on school size is largely non-experimental, a growing body of evidence purports smaller schools may have advantages over larger schools (Cotton, 1996a; Dewees, 1999; Howley, 1994; Howley, 1996; Klonsky, 1995a; Oxley, 2001; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1996; Raywid, 1999). One strategy developed for improving the academic performance

of the nation's young people is the establishment of smaller learning communities

(SLC's) as components of comprehensive high school improvement and reformation

plans. These smaller autonomous subunits of larger schools operate as "a separate entity,

running its own budget and planning its own programs" (National Association of

Elementary School Principals, 2001, p. 7). In the publications, Breaking Ranks (1999)

and Breaking Ranks II (2004), the National Association of Secondary School Principals

(NASSP) endorse the restructuring of large high schools into smaller learning

communities, citing multiple benefits of high school restructuring including

personalization, increased accountability, and improved school cultures.

Additionally, smaller learning communities are known as: autonomous small

schools, focus or theme-based schools, historically small schools, freestanding schools,

academies, alternative schools, schools-within-schools, schools-within-buildings, house

plans, career academies, pathways, pods, clusters, mini-schools, multiplexes,

scatterplexes, charter schools, pilot schools, or magnet schools (Cotton, 2001). Examples

found in the research include comprehensive high schools of 1,000 students or more

being subdivided into grades house (i.e. 9th grade house, 10th grade house), career focused

academies (i.e. School of Health, School of Business), subgroups with specialized

curriculum (i.e. fine arts academies, technology academies), and other various types. The

research on SLCs does not support subdividing high schools based on academic abilities,

whether those abilities are categorized as academic deficiencies or academic giftedness,

socio-economic backgrounds, or other demographic indicators (US DOE, 2003).

Researchers suggest the positive outcomes associated with smaller schools stem

from a school's ability to create close, personal environments in which teachers can work

collaboratively, with each other and with a small set of students, to challenge students and support learning (Gruenert, 2005; Howley, Strange, & Bickel, 2000; Legters, 1999; Oxley, 1996: Oxley, 2004). A variety of structures and operational strategies provide cardinal support for smaller learning environments; some researchers suggest these approaches offer substantial advantages to both teachers and students (Cotton, 1996b; Lee, Dederick & Smith, 1991; Lindsay, 1982; Lindsay, 1984; McAndrews & Anderson, 2002; Nuefeld, 1996; Oxley, 2004).

Compelling Forces

Academic accountability is only a portion of the *NCLB* legislation. "School-based reforms are needed to help students learn how to live together in civic, moral, and just communities respecting and valuing all students' rights and cultural characteristics" (Brandt, 2000, p. 27). The greater sense of belonging felt by students in small schools fosters more caring attitudes through interpersonal relationships (The Education Trust, 2005). Researchers have concluded small school settings enhance students' self-perceptions, both socially and academically, as well as foster a more aware and involved faculty, which promotes positive student attitudes (Cotton, 1996a; Dewees, 1999; Howley, 1994; Howley, 1996; Klonsky, 1995; McPartland & Jordan, 2001; Oxley, 2001; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1999). Because of smaller teacher to student ratios, small schools and smaller learning communities can focus on long-term relationships (Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000). Therefore, small schools and smaller learning communities generally have fewer discipline problems than larger schools attributed to the stronger parental support and adult connections (Oxley, 2001; Oxley, 2004; Williams, 1990). Additionally, in small schools more opportunity abounds for student involvement in school activities

(Cotton, 2004; Gregory, 1992; Gregory, 2000; Lindsay, 1982; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1999).

Researchers further suggest the following:

- Smaller schools act as a facilitating factor for other desirable practices to improve climate and student performance (Capps & Maxwell, 1999; Cotton, 2001; Gladden, 1998; NASSP, 2004; Oxley, 2004).

- An effective size for secondary schools is in the average range of 300-900 students (Gregory, 1992; Gregory, 2000; Rotherham, 1999; Williams, 1990).

- Smaller learning environments are a condition for boosting student achievement (Cotton, 1996b; Dewees, 1999; Howley, 1994; Howley, 1996; Klonsky, 1995a; McPartland & Jordan, 2001; Oxley, 2001; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1995; Raywid, 1998; Williams, 1990).

- Smaller school size has positive effects on student outcomes as evidenced by students' attendance rates, lower frequencies of disciplinary action, school loyalty, lower usage of alcohol or drugs, and satisfaction with school and self-esteem (Klonsky, 1995a; Noguera, 2002; Raywid, 1995; Visher, Teitelbaum, & Emanuel, 1999).

- Smaller enrollment size has a stronger effect on learning in schools having large concentrations of poor and minority children (Bickel,

1999; DeCesare, 2002; Deutsch, 2003; Howley, Strange & Bickel, 2000).

- The SLC administrative arrangement not only empowers teachers but frees up more of the principal's schedule, allowing him/her to work collaboratively with his faculty on important issues (Cushman, 1995).

- Research ultimately confirms what parents intuitively believe. Smaller schools are safer and more productive, because students feel less alienated, more nurtured, and more connected to caring adults; teachers feel they have more opportunity to get to know and support their students (Cotton, 2004; Gregory, 1992; Haller, 1991; Oxley, 2001; Oxley, 2004).

Constraining Forces

The movement toward smaller school units has accelerated. Public and Foundation resources have assisted in transforming comprehensive high schools in an effort to provide greater personalization, increase adult accountability for the achievement of all students, and create better links among schools, families, community organizations, and institutions of higher education (Cotton, 2004). However, in spite of many benefits, the transition of smaller learning communities is not without challenges, obstacles, and disadvantages. "Despite calls for 'reform,' most high schools continue to function as comfortable environments for adults, displaying few tangible changes in operations, values, priorities, professional culture, and most important, teaching methods and student engagement" (Myatt, 2005, p. 2).

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In addition to external forces impeding the restructuring of America's high schools, such as federal and state mandates, local board control, funding, and infrastructure, among others, school employees face internal forces that slow the change process, and in some cases, stifle the process completely (Gladden, 1998; Wasley & Lear, 2001). While teachers and administrators are trained professionals, they have limited experiences in restructuring and reforming the secondary educational process. Many maintain the demand to "see it done well" before they are willing to invest the time and effort to bring about change (Myatt, 2005, p. 2). Another obstacle principals face in their attempt to redesign the secondary school experience is the cultural glue of the environment. According to Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, (2005), cultural glue is the sense that what has worked in the past will continue to work, even if the populations have changed. "Human issues, not technical knowledge, are the most significant barriers to successful conversions of comprehensive high schools into new small autonomous schools…it is the personal, human question, "what does this mean for me?" that is at the heart of the resistance to change" (Wallach, Lambert, Copland, & Lowry, 2005, p. 6).

In an attempt to create a more personalized school climate, efforts to build longer relationships between teachers and students in smaller learning communities can call for teachers to "loop" students for several years (Myatt, 2002, p. 24). According to Myatt, while the practice can become the engine for higher achievement, teachers must adjust to the needs of students rather than students adjusting to the content experts arranged within academic departments (2002). Other factors that can create resistance for implementing smaller learning communities include curricular requirements, often too much curriculum, too little time, and resistance from community and parental engagement in

the status quo -- deep traditions associated with the "historical" high school (Noguera, 2002).

One researcher has been highly critical of schools-within-schools, finding them divisive and peace-threatening (Winokur, 2001). A report on one school identified several sources of organizational tension in the arrangement and asserted that it: (1) "challenged the status of the mainstream high school; (2) set up divisions between schools-within-a-school (SWAS) teams and mainstream teachers; (3) introduced practices that were viewed as counter to those supported in the mainstream; (4) yielded allegations that SWAS teachers get favored treatment and undeserved visibility; (5) produced isolation of the SWAS faculty; and (6) made it very difficult to schedule and staff the SWAS program while meeting the needs of the mainstream program" (Neufeld, 1996, p. 72-80).

DeCesare (2002) has concluded that small schools or smaller learning communities are not the panacea for comprehensive high school reform. School personnel can lose the ability to offer services and support to students when schools become "too small" (DeCesare, 2002, p. 1). The success of smaller learning environments, according to DeCesare, is dependent on the school personnel's ability to overcome numerous pitfalls and difficulties.

In an attempt to explain the breakdown with some organizations, Bolman and Deal offer four lenses through which managers, administrators, and leaders should view their organization in attempts to reframe their organizations. According to Bolman and Deal, "the proliferation of complex organizations has made most human activities collective endeavors; too often policies make things worse, students fail to learn, products

are flawed because many organizations infuse work with so little meaning" (2003, pg. 5).

They provide a framework for reframing organizations using structural, human resource, political, and social perspectives.

Statement of the Problem

Today's high school students need a different approach to education as they face the realities and demands of a technological and global society characterized by rapid change and unprecedented diversity. These expectations represent a new mission for education that requires high schools to not merely deliver instruction but to be accountable for ensuring that educational opportunities result in all students learning at high levels. High school administrators are, therefore, faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles to reforming their educational environments.

Making schools smaller seems to work in large part, because school staff and students can more easily implement and adjust effective practices in smaller environments rather than in larger ones. Conditions that promote student achievement, such as teacher collegiality, personalized teacher-student relationships, and less differentiation of instruction by ability are more often found and sustained in small schools than in larger ones.

The research on smaller learning communities is extensive, and their benefits are documented, compelling, and persuasive. The documented benefits created by smaller learning communities offer large high schools an opportunity to improve student achievement. Smaller learning communities deliver on their promise only to the extent they have independent control over budget and staffing, space, schedule, curriculum, and

culture. However, few changes occur without difficulties, and the process of creating smaller learning communities within larger high schools is no exception.

While the practice can become the engine for higher achievement, administrators, teachers, and students must adjust to a new paradigm of school operations. In many cases, prior procedures and traditions must be abandoned to achieve academic, social and school environmental goals. Because teachers and administrators have very little training in school reform, the very nature of organizations will make change a difficult process. In addition to reorganization schools implementing smaller learning communities must reexamine curricular and instructional practices.

Several unknown factors existed concerning the transition of larger high schools into SLCs. Specifically, for the purpose of this research study, little was known of Georgia's high school administrators as they attempted to find programs and procedures to meet the needs of rapidly growing and diverse student populations. Nothing was known of the experiences of Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities, nor the forces surrounding those transitions. Therefore, the researcher examined the compelling and constraining forces experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. In addition, the researcher analyzed the compelling and constraining forces as well as strategies used by administrators to overcome the constraining forces using Bolman and Deal's frameworks for reframing organizations. Based on Bolman and Deal's research, the researcher categorized these strategies into four categories of change: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic.

Research Questions

The researcher framed the study to address the following research questions:

1. What are the compelling forces experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities?

2. What are the constraining forces experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities?

3. What frameworks for reframing organizations do Georgia high school principals use to deal with the constraining forces of implementing smaller learning communities?

Significance of the Study

Through *NCLB,* members of the US Department of Education have sought to pressure local educational agencies to close the achievement gaps between disadvantaged and minority students compared to their peers and to encourage schools to change their culture so all students receive the support and high-quality instruction they need to meet higher expectations. High school administrators are, therefore, faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles to reforming their educational environments. The significance of this study for high school principals was having the opportunity to share personal experiences concerning the compelling and constraining forces, or the lack thereof, in making transitions into smaller learning communities (SLCs). In addition, they had the opportunity to share strategies used to deal with the constraining forces. By providing a framework for strategies, future administrators could have a resource for implementing smaller learning communities.

While researchers have cited numerous benefits to restructuring high schools into smaller learning communities, little was known of the constraining forces surrounding transitions into smaller learning communities for Georgia high schools. Documenting these experiences may provide a contribution to the professional literature concerning the experiences of principals making transitions into smaller learning communities.

Having experienced the transition of a comprehensive high school into smaller learning communities, the significance for the researcher was gaining an understanding of common experiences of other high school administrators in dealing with the implementation of SLC's. Additionally, the researcher gained an understanding of compelling and constraining forces for high school restructuring, where these forces originate, and the frameworks other administrators have used to deal with these forces. The possibility existed the researcher could contribute to the professional literature that may provide assistance to other high school administrators in making transitions into smaller learning communities.

<div align="center">Procedures</div>

Introduction

The researcher's focus of the study was an analysis of compelling and constraining forces experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. Additional focus was placed on the restructuring frameworks of strategies used by these principals to overcome the constraining forces based on the work of Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal, *Reframing Organizations* (2003). The strategies were analyzed and categorized into four frameworks: structural; human resources; political; and symbolic.

Design

       According to Cassell & Symon (2004), qualitative research provides descriptions and accounts of the processes and social interactions in natural settings, usually based upon a combination of observation and interviewing of participants in order to understand their perspectives. Cultures, meanings, and processes are emphasized, rather than variables, outcomes and products. Qualitative research aims to generate theories and hypotheses from the data that emerge, in an attempt to avoid the imposition of a previous, and possibly inappropriate, frame of reference on the subjects of the research. Therefore, since the researcher did test pre-conceived hypotheses, the design of this study was qualitative using in-depth interviews to record the compelling and constraining forces experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. The researcher provided a description of the processes used by administrators in dealing with the constraining forces of implementing smaller learning communities through categorizing the strategies into four frameworks: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic.

Population

       The researcher limited this study to the state of Georgia. According to the Georgia Department of Education, Georgia has 159 counties and 21 cities that contain three hundred forty-eight schools. Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, the U.S. Department of Education began awarding federal grants to schools with enrollments of 1,000 students or more in which smaller learning communities were implemented. Forty-nine of these restructured high schools using smaller learning communities exist in the state of Georgia (US DOE, 2006). These forty-nine schools are located in thirteen school

districts within the state. For the purpose of this study, the researcher interviewed used a purposeful sample of one administrator from each school district that is represented by a restructured high school.

Sample

Sandelowski (1995) has recommended that phenomenologies directed toward discerning the essence of experiences include at least six participants. Therefore, the researcher attempted to interview thirteen administrators involved with smaller learning communities, one from each district containing a restructured high school. However, only nine districts were represented by interview participants.

Instrumentation

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data was mediated through the researcher rather than through an inventory, questionnaire, or machine. Data collection was done through conducting interviews and maintaining descriptive and reflective notes.

Analysis

Data analysis was conducted as an activity simultaneously with data collection, data interpretations, and narrative reporting writing. The researcher transcribed each interview session and categorized the responses into four re-organizational frameworks: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic. The researcher examined the findings to determine if common experiences existed among administrators concerning the compelling and constraining forces of implementing a smaller learning community as well as to determine if common strategies were utilized to overcome constraining forces.

Limitations

High school restructuring in the state of Georgia is a fairly new restructuring practice. This created a limiting factor since this practice lacks a great deal of historical precedence and produces a small population within the state of Georgia. Due to the contemporary roles of high school principals and constraints on their time, it is difficult to find administrators willing to commit the time to complete an interview, further limiting the study.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to Georgia high school administrators with at least two years of administrative experience who have received federal SLC grants. The administrative experience was delimited to within a SLC restructured high school.

Definition of Terms

- *Compelling forces* – For the purposes of this study, compelling forces referred to those forces strongly encouraging or providing benefits for an individual or organization to make a certain decision or change.

- *Constraining forces* -- For the purposes of this study, constraining forces referred to those forces strongly discouraging or providing barriers against an individual or organization to make a certain decision or change.

- *Large high schools* – For the purpose of this study, large high schools were defined as schools with enrollments of 1,000 students or more based on the SLC funding grant guidelines (US DOE, 2003).

- *Smaller learning communities (SLCs)* – a separately defined, individualized unit within a larger school setting. Students and teachers are scheduled together and

frequently have a common area of the school in which to hold most or all of their classes (Sammon, 2000).

Summary

The research on smaller learning communities is extensive, and the benefits are documented, compelling, and persuasive. The conditions created by smaller learning communities offer large high schools an opportunity to improve student achievement and school climate. While the practice can become the engine for higher achievement, administrators, teachers, and students must adjust to a new paradigm of school operations. In many cases, prior procedures and traditions must be abandoned to achieve academic, social and school environmental goals. Because teachers and administrators have very little training in school reform, the very nature of organizations will make change a difficult process.

Several unknown factors existed in Georgia's high schools as their administrators attempt to find programs and procedures to meet the needs of rapidly growing and diverse student populations. First, nothing was known of the experiences of Georgia high school principals in making neither transitions into smaller learning communities nor the forces surrounding those transitions. Second, nothing was known of the frameworks used for reframing these organizations.

Through *NCLB,* members of the US Department of Education have sought to pressure local educational agencies to close the achievement gaps between subgroups of students, including disadvantaged students, minority students, and students with disabilities, compared to their peers and to encourage schools to change their culture so all students receive the support and high-quality instruction they need to meet higher

expectations. High school administrators are, therefore, faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles to reforming their educational environments. The significance for high school principals was having the opportunity to share personal experiences concerning the compelling and constraining forces, or the lack thereof, in making transitions into smaller learning communities. In addition, they had the opportunity to share strategies used to deal with these forces. By providing a framework for strategies, future administrators could have a resource for implementing smaller learning communities.

While researchers have cited numerous benefits to restructuring high schools into smaller learning communities, little was known of the constraining forces surrounding transitions into smaller learning communities. Documenting these experiences may have provided a contribution to the professional literature concerning the experiences of principals making transitions into smaller learning communities.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The researcher's intent was to review the literature related to compelling and

constraining forces for administrators in making transitions to smaller learning

communities as well as the frameworks for reorganizing schools, specifically structural,

human resources, political and symbolic frameworks. The chapter is divided into the

following sections: a historical review of high school structures; school size and its

impact on curriculum and efficiency; the ideal high school size; high school reform

designs, specifically the compelling and constraining forces of smaller learning

communities; and a summary.

This review of literature was based on a representative sample of research and

other literature, predominantly published in the past seven years. The majority of studies

focused on relatively new, deliberately small schools-by-design in urban settings. The

research documents include studies, reviews, and reports that provide results of both

studies and reviews. The researcher drew from articles featuring practitioner and other

first-person experiences of smaller learning environments and articles by those who

provide research-based technical assistance for school restructuring. Finally, various

other publications, such as guideline documents, resource listings, school profiles,

conference proceedings, and fact sheets were used in the review of literature.

Most of the literature focused primarily on high school students. In terms of

outcomes of interest, the content focus was on student achievement; attendance;

graduates/dropouts; student behavior, including classroom disruption, vandalism,

violence, theft, and drug/alcohol use; course completion; extracurricular participation; affiliation/belongingness; student attitudes toward school; college-related variables, including acceptance, entrance exam scores, and grades; equity across race/ethnicity/class; parent/community satisfaction and other variables; teacher satisfaction; curriculum quality; and cost.

<center>A Historical Review of High School Structures</center>

In order to better understand how educational performance has moved to a national perspective, many researchers have pointed to American history for the explanation. The move toward ever-larger schools began in the latter part of the 20th century. Cotton (1996a) cited the launching of Sputnik in 1957 as a factor that led to an increase in the size of the American high school. According to Cotton, the work of James Bryant Conant was the driving force behind the consolidation movement. In 1959, Conant published *The American High School Today: A First Report to Interested Citizens*. In it, he argued for the establishment of comprehensive high schools that provided a vast array of course offerings. He reported that high schools with less than 100 students per grade level could not provide an adequately diverse curriculum. Ironically, Conant argued that the small high school was the number one problem facing education.

During the 1960s and 1970s school districts across the country moved to consolidate and create comprehensive high schools (Cotton, 1996; Lee & Smith, 1997). Underlying Conant's rationale were also the principles of efficiency and economy of scale supported by business and industry (Capps & Maxwell, 1999). The result was a tremendous consolidation movement. In 1930 there were more than 262,000 public schools, compared with 93,000 in 2002 (US DOE, 2003). Since 1940, the number of

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public schools in the U.S. has declined by 69% despite a 70% increase in the student population. The student population has grown from just under 24 million in 1947-48 (Gerald & Hussar, 2002) to record 47.71 million in 2001. More recently, national high school enrollments climbed from 12.5 million in 1990 to 14.8 million in 2000 (Sack, 2002). Since 1940, the size of the average U.S. school district has risen from 217 students to 2,627 students and the size of the average schools has risen from 127 students to 653 students (Hussar, 1998).

Today public school enrollments have reached record totals. In the fall of 2001, public elementary and secondary school enrollment reached a record 47 million students, representing a 19% increase since the fall of 1988 and according to Hussar (1998) a further increase of 5% was expected and projected between 2001 and 2013, with increases projected in both public and private schools. The primary reason for this increase was a rise in the number of births between 1977 and 1990 (Gerald & Hussar, 2002). A report by the U.S. Department of Education (1997) labeled the increase in student population the baby boom echo as the children of the children of the baby boom era entered the nation's schools. Between 1990 and 2000, public elementary school enrollment rose from 34.0 million students to 38.4 million students. Enrollments in grades 9-12 increased 18% over the same period, from 12.5 million students to14.8 million students (Gerald & Hussar, 2002). This wave of student population has made its way through the primary grades and will dramatically impact the secondary level in the next ten to fifteen years. After 2002, elementary enrollments were projected to decrease slowly, falling to 37.7 million students in 2008 (Gerald & Hussar, 2002). Secondary schools however, will continue to experience record enrollments. In 2007, enrollment in

grades 9-12 were expected to reach an unprecedented 16.1 million students (Gerald &

Hussar, 2002). As the number of students was increasing, the number of schools was

decreasing, as consolidation of schools was also increasing. According to Walberg

(1992), between 1940 and 1990, the total number of elementary and secondary public

schools declined 69%, even though we experienced a 70% increase in the U.S.

population. This has led to fewer schools with higher enrollments. In 2001, the average

elementary school in America had 443 students, the average middle school had 605

students, and the average high school had 751 students (Gerald & Hussar, 2002).

This trend was clearly evident at the high school level. From 1950s - 1990s, the

percentage of secondary schools enrolling more than 1,000 students grew from 7% to

25% (Klonsky & Klonsky, 1999). According to Hoffman and Synder (2001), in 2000, the

average high school enrollment was over 1,000 students in the states of Delaware,

Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, New York, and Virginia. Between 1988-1989 and

1998-1999, the number of high schools with more than 1,500 students doubled (Cotton,

2001).

<div align="center">Effects of School Size</div>

Curriculum

During the First National Educational Summit (1989), six national goals were

determined including (1) students starting school ready to learn, (2) increase the

graduation rate to 90%, (3) exit exams for grades 4, 8, and 12 for core academic classes,

(4) US students first in math and science, (5) every adult American would be literate, and

(6) drug-free, safe schools (Miller, 2000). By the late 1990's research findings reinforced

the concerns for one of the hottest topics in the American view – education. Data from

the National Assessment of Education Progress (1999) showed the general level of achievement in U.S. high schools:

- Only 40 percent of 17-year old high school students could read and understand material such as that typically presented at the high school level, and only six percent could synthesize and learn from specialized reading materials;

- Fewer than half of 17-year old high school students could evaluate the procedures or results of a scientific experiment, and just ten percent could draw conclusions using detailed scientific knowledge;

- Only eight percent of 17-year old high school students could use basic algebra or solve math problems with more than one step;

- In the 1996-1997 school year 3,792,818 ninth graders in the nation comprised the high school class of 2000;

- In the 1999-2000 school year, of the 2,781,701 twelfth graders, 2,546,102 received diplomas, a 73% completion rate and a 67% graduation rate.

The growing emphasis on educational standards, equity, continuous improvement, and accountability that now drives high school reform is fueled by widespread recognition that schools must become high-performing organizations if administrators and teachers are to prepare all students to succeed in the 21st century (Noguera, 2002). Today, students represent an unprecedented level of diversity in abilities, learning styles, prior educational experience, attitudes related to learning, work habits, language and

culture, and home situations (Cooper, Ponder, Merritt, & Matthews, 2005). According to

Gruenert (2005):

> the challenges of educating these students require new capacities for
>
> schools and new orientations for the educators who make decisions that
>
> influence students' lives. A commitment is required to base these
>
> decisions on sound information and strategies rather than assumptions and
>
> subjective perceptions. The capacity to access and effectively use many
>
> types of data from multiple sources is critical to realizing a vision of high
>
> school education embracing the belief of high expectations for all students
>
> (p. 51).

Ark (2002) concluded that too many high school organizations are not responsive

to today's realities, lacking the infrastructure to respond to multiple sources of

accountability. He further concluded that high schools need to be redesigned to address

different demographics and economics conditions. These challenges call for a

transformation of the America high school to match the realities of contemporary life.

Too many high schools are characterized by large, compartmentalized, and impersonal

school settings, low expectations for student performance, and curricula guided by dated

and autonomous departmental priorities in which the student's role in the educational

process is often passive and subordinate (Buechler, 2002). A pervasive over-emphasis

exists on teacher-directed instruction, and a fragmented curriculum prevents students

from seeing the connections between the content learned in school and real life (Lee,

Smith, & Croninger, 1995). The vast majority of these high schools and their

administrators find ways to divide students on some measure of ability (tracking), which

diminishes opportunities to learn for some students and contributes to increasing inequalities among students over time (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002).

One of the touted advantages of a larger high school enrollment is the ability to offer a wider array of courses and more diverse curriculum. Roelke (1996) discredited that myth. He stated that core curricular offerings in small high schools were comparable to that of larger high schools. Roelke claimed high schools enrolling as few as 100 to 200 students offer base courses in core curricular areas such as mathematics and science at rates comparable to high schools enrolling between 1200 and 1600 students. Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, and Moss (2000) examined the relationship between school size and curriculum in nearly 500 schools and found that, once a graduating class size exceeds 100 students, a school is able to offer advanced mathematics equal to larger high school counterparts. McMullen, Sipe, and Wolf (1994) found that students make more rapid progress toward graduation in small high schools. Pittman and Haughwout (1987) found that students were more satisfied in smaller high schools and fewer of them dropped out than did students from larger schools.

Technological advances such as internet, distance learning, and virtual high schools have provided smaller schools and SLCs with multiple approaches to expanding curriculum without the addition of faculty members and facilities, thereby avoiding increased cost for services. "Cyberspace offers educators intriguing, technological capabilities acting as virtual research assistants (voice, video, data, images, animation, graphics, etc.), which might not otherwise be affordable if performed by a human being" (Hamza & Alhalabi, 1999). Today, various computing technologies provide much

assistance in achieving school goals via the use of distance learning, Internet searches, and the linking of other available technologies.

In contrast to the argument of poor student performance in large, comprehensive high schools, some researchers have found increasing returns in academic achievement in larger schools and more efficient use of taxpayers' monies due to economics of scale (Ferguson & Ladd, 2000; Kenny, 2004; Magnuson, 2001). Klonksy (1995a) reported evidence that students in high socioeconomic status communities perform better in larger schools. However, according to the research findings, most of these schools are in high socio-economics districts with very little diversity.

Cost

The discussion of cost, or economy of scale, represents a major theme in the literature on smaller learning environments. The trend towards school and district consolidation has been greatly motivated by the argument that larger organizational units are more cost effective, offering a broader range of curricula with lower per-pupil expenditures. Conant (1959) contented that "the enrollment of many American public high schools is too small to allow a diversified curriculum except at an exorbitant cost" (p. 77). Though his vision of the ideal high school only included 100 students per graduating class - a small school by today's standards – Conant's argument about the relationship between larger schools and a low-cost, comprehensive curriculum provided grounds for the policy shift toward larger schools.

The ability of larger schools to offer more types of courses at lower per-pupil costs remains a major justification for larger schools, although some researchers have challenged this claim (Monk & Haller, 1993). Even small-school proponents have

conceded that smaller learning environments rarely cost less. As Steifel, Berne, Iatarola, and Frucher (2000) noted, "there is no evidence from the body of cost studies we examined that smaller learning environments cost less per pupil than those with enrollments of around 900" (p. 30).   However, some researchers offer a different definition of cost, arguing that higher dropout rates occurring within large schools mean "that small academic high schools have budgets per graduate similar to those of larger schools (greater than 2,000 students)" (Steifel, Berne, Iatarola, & Frucher, 2000, p. 36).

Optimal High School Size

Educational researchers vary considerably in their claims about how small schools should be. Deborah Meier (1993), cited seven reasons why schools of 300 to 400 students work best: (1) governance – communication is easier when the whole staff can meet around one common table; (2) respect – students and teachers get to know each other well; (3) simplicity – less bureaucracy makes it easier to individualize; (4) safety – strangers are easily spotted and teachers can quickly respond to rudeness or frustration; (5) parent involvement – parents are more likely to form alliances with teachers who know their child and care about his or her progress; (6) accountability – no one needs bureaucratic data to find out how a student, a teacher, or the school is doing; (7) belonging – every student, not just the academic and athletic stars, is part of a community that contains adults. Other researchers have attempted to define the ideal school size. According to Rotherham (1999), no school should serve more than 1,000 students. Lee and Smith (1997) concluded that the ideal high school size would contain between 600 and 900 students – no more, no less. An earlier study of school size (Williams, 1990) recommended up to 800 students for a high school.

A summary of research places the ideal high school enrollment between 600-900 students, but certainly no more than 1,000 students (Raywid, 1999). However, in 2000, more than one in four secondary schools nationwide enrolled more than 1,000 students (Klonsky, 2002). Among the states with the highest high school enrollments are Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, New York, and Virginia. Between 1988-1989 and 1998-1999, the number of high schools with more than 1,500 students doubled (Cotton, 2001).

High School Reform Efforts

The trend towards increasing school size represents one of the most important educational reforms of the twentieth century (Overbay, 2003). In 2001, the average elementary school in America had 443 students, the average middle school had 605 students, and the average high school had 751 students (Gerald & Hussar, 2002). Beginning in the early 1980s, groups of corporate executives concerned about the lack of workplace skills of high school graduates formed roundtables to lobby local, state, and national policy makers for school improvement. In addition, national commissions chaired by chief executives of the country's leading firms and national business groups began issuing reports, of which more than 300 had appeared by 1990, expressing the corporate view of what should be done to improve public schools (Cuban, 1992). Since the 1980s, numerous forces have had a significant impact on shaping education policy. Reyes, Wagstaff, and Fusarelli (1999), concluded that "despite the diversity of policy entrepreneurs, they all share the basic assumptions of the neo-corporatist model of schooling emphasizing competitive, hierarchical achievements, punitive discipline, and

segregation of diverse populations leading to reproducing rather than transcending societal inequalities and stratifications" (p. 198).

Large schools cannot meet the diverse needs of their populations without changing operational structures (Ark, 2002). Often district policies, state laws, and higher educational expectations make it difficult for restructuring. Restructuring today's high schools to meet the diverse needs of students takes leaders with strengths in setting visions, curriculum design, participatory leadership, technology, and facilities (O'Donnell & White, 2005). According to Mullen and Sullivan (2002), the following elements were identified as necessary traits that should exist for secondary school reform: (1) shared governance; (2) sustainability of leadership; (3) identified core values that drive all decision-making; (4) high expectations for students to be productive citizens and lifelong learners; (5) expectations to teach all learners; (6) faculty and administrative visits; and (7) continued learning. Noguera (2002) concluded that implementing reform efforts independently will not bring about results without stakeholder buy-in and training. O'Donnell and White (2005) further concluded that principals must first begin by conducting comprehensive assessments of their own instructional leadership behavior before working with their teachers to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Buechler (2002) added "school transformation utilizing a program does not necessarily lead to changes in the classroom practices and can lead to a new type of tracking" (p. 60).

Redistricting

Alternative reforms at the district level tend to involve the reorganization of school populations. Roeder (2002) claimed that "disputes over school size may be costly diversions from the more important issues of disadvantage populations and equal

opportunity" (p. 17). According to Roeder, district policy makers and administrators in urban and suburban districts with diverse neighborhoods should consider drawing attendance boundaries to distribute poor children more equitably across schools, regardless of school size, in order to address underlying issues related to student performance. This reform effort has its roots in the era of school desegregation, under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the last decade, critics have emphasized the persistence of substantial inequalities in the education received by high and low-income students, and have stressed the continued need to distribute low-income students more equitably throughout school districts (Orfield, 2000). Although this reform effort faces a number of challenges in an era of policy change, it remains one of the primary means of assuring equal access to high-quality educational environments, and supporting the educational experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Welner, 2001).

Class Size Reduction

Many researchers identify class size reduction as another important alternative reform measure (Cotton, 1996; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002; Deutsch, 2003; Iacovou, 2002; Lee & Smith, 1997; Oxley, 2001; Raywid, 1999). Advocates of this reform point to the greater instructional flexibility and individualization possible with smaller classes, features that can lead to increased student engagement. Evaluations of major class size reduction initiatives, such as Tennessee's STAR project, Wisconsin's SAGE program, and Indiana's Prime Time plan, suggest that students in smaller classes (13-17 pupils) score higher on achievement tests (Finn & Achilles, 1999). Furthermore, some researchers suggested that minority students particularly benefit from smaller classes (Ancess & Ort, 1999; Finn & Achilles, 1999; Lee & Smith, 1995; Meiner, 1998;

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Molner, Smith, Zahorik, Palmer, Halback, & Ehrle, 2000; Raywid & Henderson, 1994).

Tillitski (1990) concluded that the benefits of smaller class sizes may decline after the

second grade. While class size reduction efforts are under way in many states, budget

restraints prevent many local districts from providing adequate facilities to address the

creation of new classrooms when teacher-to-pupil ratios are lowered (McRobbie, 1996;

Roelke, 1996).

School Organizational Restructuring

With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB),* the

educational system began to experience perhaps the most sweeping Federal education

policy reform in a generation (U.S. Department of Education - OVAE, 2003). The

legislation was designed to implement President George W. Bush's agenda to improve

America's public schools by: (1) ensuring accountability for results; (2) providing

unprecedented flexibility in the use of Federal funds in implementing education

programs; (3) focusing on proven educational methods; and (4) expanding educational

choice for parents. Since the enactment of the original Elementary and Secondary

Education Act in 1965, the Federal Government has spent more than $130 billion to

improve public schools. "Unfortunately, this investment in education has not yet

eliminated the achievement gap between well-off and lower-income students, or between

minority students and non-minority students" (U.S. Department of Education - OVAE,

2003, p. 9).

In passing the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001,* legislatures promoted a strategy

of Smaller Learning Communities (SLC's) to assist with the mandates set forth by the

legislation. The Smaller Learning Communities Program was first funded in the

Department of Educations' Fiscal Year 2000 Appropriations Act, which included $45 million for the program. Since then the US Department of Education has awarded 146 three-year implementation grants and 173 one-year planning grants to large high schools, defined as a schools including Grades 11 and 12 and enrolling at least 1,000 students in grades nine and above (D'Amico, 2003). Under the statute, grant funds may be used to redesign schools into structures such as academies, house plans, schools-within-a-school, and magnet programs. Funds may also be used for personalization strategies that complement the advantage of smaller learning communities, such as freshmen transition activities, multi-year groupings, alternative scheduling, advisory or advocate systems, and academic teaming. Approximately 70 percent of American high schools enroll 1,000 or more students; nearly 50 percent of high school students attend schools enrolling more than 1,500 students. Some students attend schools enrolling as many as 4,000 to 5,000 students (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The US DOE published *The High School Leadership Summit Issue Papers* (2003) promoting a framework for the challenges facing America's high schools as well as to address some steps that states, schools, educators, and others are taking to tackle these challenges.

States must produce annual state and school district report cards that inform parents and communities about state and school progress. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance, take corrective actions, and if still not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) after five years, make dramatic changes to the way the school is run (Buechler, 2002). Buechler (2002), further reports, "The legislation decrees that state-developed standards should drive school reform" (p. 19). All states must have standards for English language

arts and mathematics, as well as science by 2005. Schools must also focus on getting students to achieve the standards. Assessments, aligned to the standards, are to provide information about the extent to which students have met the standards. Adequate yearly progress means demonstrating that larger and larger percentages of students are meeting standards each year, not just in overall groups, but also in disaggregated groups. Through *NCLB*, politicians have forced states to adopt policies, such as the ones listed below, in an attempt to begin the accountability process:

- Sanctions for Low-Performing Schools/Districts – requiring schools to develop simple improvement plans or re-constituting or closing low-performing schools;

- Rewards for high-performing schools/districts – offering rewards to schools for high performance in the form of money or recognition;

- Reporting of results – requiring schools and districts to report performance data to the public;

- Teacher certification – requiring that content-related teachers become highly qualified, certificated, in the content area in which they teach;

- Remediation – providing additional services for students who are falling behind.

- Course credits – increasing the number of credits for graduation as well as the rigor in which they are taught;

- Exit exams – requiring students to pass an exam to receive a diploma (Martinez & Bray, 2002).

Under *NCLB,* federal support is targeted to those educational programs that have been demonstrated to be effective through rigorous scientific research. Educators are expected to consider the results of relevant scientifically-based research, whenever such information is available, before making instructional decisions (US DOE, 2003). U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige in his 2003 Back-to-School Address to the National Press Club sounded the consequences for children if the nation hesitated on school reform: "Those who are unprepared will sit on the sidelines, confronting poverty, dead-end jobs, and hopelessness. They will find little choice and much despair. The well educated will live in a world of their own choosing; the poorly educated will wander in the shadows. We cannot deny the benefits of education through shortsighted indifference or lack of will. Nor can we capitulate the guardians of the status quo. The achievement of all children must improve across the board. No child can be left behind" (Paige, 2003).

Over the past ten years, restructuring high schools into smaller subunits have lead to a variety of arrangements, organizations, terms, and definitions. "The nomenclature for different kinds of small learning units is awkward and significant because the structures range in nature all the way from tentative, semi-units organizationally supplementing a high school's departments to totally separate schools that just happen to be located under the same roof" (Raywid, 1996, p. 16). The following terms are provided to bring clarity to the variety of school types and terminology associated with smaller learning communities: smaller learning community; autonomous small school; focus school; theme-based school; historically small school; freestanding school; alternative school; school-within-a-school; school-within-a-building; house plan; career academy; pathway; pod; cluster; minischool; multiplex; multischool; scatterplex; charter school; pilot school;

and magnet school. Raywid (1998) summarized SLCs simply as ranging from part-time supplements to a large school's operations to schools that are totally separate.

While U.S. schools were experiencing record-setting growth, educators were publicizing research that points to the effectiveness of small schools, especially small secondary schools. Cotton (2004) claimed that smaller high schools graduate a higher percentage of students and students dropped out of small schools at lower rates than they did from large schools. Cotton also cited research that indicated that more students who graduated from smaller high schools go on to post-secondary education than do their counterparts in larger high schools. According to Bryk (1994), smaller high schools are more engaging environments and produce greater gains in student achievement. Bryk stated that in smaller schools teachers were more likely to report great satisfaction with their work, to exhibit higher levels of morale, and to indicate a greater commitment to their profession.

<div align="center">Smaller Learning Communities</div>

In comparing research findings of recent studies with findings from older small schools research, the researcher found that the effects produced by the new restructured schools are the same, only more so. Both studies report benefits (compelling forces) for restructuring high schools into smaller learning communities including improvement in achievement, affiliation/belonging, cost, curriculum quality, equity, parent involvement and satisfaction, preparation for higher education, safety and order, teacher attitudes and satisfaction, and truancy and dropouts (Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Bickel, 1999; Cotton, 1996a; Cotton, 1996b; Cushman, 1999; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, & Moss, 2000, Mitchell, 2000;

Oxley, 1989; Oxley, 1996; Oxley, 2000; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1998; Raywid, 1999; Roellke, 1996; Wasley, Fine, King, Powell, Holland, Gladden, & Mosak, 2000; Wasley & Lear, 2001). These same studies report barriers and pitfalls (constraining forces) that can impede the implementation and sustainability of high school restructuring efforts including cultural expectations; large student numbers even with SLCs; comprehensive curriculum; impatience; laws, regulations, policies, and procedures; rigidity; defensiveness; tracking; implementation strategies; demands on staff; low expectations; fiscal constraints; and physical constraints (Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Bickel, 1999; Cotton, 1996b; Cushman, 1995; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, & Moss, 2000; Mitchell, 2000; Oxley, 2001; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 2000; Raywid, 1996; Raywid 1998; Raywid & Henderson, 1994; Roellke, 1996; Wasley & Lear, 2001;)

Compelling Forces

Stemming from increased accountability from various stakeholder groups and extremely diverse populations, high school administrations find themselves in ever-changing environments. Researchers have cited several compelling forces that could possibly assist administrators in implementing smaller learning communities. Small schools and smaller learning communities can be remarkable for improving the intellectual and social life of children, youth, educators, and parents, providing an educational environment where all students can achieve at high levels, and providing staff with exciting opportunities to teach and learn (Fine & Somerville, 1998).

Achievement. According to Deutsch's (2003) research on the effects of class size on achievement in high schools has been plagued by methodological problems.

Nonetheless, studies do show that small classes promote student engagement, enriched curricula, positive teacher-student interaction, increased time on instruction rather than on discipline, and high teacher morale (Cotton, 1996a; Oxley, 2001; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1996). According to Kathleen Cotton's (1996a) review of 31 studies that examined the relationship between small schools and academic achievement, students in small schools performed equal to or better than their larger school counterparts. Cotton reported that,

About half the student achievement research finds no difference between

the achievement levels of students in large and small schools, including

small alternative schools while the other half finds student achievement in

small schools to be superior to that in large schools. None of the research

finds large schools superior to small schools in their achievement effects

(1996, p. 1).

McAndrews & Anderson (2002), reported test scores of students in small schools are consistently higher that those in larger schools. Legters (1999) measured the promoting power of 10,000 regular and vocational high schools that enroll more than 300 students and reported that in 20 percent of the schools graduation in a four year period was not the norm. Nearly 40 percent of the entering freshmen had dropped out by their senior year and nearly half of the country's African American students attended one of the "dropout factories" (p. 1).

In addition to reporting on academic achievement, Cotton (2004) noted that "measured either as dropout rate or graduation rate, the holding power of small schools is considerably greater than that of large schools" (p. 4). Mitchell (2000) noted school size

had such a powerful positive effect on the achievement of poor students that it even trumped the beneficial effects of class size.

Affiliation/Belonging. School size research consistently finds stronger feelings of affiliation and belongings on the part of small-school students than large-school students (Ancess, 1997; Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Cotton, 1996b; Oxley, 1994; Raywid, 1996). Students and teachers in smaller learning environments can come to know and care about one another in a way that is difficult to achieve in large schools. The Architecture Research Institute researchers (1999) wrote that, "the extra attention that students get from the staff affords them greater educational, psycho-emotional, and social services, and also makes them feel a part of a community" (p. 3). This holds true from contemporary small-by-design schools as well, as these schools typically feature at least two additional attributes that foster a sense of community: 1) students often self-select into these settings based on interest in a topical area or career focus around which the school is organized; and 2) staff take an active, often insistent, interest in students' learning and general well being (Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Cotton, 1996b; Gladden, 1998; Klonsky & Klonsky, 1999; Raywid, 1996; Wasley & Lear, 2001).

Cost. Most arguments against small schools, if not on the basis of curriculum quality, are on the grounds of cost-effectiveness. Many state and local agencies make decisions of school design based on the notion of economies of scale – the thoughts of having a lower per-student cost than small schools or smaller learning environments. Cotton (1996a) reported that this is not necessarily true – that some large schools are exorbitantly expensive, and some small schools are very cost effective. Cotton further

reported that the required disciplinary and other administrative personnel of large schools are so costly that, past a certain point, per pupil cost goes up and keeps going up as the school grows larger. Steifel, Berne, Iatarola, and Frucher (2000) reasoned that a more useful comparison than cost per student is cost per student graduated. By this measure, they reported that smaller learning environments, with their much higher graduation rates, are the most economical schools. They further concluded from review of sociology and economic studies that the lifetime earnings and many other quality-of-life indicators are usually better for high school graduates than for dropouts. Steifel, Bernce, Iatarola, and Frucher (2000) drew the conclusion that providing at-risk students a good small-school education is an investment in society that will continue to pay off.

Curriculum Quality. Critics declared that more students means more staff and a greater variety of curricular offerings, which in turn will meet individual student needs and provide them better preparation for college or other postsecondary plans. Roellke (1996) summarized "that core curricular offerings in smaller settings overall are well aligned with national goals. In fact, they have been determined that high schools enrolling as few as 100 to 200 students offer base courses in core curricular areas such as math and science at rates comparable to high schools enrolling between 1,200 and 1,600 students" (p. 1). Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, and Moss (2000) conducted a study of nearly 500 schools and reported that once a graduating class size exceeds 100 students a school is able to offer advanced mathematics courses equal to those offered by large schools. They also found that "quite small schools are able to offer a program that is nearly equivalent in comprehensiveness to that of larger schools" (p. 113). Gladden (1998) reported similar findings. He concluded that although larger learning

environments offer more courses, only a small percentage of students benefited from the additional offerings. Gladden further concluded small schools were forced to teach a core academic curriculum in heterogeneous classes, a factor that is associated with a higher and more equitable level of achievement among students. Additional factors that levelize that ability of smaller learning environments to provide a comprehensive curriculum include technology, differentiated instructional strategies, joint-enrollment opportunities, post-secondary articulations, and work-study based instructional programs (Cotton, 1996; Oxley, 200l; Oxley, 2004; Stiefel, et al., 2000).

Equity. As part of the new age of accountability, high school administrators have been searching for strategies to close the achievement gap, particularly between lower socio-economic students and minorities and their peers. In a replicated study, Bickel (1999) reported that mostly poor and ethnic minority children have notably higher achievement in smaller learning communities. Howley, Strange and Bickel (2000) further reported in their multi-state studies of school size in impoverished communities, "the effect is not only well documented, but sizeable – remarkably strong and consistent from state to state" (p. 4). Their findings indicated a reduction in the negative effects of poverty by between 20 and 70 percent, and usually by 30 to 50 percent, depending on grade level. Likewise, Gladden (1998) published corroborating findings. School performance of poor and minority students in smaller schools and smaller learning environments was not only better, but "significantly better" (Gladden, 1998, p. 114). Nine of the eleven studies he reviewed found a consistent and often strong relationship between school size and more equitable academic achievement across ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds.

Parent Involvement and Satisfaction. According to Halsey (2004), parents whose

children attend a small high school were more likely to say that teachers help struggling

students. They also reported that students speak and write well. In addition, these parents

were considerably happier with the small schools on issues of civility, student alienation,

and parent-teacher engagement. Smaller learning environments provided greater

opportunities for communication between parents and teachers. Parents who find it

intimidating to confront the bureaucratic complexity of large schools typically felt more

welcomed, and needed, in smaller learning environments (Cotton, 1996a; Oxley, 1996;

Oxley, 2004). In a section of their report called, "What Makes a Small School Work?"

Wasley and Lear (2000) included as a key component that, "Relationships with parents

are strong and ongoing. Within the successful smaller learning environments, advisors

and parents communicate regularly, and some of them scheduled individual advisor-

student-parent meetings several times a year" (p. 23). One type of SLC, the career

academy, is especially dependent on relationships with the surrounding community

(Oxley, 1994). Along with a broad-based career theme and an integrated sequence of

courses, Sammon (2000) wrote that "each academy has work-based experiences and

strong partnerships with business and community partners" (p. 13). Several researchers

reported a greater sense of parent satisfaction within schools that had implemented

smaller learning communities (Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000;

Bickel, 1999; Cotton, 1996; Cushman, 1995; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Haller,

1992, Mitchell, 2000; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1999; Raywid, 1996; Roellke, 1996;

Wasley, Fine, King, Powell, Holland, Gladden, & Mosak, 2000; Wasley & Lear, 2001).

Preparation for Higher Education. The evidence showed that the presence and perseverance of students in smaller learning communities continues to serve them after they graduate (Gladden, 1998; Raywid, 1999; Oxley, 2004). Ancess and Ort's description of the dozen smaller learning communities created from two large, failing New York City comprehensive high schools included the fact that they have a remarkable 89% college-going rate (1999). While that is usually high even for the new generation of smaller learning community inner-city schools, the large scale study of Chicago smaller schools conducted by Wasley and others also found significantly more college bound students among the graduates than demographically similar graduates of larger comprehensive high schools (Wasley, et al, 2000).

Safety and Order. Another benefit of student affiliation and belonging is increased order and safety (Cotton, 1996a; Oxley, 1989; Raywid, 1995). The full range of negative social behavior, from class room disruption to assault and even murder, is far less common in smaller learning environments, traditional or new, than it is in larger schools. (Cocklin, 1999; Gladden, 1998; Raywid, 1999). According to Stockard and Mayberry (1992), students behaved better in smaller high schools.

A study of smaller high schools in Chicago found that students made significant improvement in school behavior and achievement (Wasley, et al, 2000). The study compared smaller learning communities that had been created utilizing the school-within-a-school model within larger, traditional high schools. This research was mirrored by studies that revealed the negative effects of schools with high enrollments. A report by the U.S. Department of Education (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998) analyzed the number and types of incidents of crime among U.S. public schools.

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According to the study, large schools (more than 1,000 students) had a significantly higher percentage of incidents of crime and violence than small schools (less than 300 students). Large schools had 825% more incidents of crime and violence, 270% more incidents of vandalism, 394% more physical fights or attacks, and 1,000% more weapons on campus (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998). Gladden's 1998 research review identified, among the benefits of small schools, that students feel safer. He also noted "there is a lower incidence of drug use, assault, vandalism, victimization, violence, suspensions, and expulsions" (p. 16).

Teacher Attitudes and Satisfaction. Ayers, Bracey, and Smith (2000) found that teachers in small learning environments feel they are in a better position to make a difference in students' learning and general quality of life than do teachers in large schools. The researchers further concluded that the teachers have closer relationships with students and other staff, experience fewer discipline problems, and are better able to adapt instruction to students' individual needs. Walsey, et al. (2000), compared the new small Chicago schools to large schools with similar student populations and made the following conclusions concerning teachers:

- they felt more committed and more efficacious;

- they tended to report a stronger professional community;

- they are far more satisfied;

- they are more likely to collaborate with colleagues;

- they are more likely to engage in professional development that they find valuable;

- they are more able to build a coherent educational program for students between discipline and across grade levels;

- they demonstrate a greater sense of responsibility for ongoing student learning;

- they provide a more focused learning environment for students; and

- they build a more varied instructional repertoire for working with students (pp. 38-49).

Truancy and Dropouts. The majority of accountability standards measure a school's ability to graduate students in a timely manner and provide them with the opportunity to go to college or find a better job than they would without a high school degree. Students attending smaller learning environments are more likely to pass their courses, accumulate credits, and attain a higher level of education than students who attend larger schools (Gladden, 1998). The Cross City Campaign (2000) reported that dropout rates are consistently, and often strikingly, lower in small schools.

Constraining Forces

"Human issues were the most significant barrier to successful conversions of comprehensive high schools into new small autonomous schools" (Lear, 2001, p. 1). Despite the compelling forces for implementing smaller learning communities, researchers reported barriers and pitfalls (constraining forces) that could impede the implementation and sustainability of high school restructuring efforts including comprehensive curriculum; cultural expectations; demands on staff; fiscal and physical constraints; implementation strategies; large student numbers even with SLCs; laws, regulations, policies, and procedures; and rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations (Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Bickel, 1999; Cotton, 2004; Cotton,

2001; Cushman, 1995; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Mitchell, 2000; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1996; Raywid, 1995; Roellke, 1996; Wasley & Lear, 2001).

Comprehensive Curriculum. Part of the comprehensive school mindset is the thinking it is essential to provide a huge variety of courses and activities. Mohr (2000) argued that schools that attempted to maintain comprehensive school structures such as a departmentalized faculty, rigid student placements, a dean of discipline, etc. would be most likely unsuccessful. Mohr (2000), Gregory, (2000), and Wasley and Lear (2000) all concluded that a tremendous barrier to transitions into smaller learning communities would be the mistaken thoughts of confusing curriculum choice with variety.

Cultural Expectations. Wasley and Lear (2001) stated the paradox to school reform is that "we want schools that are better, but not different" (p.24). Traditional methods and deeply engrained roots of status quo are great barrier for change since they involve the human element (Lear, 2001). Lear further concluded "it is the personal, human question, "what does this mean for me? that is at the heart of resistance to change" (2000, p. 1).

Demands on Staff. The task of beginning a school can be enormously demanding on founding leaders (Ancess & Ort, 1999). The tasks are uniquely taxing because founding leaders guide the transformation of the school from idea to reality by rooting it in the basis of administrative order while they simultaneously aim for the flexibility necessary for creative development (Fine & Somerville, 1998). Gladden (1998) found that "some teachers resist the heavy workload of smaller learning communities" (p. 125).

Fiscal and Physical Constraints. Schools-within-schools may experience scheduling and space constraints imposed by the larger school with which they share

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buildings (Raywid, 1996; Visher, Teitelbaum & Emanuel, 1999). In buildings with

several schools, there are sometimes allegations of favored treatment, as well as conflicts

over enrollment and adequate funding to support initiatives (Raywid, 1996; Visher,

Teitelbaum & Emanuel, 1999). Schools also have difficulties in bringing about effective

communication among SLCs. Resistance also arises if teachers or classrooms have to be

moved, while others, such as science or specialized labs, do not since they cannot be

relocated (Meier, 1995a).

Implementation Strategies. In many cases, high school restructuring is done

utilizing the old method of top down decision making. A decision is made by a

governing body and then the subordinates are expected to carry out the decision. Lear

(2000) concluded, that schools often agree to change – intellectually. "It's not hard to

acknowledge the need. Then, the how-to part is held hostage to regular revisiting of the

why part" (2000, p. 1). Gladden (1998) concluded that some teachers resist the heavy

workload of small schools. Those with expertise in starting and maintaining SLCs have

identified some additional problem areas including scheduling and space constraints,

allegations of favored treatment, and staff relationship between SLC faculties and larger

school faculties (Lashway,1998; Mohr, 2000; Raywid, 1996; Visher, Teitelbaum, &

Emanuel, 1999; Wasley, et.al, 2000).

Large Numbers within SLCs. Some researchers argue that smaller schools are

only effective if they have 200 to 400 students (Gregory, 2000; Wasley & Lear, 2000).

These researchers contended that anything over this size only makes sense if "one's

intent is to conduct business as usual, a routine of textbook-dominated classes that are

designed to dispense a curriculum that emphasizes the transmission of information from

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the old to the young via group instruction delivered with the confines of the school building (p. 13). These researchers contend that larger high schools will have a difficult time even if they restructure into smaller learning communities simply from the larger number of students.

   Laws, Regulations, Policies, and Procedures. Over the last 40 to 50 years, laws, regulations, policies and procedures from the federal government down to the local boards of education have followed the move to create comprehensive high schools. Wasley and Lear (2000) concluded that most district and state laws, regulations, policies, and procedures reflect this attitude, [and] state funding formulas often explicitly favor large high schools for school construction funding. This mindset has and will make it difficult for smaller learning communities to be a feasible alternative to larger, comprehensive high schools.

   Rigidity, Defensiveness, and Low Expectations. School personnel, many of whom attended large schools or have taught in them for a long time, "perceive the critique of large schools to be personal and respond defensively" (Wasley & Lear, 2001, p. 25). Although strategies have been suggested to offset this defensive nature, researchers have concluded that this cultural glue is very difficult to overcome and often retards the restructuring of large, comprehensive high schools (Cotton, 2004; Oxley, 1994; Raywid, 1996). Among the comprehensive philosophies that can impede high school restructuring are tracking students based on ability, low expectations of students, and the predictability of a student's socio-economic factors on their ability to achieve (Oxley, 2004).

Summary

The review of literature reveals that much energy has gone into creating smaller, friendlier, more effective schools. The challenge for educators across the nation has become how to design and develop a teacher corps and a school structure that allows for a school that operates in a completely different manner than the classrooms of the past. The research on smaller learning communities is extensive, and their benefits are documented, compelling, and persuasive. The conditions created by smaller learning communities offer large high schools an opportunity to improve student achievement. While the practice can become the engine for higher achievement, administrators, teachers, and students must adjust to a new paradigm of school operations.

In many cases, prior procedures and traditions must be abandoned to achieve academic, social and school environmental goals. Because teachers have minimal training in school reform, the very nature of organizations will make change a difficult process calling for buy-in from stakeholders. Despite the barriers and potential pitfalls described in the literature, those who believe in the potential of small learning communities have created many successful ones.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Procedures

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a description of the researcher's

procedures for completing a study of the compelling and constraining forces experienced

by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. The

researcher's focus of the study was an analysis of compelling and constraining forces

experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning

communities. Additional focus was placed on the restructuring framework of strategies

used by these principals to overcome the constraining forces based on the work of

Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*. The strategies were analyzed and

categorized into four frameworks: structural; human resources; political; and symbolic.

Design

According to Cassell & Symon (2004), qualitative research provides descriptions

and accounts of the processes and social interactions in natural settings, usually based

upon a combination of observation and interviewing of participants in order to understand

their perspectives. Cultures, meanings, and processes are emphasized, rather than

variables, outcomes, and products. Qualitative research aims to generate theories and

hypotheses from the data that emerge, in an attempt to avoid the imposition of a previous,

and possibly inappropriate, frame of reference on the subjects of the research. Therefore,

since the researcher did not test pre-conceived hypotheses, the design of this study was

qualitative using in-depth interviews to record the compelling and constraining forces

experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning

communities. The researcher provided a description of the processes used by

administrators in dealing with the compelling and constraining forces of implementing

smaller learning communities through categorizing the strategies into four frameworks:

structural, human resources, political, and symbolic.

After Internal Review Board (IRB) approval [Appendix A], the researcher

conducted a series of nine interviews to record the experiences of Georgia high school

principals. Based on the review of literature, the researcher used three research questions

to guide the interview process. Additional questions based on Bolman and Deal's

strategies were asked during the interviews to provide more in-depth records and

clarification of the principals' experiences.

Population

The researcher limited this study to the state of Georgia. According to the Georgia

Department of Education, Georgia has 159 counties and 21 cities that contain three

hundred forty-eight schools. Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, the U.S.

Department of Education began awarding federal grants to schools, with enrollments of

1,000 students or more, in which smaller learning communities were implemented. Forty-

nine of these restructured high schools exist in the state of Georgia (U.S. DOE, 2006).

These forty-nine schools were located in thirteen school districts within the state of

Georgia. For the purpose of this study, the researcher planned to interview one

administrator from each school district that was represented by a restructured high

school. Each district ranged from having one restructured high school to having fourteen

restructured high school. Five schools were located in urban school districts. One school

was located in a suburban district. Three schools were located in rural districts. Districts ranged from having one restructured high school to x restructured high schools.

Sample

Sandelowski (1995) has recommended that phenomenologies directed toward discerning the essence of experiences include at least six participants. Therefore, the researcher intended to interview thirteen administrators involved with smaller learning communities, one from each district containing a restructured high school. However, only nine participants agreed to complete the interview.

Instrumentation

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the researcher used a scripted set of questions and prompts for all interviews. The researcher developed a guided interview form which included the research questions as well as prompts taken directly from the literature regarding Bolman & Deal's frameworks of organizations [Appendix B].

Data Collection

The researcher contacted thirteen administrators, one from each district currently utilizing smaller learning communities according to the data provided by the United States Department of Education. Participants had at least two years of administrative experience and were associated with a school utilizing smaller learning communities. Nine administrators agreed to participate in the study. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect anonymity: Jim Mayes, Mary Yancy, Gil Brass, Betty Garvin, Kathy Lester, Keisha Carver, Leon Eason, Carl Young, and Bill Knight.

Data collection was done through conducting pre-scheduled telephone interviews. Interviews were scheduled to last approximately one hour. Each conference call interview

was voice recorded after disclosure was made to the participant. The researcher followed a scripted set of questions and prompts for all participants while maintaining descriptive and reflective notes.

Analysis

Data analysis was conducted as an activity simultaneously with data collection, data interpretations, and narrative report writing. The researcher transcribed each interview session and categorized the responses into four re-organizational frameworks using a color coding system. The categories were: structural framework; human resources framework; political framework; and symbolic framework. The researcher examined the findings to determine if common experiences existed among administrators concerning the compelling and constraining forces of implementing a smaller learning community.

Summary

The research on smaller learning communities is extensive, and the benefits are documented, compelling, and persuasive. The conditions created by smaller learning communities offer large high schools an opportunity to improve student achievement and school climate. While the practice can become the engine for higher achievement, administrators, teachers, and students must adjust to a new paradigm of school operations. In many cases, prior procedures and traditions must be abandoned to achieve academic, social, and school environmental goals. Because teachers and administrators have very little training in school reform, the very nature of organizations will make change a difficult process.

Several unknown factors existed in Georgia's high schools as their administrators attempt to find programs and procedures to meet the needs of rapidly growing and

diverse student populations. First, nothing was known of the experiences of Georgia high

school principals in making neither transitions into smaller learning communities nor the

forces surrounding those transitions. Second, nothing was known of the frameworks used

for reframing these organizations.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the compelling and constraining forces

experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning

communities and analyze the compelling and constraining forces as well as strategies

used by administrators to overcome these forces using Bolman and Deal's frameworks

for reframing organizations. The researcher proposed to categorize these strategies into

four categories of change: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic.

Research Questions

1. What are the compelling forces experienced by Georgia high school principals
   implementing smaller learning communities?

2. What are the constraining forces experienced by Georgia high school principals
   implementing smaller learning communities?

3. What frameworks for reframing organizations do Georgia high school principals
   use to deal with the constraining forces of implementing smaller learning
   communities?

Research Design

The researcher intended to conduct 13 interviews with a representative from within

13 school districts in the state of Georgia identified through the US Department of

Education. These thirteen districts contained 49 high schools which were participants in a

federally funded smaller learning communities grant for the purpose of restructuring a

larger, comprehensive high school with an enrollment of 1,000 students or more into

small subunits. Only nine participants agreed to participate in the study. Therefore, nine interviews were conducted. While an analysis of school and administrative demographics was not conducted, the following demographic information is provided as background information concerning the participants and their schools. The following pseudonyms were used to identify the high schools: Durden High School; Westlake High School; Statesville High School; Ringwald High School; Clarkeston High School; Stafford High School; Wilkinston High School; Dubberly High School; and Trion High School.

Durden High School is located in an urban school district in north central Georgia. The school has an enrollment of 2072 students with a large minority population (98%). The school has a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students (70%) which qualifies it as a Title I school. Durden High School met adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards in the 2004-2005 school year, but did not meet AYP standards in the last two school years. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for five years.

Westlake High School is located in an urban school district in central Georgia The school has an enrollment of 1698 students with a population consisting of 55% black, 42% white, and 3% other. The school has a low percentage of economically disadvantaged students which does not qualify the school as a Title I school. Westlake High School met adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards in the 2004-2005 school year, but did not meet AYP standards in the last two school years. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for five years.

Statesville High School is located in a rural school district in southeast Georgia. The school has an enrollment of 1467 students with a population consisting of 45%

black, 53% white, and 2% other. The school has a low percentage of economically disadvantaged students which does not qualify the school as a Title I school. Statesville High School did not meet AYP standards in the 2004-2005 school year but has met the AYP standards for the last two year. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for five years.

Ringwald High School is located in a suburban school district in northwest Georgia. The school has an enrollment of 1358 students with large white population (96%). The school has a low percentage of economically disadvantaged students which does not qualify the school as a Title I school. Ringwald High School did meet AYP standards in the 2004-2005 school year, did not meet the AYP standards in the 2005-2006 school year, but met the AYP standards for the 2006-2007 school year The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for five years.

Clarkeston High School is located in an urban school district in northeast Georgia. The school has an enrollment of 1514 students with a population consisting of 55% black, 32% white, 10% Hispanic, and 3% other. The school has a low percentage of economically disadvantaged students which does not qualify the school as a Title I school. Clarkeston High School has not met AYP standards in the 2004-2005 school year, 2005-2006 school year, or 2006-2007 school year. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for five years.

Wilkinston High School is located in a rural school district in south central Georgia. The school has an enrollment of 1570 students with a population consisting of 39% black, 59% white, and 2% other. The school has a low percentage of economically disadvantaged students which does not qualify the school as a Title I school. Wilkinston

High School has not met AYP standards in the 2004-2005 school year, 2005-2006 school year, or the 2006-2007 school year. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for five years.

Stafford High School is located in an urban school district in north central Georgia. The school has an enrollment of 1938 students with a large minority population (97%). The school has a low percentage of economically disadvantaged students which does not qualify the school as a Title I school. Stafford High School met AYP standards in the 2004-2005 school year and 2005-2006 school year. The school did not meet AYP standards for 2006-2007 school year. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for six years.

Dubberly High School is located in a rural district in southwest Georgia. The school has an enrollment of 1138 students with a large minority population (95%). The school has a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students (88%) which does qualifies the school as a Title I school. Dubberly High School did not meet AYP standards in the 2004-2005 school year, 2005-2006 school year, or 2006-2007 school year. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for four years.

Trion High School is located in an urban district in north central Georgia. The school has an enrollment of 2005 students with a large minority population (89%). The school has a low percentage of economically disadvantaged students which does not qualify the school as a Title I school. Trion High School did not meet AYP standards in the 2004-2005 school year or 2005-2006 school year. The school did meet AYP standards for the 2006-2007 school year. The school has been involved in smaller learning communities for six years.

Table 1

High School Demographic Information

School #	Students	Teachers	Asian	Black	White	Hispanic	Other	Econ. Disad. %	Yrs. In SLC
Durden	2072	109	0	98	0	0	2	70	5
Westlake	1698	96	0	55	42	0	3	37	5
Statesville	1467	96	0	45	53	0	2	41	5
Ringwald	1358	80	0	1	96	1	2	21	5
Clarkeston	1514	93	2	55	32	10	1	41	5
Wilkinston	1570	99	0	39	59	0	2	41	5
Stafford	1938	95	1	97	1	1	0	27	6
Dubberly	1138	68	0	95	4	0	1	88	4
Trion	2005	130	3	89	4	4	0	42	6
Average	1640.0	96.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	45.3	5.1
Maximum	2072.0	130.0	3.0	98.0	96.0	10.0	3.0	88.0	6.0
Minimum	1138.0	68.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.0	4.0

Table 2

Administrator Demographic Information

Admin #	Age	Sex	Adm Exp	Adm Exp w/i school	Degree Attained			Ethnicity	
					MEd	EdS	EdD/PhD	White	Black
Jim Mayes	38	M	3	3		x		x	
Mary Yancy	35	F	4.5	3	x			x	
Gil Brass	59	M	6	2		x	x		x
Bill Knight	43	F	2	2		x			x
Betty Garvin	47	F	11	11			x	x	
Kathy Lester	51	F	3	3		x			x
Keisha Carver	57	M	19	6		x			x
Leon Eason	63	M	18	12		x		x	
Carl Young	44	M	7	4	x			x	
Average	48.6		8.2	5.1	2	6	2	5	4

Findings

Research Question 1

What are the compelling forces experienced by Georgia high school principals
implementing smaller learning communities?

In completing the review of literature, the researcher found ten common
compelling forces identified by researchers as the common forces experienced by
administrators for implementing smaller learning communities. These ten factors are
achievement, affiliation/belonging, cost, curriculum quality, equity, parent involvement
and satisfaction, preparation for higher education, safety and order, teacher attitudes and
satisfaction, and truancy and dropouts. Two other compelling factors were found during
the interview process, accountability and data-driven decision making. Participant names
have been changed to protect anonymity: Jim Mayes, Mary Yancy, Gil Brass, Betty
Garvin, Kathy Lester, Keisha Carver, Leon Eason, Carl Young, and Bill Knight. A
description of the findings follows.

Accountability. While the literature review did not reveal accountability as a
common compelling force for implementing smaller learning communities, five
participants of the nine interviewees concluded that state and federal accountability
standards had led them to a reform effort. Mayes stated, "When AYP [adequate yearly
progress] came about, our faculty realized that we needed to sit up and take notice of
every student's performance. After all, most of our kids were doing well and their parents
were satisfied. Others had come to expect low performance from others and their support
structures."

Achievement. Five participants of the nine interviewed responded that student achievement was a compelling force for implementing smaller learning communities. Georgia high school graduation test results and accountability, adequate yearly progress as defined by the *No Child Left Behind Act,* and high failures rates were the most common examples of low student achievement that were cited. According to Yancy, "Some of the things we noticed about our kids were the SLC's allow us to focus on the academic needs of the individual student. We are really looking to make sure that none of the kids were slipping through the cracks." Lester concluded, "Achievement is the number one reason; the reporting of achievement provides the ability to make data-based decisions."

Affiliation/Belonging. Six participants of the nine interviewed participants responded that students' and teachers' sense of affiliation/belonging was a compelling force for implementing smaller learning communities. Giving students a common group of teachers, personalization, relationship-building, and collaboration were the most common examples of affiliation/belonging that were citied. Yancy stated, "SLC's gave us the most effective means of having our faculty to work together. It allows us to pair people together to strengthen each other." "Breaking into smaller learning communities made it easier for teachers and faculty to get to know students and track their progress as well as made it easier for students to identify with certain teachers," according to Knight. Building meaningful relationships was a common compelling force that was mentioned by the participants. Carver concluded, "We could build better relationships with children, staff, and administration. It allows us to better know the students we are working with, the issues they are having, good or bad, and how we can intervene."

Cost. While the research revealed that some educators are seeking ways to use larger facilities and faculties more efficiently, cost was not mentioned as a compelling force for any of the nine interviews conducted by the researcher.

Curriculum Quality. Among the factors that lead many schools to implement smaller learning communities, curriculum quality was not mentioned in any of the nine interviews conducted by the researcher. Researchers conclude that although larger learning environments offer more courses, only a small percentage of students benefited from the additional offerings (Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, and Moss, 2000). However factors that level that ability of smaller learning environments to provide a comprehensive curriculum include technology, differentiated instructional strategies, joint-enrollment opportunities, post-secondary articulations, and work-study based instructional programs. With technological advances, schools have more curriculum options than in previous years.

Data-driven Decision Making. "Following the surge of accountability efforts at that state and federal levels, the age of data exploration began. Our school was essentially too big for any one person to be able to handle and monitor student progress and success," stated Knight. According to him and three other participants, the need to look closely at each individual student's progress and achievement led them in search of a reform effort. "The restructuring design of smaller learning communities allowed us the opportunity to divide and conquer the monumental task of reviewing performance data," according to Lester.

Equity. Two participants of the nine interviewed stated that equity and closing achievement gaps were important compelling forces for school reform, particularly

smaller learning communities. Brass stated, "When you begin looking at students who are not achieving, you see one group that is outperforming another – whether that is a subgroup based on gender, race, or socio-economic status. SLC's allow you to identify these groups and work individually to even the score so that all students are able to achieve." According to Lester, "Until we broke our larger population into smaller learning communities, there did not seem to be a whole lot of emphasis placed on working with groups that were not doing well. Now we focus on each child within the smaller, more personalized group and ways of closing the achievement gaps."

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

Preparation for Higher Education. While no participant directly mentioned students' preparation for higher education, each one implied that purpose for implementing smaller learning communities was to benefit the overall quality of education for each student and to increase his/her chances for graduation. Yancy stated, "SLC's create an environment where all students can achieve." In referring to students' sense of belonging, Garvin concluded, "SLC's allow teachers the opportunity to be able to talk about specific kids in order to see that those students need to get to the next level."

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The researcher believes that the implication is that in preparing all students for graduation, schools indeed are better preparing them for higher education.

Safety and Order. Based on the review of literature, a benefit of student affiliation and belonging is increased order and safety leading to a reduction in negative social behaviors. While almost two-thirds of participants stated that affiliation/belonging were compelling forces, none of them concluded that safety and order was a compelling force. Young stated, "Working with students, assisting them in any way, academically or with other matters, is the most positive thing about SLC's."

Teachers' Attitudes and Satisfaction. Two participants (22.2%) mentioned that teacher attitudes and satisfaction were compelling forces for implementing smaller learning communities. According to Mayes, "teacher morale was low. High administrative turnover and increasing accountability stakes left teachers feeling as if they were on the firing line. SLC's gave us the mechanism for building a sense of shared responsibility and teamwork." Yancy stated "teachers seldom saw the need to work together for a common goal, that goal being the academic success of a particular child. They were more focused on covering their content and curriculum. SLC's provided a catalyst to bring different teachers together at one table for the benefit of a specific group of kids."

Truancy and Dropouts. Three participants of the nine interviewed provided truancy and dropouts as compelling forces for implementing smaller learning communities. Among the common factors were low graduation rates, low student attendance, and high dropout rates, particularly between the 9th and 10th grade. Eason shared, "we found that kids who were not doing well on the graduation test were not

graduating. While this seemed to be a common sense finding, it was not until we

implemented smaller learning communities that the majority of our faculty felt we could

have a positive affect on the graduation rate." Mayes stated, "While our student

attendance rate was low, no one felt capable or responsible for making a change. SLC's

gave teachers a practical approach to lower numbers and provide collaborative support

for a smaller group of students."

Table 3

Comparative Chart of Compelling Forces

COMPELLING FORCE	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES
Accountability	5
Achievement	5
Affiliation / Sense of belonging	6
Cost	0
Curriculum Quality	0
Data-driven Decision Making	4
Equity	2
Parent Involvement & Satisfaction	0
Preparation for Higher Education	0
Safety and Order	0
Teacher Attitudes & Satisfaction	2
Truancy & Dropouts	3

Summary

The researcher identified seven compelling forces experienced by administrators

implementing smaller learning communities: accountability; achievement;

affiliation/sense of belonging; data-driven decision making; equity; teacher attitudes and

satisfaction; and truancy and dropouts. The main compelling forces, having a frequency

of four or more responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities

as an organizational restructuring efforts were: (1) a desire to increase a student's

affiliation and sense of belonging in their school, (2) and attempt to increase student's

academic achievement, (3) an attempt to meet the accountability standards set forth in federal and state mandates, and (4) an attempt to involve more stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Research Question 2

What are the constraining forces experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities?

In completing the review of literature, the researcher found eight common constraining forces identified by researchers as the common forces experienced by administrators in implementing smaller learning communities. These eight factors are comprehensive curriculum; cultural expectations; demands on staff; fiscal and physical constraints; implementation strategies; large numbers within smaller learning communities; laws, regulations, policies, and procedures; and rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations. A description of the findings follows.

Comprehensive Curriculum. According to the review of literature, part of the comprehensive school mindset is the thought that it is essential to provide a wide variety of courses, ability grouping, and various extracurricular academic activities to pique the interest of students and keep them engaged in the learning process. These schools often utilized departmental structures [i.e. math department, science department] to develop curriculum offerings in isolation of other content areas. Some researchers argued that schools that attempted to maintain comprehensive school structures such as a departmentalized faculty, rigid student placements, a dean of discipline, etc. would be most likely unsuccessful. While none of the interviewees mentioned curriculum as a constraining force, all of them made reference to focusing on core academic subjects.

Only one participant, Brass, concluded, "The focus had to shift from accelerated and Advanced Placement students to the needs of the whole school."

Cultural Expectations. Four of the nine participants reported that cultural expectations were a constraining force they experienced in implementing smaller learning communities. Among the constraining forces, the participants cited teacher resistance to change from the traditional high school, parent resistance to change from high school practices of which they were familiar, and even misdirected student social expectations. Brass reported, "We anticipated external resistance from particularly affluent parents. They expect that the largest portion of public education funds should go to their child's education; forget about the rest. Administrators are expected to meet the needs of the accelerated child at any expense." Knight concluded, "Parents are familiar with the high school they went to, so when you change the structure from what they knew to SLC's, it can be intimidating." According to Garvin, "students had expectations that they should take classes based on the friends who were signed up for the same class. The concept of academic or career goals seemed to be a foreign concept."

Demands on Staff. The review of literature revealed that an organizational restructuring of a comprehensive high school can be an extremely labor intensive process including planning, implementation, monitoring, and revision of policies, procedures, and protocols. Only one participant reported that the demands of the staff have created a constraining force for implementing smaller learning communities. "The biggest obstacle has been to schedule everyone purely in a SLC's. This takes hours to review individual student's requests and registrations to avoid them crossing over into other schools. Teachers expected 100% purity while guidance counselors and administrators struggled

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under an unrealistic and unobtainable goal. These unrealistic expectations and unexpected challenges created a huge barrier at first," according to Young.

Fiscal and Physical Constraints. Two participants of the nine interviewees reported fiscal and physical constraints to implementing smaller learning communities. The constraints included older building structures and limited budgets for personnel. Mayes stated, "Our building is approximately 45 years old. It was designed on a comprehensive, departmental design. SLC's requires the physical rearrangement of cross-curricular teachers for the purpose of collaboration. Moving science labs is not a simple task. In some cases we couldn't move rooms, thereby limiting our pure SLC approach." Young reported, "Because we have a limited personnel budget, we did not have enough core content teachers to share equally among each of our four SLC's. We had to split teachers among two SLC's, which limited their efficiency and collaboration efforts."

Implementation Strategies. Implementation strategies refer to the "how to" processes that must be defined during a restructuring process. Only one participant reported that implementation strategies have presented a constraining force for implementing SLC's. Specifically, Carver reported the role of scheduling and involving special education staff and students in their SLC's had led to great resistance. "It appeared that special education was an after-thought. We had to do some major tweaking and retooling to assist teachers and students in the transition."

Large Numbers within SLC's. Two participants reported that their high school enrollment numbers had led to constraining forces for their smaller learning communities. With each school's enrollment over 1800 students, each of their four SLC's were

averaging 450 students. According to Lester, "Due to numbers we have to force students into other SLC's in order to balance the work load on the staff. Such practices are not conducive to the effective research-based strategies for SLC's." Young also concluded, "Having enough faculty to meet the needs of students is a constraining force, not because of budget, but because of students changing needs. We may have 450 kids request a set of career-based courses [basis for this school's SLCs] and 600 the next year. When we cannot adapt to the large numbers, kids are forced to take their second, third, or sometimes fourth curricular and/or career choice."

Laws, Regulations, Policies, and Procedures. Only one participant reported that local regulations and policies were creating a constraining force for implementing his SLC's. "The resistance can be passive. We found that while most folks were in favor of our restructuring, no one thought about the local policies that created barriers," according to Brass. His interview revealed that in many instances, the board of education had set policies that severely limited the implementation of smaller learning communities. One example that he provided dealt with students' ability to makeup missing assignments. Due to increased academic expectations under the SLC model, it was essential that students make-up all missing tasks in order to demonstrate content mastery. However, the local board of education policy set restrictions that hindered some students' ability to complete the missing work, particularly low-SES students who could not come to after school tutoring. Brass further reported, "At first our BOE members met us with resistance for requesting changes in our local policies. They felt that we should treat every child exactly the same instead of considering individual student needs. However, when we

began to experience success, they were more open to suggestions that could provide catalysts for increased student achievement."

Rigidity, Defensiveness, and Low Expectation. Six participants of the nine interviewed concluded that rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations created constraining forces for implementing smaller learning communities. Among the specific incidents reported were obstinate faculty members, resistance to change, low expectations of students' capabilities, defensiveness to collaboration, and comfort with the traditional status quo. According to these six participants, most resistance came from veteran teachers, "who have seen similar reform efforts come and go, and come again," according to Knight. Yancy shared, "The biggest resistance for teachers was the change process itself. In meeting with stakeholders, some were 100% on board, others cautiously optimistic, some who are waiting on results, and some that are down right pessimistic." "It's difficult to get everyone on the same page of music," stated Brass." He further reported, "Some people refuse to look at the big picture; all they want to know is 'How is this going to affect me?'." "Some of our teachers had the mentality that we should only be working with kids who wanting to be in school, typically our high socio-economic families. They were resistant to the idea that we were trying to keep some of the "other kids" in school," according to Knight. Eason, "we had to keep moving forward and insist that people move and make changes. Over time we changed their resistant beliefs and low expectations by changing their experiences."

Table 4

Comparative Chart of Constraining Forces

CONSTRAINING FORCE	FREQUENCY
Comprehensive Curriculum	0
Cultural Expectations	4
Demands on Staff	2
Fiscal & Physical Constraints	2
Implementation Strategies	1
Large Numbers within SLCs	2
Laws, Regulations, Policies, & Procedures	1
Rigidity, Defensiveness, & Low Expectations	6

Summary

The researcher identified seven constraining forces experienced by administrators

implementing smaller learning communities: cultural expectations; demands on staff;

fiscal and physical constraints; implementation strategies; large numbers within SLCs;

laws, regulations, policies, and procedures; and rigidity, defensiveness, and low

expectations. The main constraining forces, having a frequency of four or more

responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities as an

organizational restructuring efforts were: (1) a sense of rigidity, defensiveness, and low

expectations on the parts of all stakeholders and (2) to desire to maintain cultural

expectations.

Research Question 3

What frameworks for reframing organizations do Georgia high school principals use to

deal with the constraining forces of implementing smaller learning communities?

In an attempt to explain the breakdown with some organizations, Bolman and

Deal offer four lenses through which managers, administrators, and leaders should view

their organization in attempts to reframe their organizations. These metaphorical

frameworks, or lenses, include administrators analyzing force fields through (1) structural

lenses [the purposes and processes that assist the organization in being efficient and

effective], (2) human resource lenses [the balance between meeting the organization's

goal's and the goals of people within the organization], (3) political lenses [the allocation

of scarce resources and power and the negotiation of positions], and (4) symbolic lenses

[the deeper meanings and interpretations of actions and words]. The researcher analyzed

administrators' experiences in dealing with or overcoming constraining forces as they

implemented smaller learning communities using each of the nine strategies provided by

Bolman and Deal's research.

Strategic Planning: Structural Framework. The largest number of responses

dealing with strategic planning fell within the structural framework. Eight responses

were provided indicating that creating strategies to set objectives and coordinate

resources were strategies used by participants. Participants indicated they spent a great

deal of time forming committees to determine the objectives for the SLC reform effort.

Yancy indicated, "We established committees that involved them [all staff] in researching

improvement efforts for everything from teacher attendance to student achievement from

teacher morale to test scores." "The "how?" was extremely hard. We needed everyone to

look at the total picture and map out our direction," shared Lester.

Strategic Planning: Human Resource Framework. Three responses were

categorized as dealing with the human resource framework for strategic planning. These

responses were provided indicating that gatherings to promote participation were

strategies used by participants. "We intentionally established routine committee meetings

to solicit stakeholder input," stated Mayes. Garvin indicated that her school did a great

job of communicating after they realized there was resistance in small groups. "Providing established times for small groups to meet and share their concerns as well as research articles began breaking down many of our barriers of resistance." Knight concluded, "it was the monthly SLC gatherings that opened our lines of communication and collaboration."

Strategic Planning: Political Framework. Only two responses were categorized into the political framework for strategic planning, the least of the four categories. These responses were provided indicating that an arena to air conflict and realign power was provided. Young shared that the job descriptions, roles, and responsibilities for their leadership team was completely revised with input from participants. "It was actually a great exercise to discuss our organizational structure. We revisited some responsibilities that had been overlooked due to constant administrative turnover," he shared. Knight shared a similar experience, but also shared, "teachers knew to whom and where to report when they had conflicts. It was about dominating power, but it seemed to be a tremendous relief when they learned someone was responsible for working out the problems." An additional challenge faced by these two administrators was the other conflicts that arose from reassigning and redirecting authority and power within their organization, which will be discussed in a subsequent area.

Strategic Planning: Symbolic Framework. Three responses provided by participants alluded to the symbolic framework in dealing with strategic planning. These responses were provided indicating that rituals were created to signal responsibility, produce symbols, and negotiate meanings. "A great deal of time went into the decision-making process for what we would call our SLC's. We wanted the names to be

meaningful to all stakeholders as well as be symbolic of our organizational change," according to Yancy. "For us, we wanted SLC's to signal a new beginning with new expectations, especially the expectation that all students could and would be successful," stated Carver. Garvin shared, "SLC's were meant to create a sense of responsibility within every adult in our building to sit down and make decisions according to what is best for each student."

Table 5
Strategic Planning Framework Analysis

Framework:	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
	Creating strategies to set objectives and coordinate resources	Gatherings to promote participation	Arena to air conflict and realign power	Ritual to signal responsibility, produce symbols, negotiate meanings
Number of Responses	8	3	2	3

Table 6
 Respondent Strategic Planning Framework Analysis

Respondent	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Jim Mayes		Created nine committees to seek input from stakeholders		
Mary Yancy	Determine how school would be staffed; determine how students would be selected; which SLCs will be offered			We wanted names to be meaningful to stakeholders & be symbolic of our change
Gil Brass	Needed a whole picture approach; master plan before involving others;			

	determine how we would structure			
Bill Knight	Determine the specific objectives to be met before starting; determined scheduling options	Created committees to solicit stakeholder input	Determine who would be the power brokers in restructuring	
Betty Garvin		We met with everyone to determine How would we track the program; which teachers were best for which SLCs; what were our expectations/objectives		SLC's were meant to create a sense of responsibility within every adult
Kathy Lester	What courses would we offer; how many teachers would we need			
Keisha Carver	Determine what needs students had and how we would address			We wanted SLC's to signal a new beginning with new expectations
Leon Eason	Spending a great deal of time in committee meetings to determine the correct direction for student improvement			
Carl Young	Planning to determine needs; planning to determine direction; determine classroom protocols, when would we meet; what would be discussed	Planning to find common ground	Planning to determine job responsibilities and how accountability would be monitored	

The first restructuring tool suggested by Bolman and Deal was strategic planning. In analyzing the participants' responses, the researcher discovered that half of responses indicated these administrators spent their time in strategic planning dealing with

organizational goals, coordinating forms and processes, developing procedures, and

coordinating resources. While some administrators appeared to have dealt with

opportunities for stakeholders to participate, provide input, and negotiate meaning of the

organizational changes, these responses were intermittent at best.

Decision Making: Structural Framework. Three responses were provided

indicating that leaders established rational sequences to produce right decisions. Mayes

shared that before decisions were made all stakeholders had to be involved to provide all

perspectives. "It was amazing how easily most decisions could be made once we have all

stakeholders' opinions, including parents, boosters, board of education members in

addition to just our faculty and staff," declared Mayes. "While it took some time, later in

the process, our leadership team became a true team with representation and input from

many stakeholders, leading to better decisions and easier implementation," shared Lester.

Decision Making: Human Resource Framework. The largest number of responses

dealing with decision making fell within the human resource framework. Seven

responses were provided indicating that administrators created an open process to

produce commitment. Lester indicated that decision making in her school became

transparent. "We shared the research and facts in open meetings, published them in

weekly newsletters, and held called meetings to debate potential solutions," she shared.

According to Knight, a great deal of decision making was placed back on their teachers to

produce buy-in. "While they were responsible for devising solutions to simple and

complex problems, teachers were also responsible for providing support for their

solutions. This exercise quickly opened their eyes to how much of an open-system

schools can be," he declared. According to Carver, "everybody has multiple opportunities

for input into the decision making process. No one can say they were unaware of the areas being examined our how they could become involved in the process." Brass and Garvin made similar conclusions that having as many people involved as possible in making major decisions is critical. Young concluded, "While everyone understands that the principal has the final authority to make decisions, I can't think of any major undertaking that we've had that everyone didn't have input into making that decision."

Decision Making: Political Framework. Only one response was provided indicating that opportunities to gain or exercise power were provided. "Initially we didn't do a good job of involving everyone," according to Yancy. She further concluded, "However, after time, our leadership team members began to realize that part of their responsibility was to speak up and share both supporting and dissenting views in our leadership meetings. Sitting idly in the open and then criticizing in private was no longer an acceptable practice at our school."

Decision Making: Symbolic Framework. No responses were provided indicating that rituals existed to confirm values or create opportunities for bonding.

Table 7
Decision Making Framework Analysis

Framework	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Strategies	Rational sequence to produce right decision	Open process to produce commitment	Opportunity to gain or exercise power	Ritual to confirm values and create opportunities for bonding
Number of Responses	3	7	1	0

Table 8
 Respondent Decision Making Framework Analysis

Respondent	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Jim Mayes	Sought teacher input, parent input, academic booster, PTO in order to gather data			
Mary Yancy			Create shared leadership and ownership	
Gil Brass		What type of decisions; who would make them; who would be involved; establish protocols; give people a seat at the table		
Bill Knight		Seek to involve teachers and stakeholders to create buy-in		
Betty Garvin	Based on what's best for students; basis for improvement	Everybody has input		
Kathy Lester	Team approach to determine needs; analyze data; find gaps, how would be address	Involve everyone to create a sense of belonging and ownership		
Keisha Carver		Establish a cyclical protocol to flow from administrators to staff to students and parents to create open communication		
Leon Eason		Big decision should involve everyone		
Carl Young		Establish lines of communication to share needs; Develop consensus		

It was evident through the analysis of data that a clear majority of administrative responses fell into the human resource framework for dealing with decision-making

strategies. Administrators seemed to be more concerned with providing a forum for commitment and understanding in the decision-making process than the actual process for making a decision. Most administrators shared an open approach to discussing topics where every leadership participant shared common ground in the meeting. One of the major points of emphasis in restructuring comprehensive high schools into smaller learning communities is relationship building. It was apparent that the majority of these participants were creating relationships by allowing people within the organization find meaning and satisfaction in their work.

Reorganization: Structural Framework. Three responses were provided indicating that administrators realigned roles and responsibilities to fit tasks and the environment. "One difficult task for an administrator is making sure that roles and responsibilities are assigned to the right members. Some of our staff leadership had to be changed due to ineffective practices. I believe this created a sense of awareness and accountability among our faculty," shared Lester. Lester shared an account of redefining department chair job responsibilities from an old structure of plan autocratically and execute, to a cyclical process of planning, monitoring, seeking input from department members, and redefining processes. Young indicated, "We had a massive structural reorganization from physically moving classroom to reassigning personnel to reassigning responsibilities. We also found that it wasn't a one time decision to reorganize but an ongoing process based on the needs of students, faculty members, and the community."

Reorganization: Human Resource Framework. Three responses were provided indicating that maintaining a balance between human needs and formal roles was a strategy utilized by administrators in dealing with reorganization. "While we were

physically relocating teachers, we created surveys for them to complete to identify their areas on interests in order to place them with a SLC that they would have a connection to," shared Mayes. "I conducted individual interviews with every faculty member. I wanted each one to know how the reorganization effort would affect them and also have them identify where they felt they would best benefit students and the organization," declared Yancy.

Reorganization: Political Framework. The smallest number of responses dealing with reorganization fell within the political framework. Only one response was provided indicating that administrators redistributed power and formed new coalitions. Brass shared, "Even taken in its purest sense in moving teachers out of their imminent domain, the movement out of a room was critical to our success. I think primarily because it let faculty members know that this was something that wasn't going away." Brass further concluded that these moves created new collaborations among faculty members. "Instead of approaching challenges and problems as a faculty, they were used to only worrying about their individual or departmental problems. Now that they were no longer grouped by departments, they were forced to develop new relationships with their neighbors," he concluded. Through Brass explanation, the researcher identified that power once held by a few department chairs and the administrator in the building was now held by a number of other faculty members within the building including team leaders, counselors, lead custodians, and even clerical assistants. This redistribution of power to hold others accountable forged new coalitions.

Reorganization: Symbolic Framework. The largest number of responses dealing with reorganization fell within the symbolic framework. Five responses were provided

indicating that maintaining an image of accountability and responsiveness as well as negotiating new social orders were strategies utilized by administrators in dealing with the forces of implementing smaller learning communities. Knight concluded that reorganization was a major strategy that he utilized for implementing SLCs. He shared, "We went from operating as one large high school into operating as four schools within one building. Our people soon realized that the new organization made it easier to hold everyone accountable – students, teachers, and administrators." "Now when we see one of our colleagues struggling, it is everyone's responsibility to move this person to an acceptable level. Staff development, collaboration, whatever it takes – poor performance is everyone's responsibility to correct," according to Carver. Garvin concluded, "We meet every 4 ½ weeks. We know what is expected for us to review and those results are displayed on a data wall at the front entrance of the school. This data is expected to be the basis of our decisions."

Table 9
Reorganization Framework Analysis

Framework	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Strategies	Realign roles and responsibilities to fit tasks and environment	Maintain a balance between human needs and formal roles	Redistribute power and form new coalitions	Maintain image of account-ability and responsiveness; negotiate new social order
Number of Responses	3	3	1	5

Table 10
 Respondent Reorganizing Framework Analysis

Respondent	Structural	Human	Political	Symbolic

		Resource		
Jim Mayes		Constant teacher input and feedback; determine faculty strengths		
Mary Yancy		Analyze relationships; determine staff where staff could be most effective		
Gil Brass	Administrators realigned; staff reassignments; determining who and what are crucial		Moving teachers forced new coalitions among co-workers other than content department members	Support and/or redirect ineffective performance
Bill Knight				We went from operating one large school to 4 independent schools; accountability was closer to employees
Betty Garvin				Establish firm expectations for evaluations and performance
Kathy Lester	Redefining department responsibilities			Department chairs were given evaluation authority
Keisha Carver				By analyzing each other we are expected to provide a team approach to improvement
Leon Eason				
Carl Young	Physically moving people			

Part of the symbolic strategy in dealing with reorganization encompasses creating new social orders and culture for an organizational environment. The majority of

administrators responded that SLCs created a sense of ownership among their faculty members. Data walls and other visuals created a sense of pride and even competition, symbols of a paradigm shifts among faculty members, as they sought better ways to engage their students. While most administrators mentioned that the reorganization process involved identifying roles and responsibilities, defining levels of accountability, and maintaining workloads, almost all referred to a shift in the tone of their schools due to the reorganization process.

Evaluation: Structural Framework. Five responses were provided indicating administrators sought ways to distribute rewards or penalties and control performances. "In examining student performance, we had to look at teachers. Some of the controls meant crossing kids and sometimes teachers over into different SLCs," reported Eason. "One of the first challenges we faced in addressing goals was how we would recognize individuals [students and teachers] and celebrate," stated Brass. He further reported, "We developed a standardized process for evaluating and recognizing performance and success."

Evaluation: Human Resource Framework. Tying with the structural framework for the highest number of responses to evaluation processes, five responses were provided indicating that processes for helping individuals grow and improve existed. Mayes revealed, "I've been at ABC School for 10 years. We went from no evaluation process to truly looking at data and making choices according to what was needed and best for everyone." "I believe our evaluation process has become less a feared part for teachers; it's seen as more of a helpful process, not so much a process for dismissing employees," reported Knight. Young explained:

We do a lot of that [evaluation]. I think the way we pull our data every 4

½ weeks, we are constantly looking at what we are doing. Constantly

looking at areas where we can improve and work on our school

improvement goal. We are not just pulling things out of the sky to work

on, but our efforts are based on numbers and what we see is actually

happening in the school that is affected by this data.

"We had to learn to be open with evaluation pieces. If you don't give folks their

weaknesses, how can they improve? I believe in being honest and assisting folks

in their improvement efforts builds a true team," shared Carver.

Evaluation: Political Framework. No responses were provided indicating that

opportunities were provided for individuals to exercise power. The researcher did not

record any instances where administrators delegated administrative power beyond the

administrative level (assistant principals). While teachers were allowed opportunities for

input, according to several administrators, the final decisions rested with the

administrative teams.

Evaluation: Symbolic Framework. Only one response was provided indicating

that providing occasions to play roles in a shared drama was implementation strategy

used by administrators in implementing SLCs. Carver explained that her school had a

process for utilizing administrative interns, a process that assisted in broadening teachers'

perspectives of the whole school picture. In return, administrators rewarded teachers

occasionally by covering the teacher's class. "Having teachers evaluate their

administrator provides powerful insight for administrators' improvement efforts,"

according to Carver. She added, "If an evaluation process can be communicated as a goal

for improvement, then you can never gather too much information. However, people

have to get over the fear of being personally attacked. It's an improvement process."

Table 11
Evaluation Framework Analysis

Framework	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Strategies	Way to distribute rewards or penalties and control performance	Process for helping individuals grow and improve	Opportunity to exercise power	Occasion to play roles in a shared drama
Number of Responses	5	5	0	1

Table 12
Respondent Evaluating Framework Analysis

Respondent	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Jim Mayes	Needed to be based on data	Making choices according to what was needed and best for everyone		
Mary Yancy	Based solely on performance indicators from AYP			
Gil Brass	How we would recognize individuals [students and teachers] and celebrate	We discussed evaluation expectations and helped every employee develop an staff development improvement plan		
Bill Knight		our evaluation process has become less a feared part for teachers; it's seen as more of a helpful process		

Betty Garvin			
Kathy Lester	Determine strengths and weaknesses to develop plans		
Keisha Carver		We had to learn to be open with evaluation pieces.	A process for utilizing administrative interns, a process that assisted in broadening teachers' perspectives of the whole school picture
Leon Eason	Some of the controls meant crossing kids and sometimes teachers over into different SLCs		
Carl Young		Constantly looking at areas where we can improve and work on our school improvement goal	

In analyzing the responses of administrators regarding evaluation processes, it was clear during the interviews that their evaluation processes were structural in nature, pertaining to formal teacher evaluations based on student performances. Almost all administrators referred to their systems for gathering school performance data and using that data to help determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of teachers. However, an equal number of administrators referred to the power of school performance data to assist them in creating support structures for teachers through professional development opportunities and training. Most administrators seemed to place themselves in the lead role of assisting teachers as they identified personal areas of growth.

Resolving Conflicts: Structural Framework. Three responses were provided indicating that administrators maintained organizational goals by having authorities resolve conflict. "There were some cases where we [administrators] had to make some decisions; they weren't always popular. However, they are always made basis that if the data didn't indicate success we were willing to go with a different approach," stated Yancy. Brass shared that most of the conflict dealt with special education services. "You must have someone at the top who knows what's going on; someone who understands the whole process," he added.

Resolving Conflicts: Human Resource Framework. The largest number of responses dealing with resolving conflict fell within the human resource framework. Five responses were provided indicating that developing relationships by having individuals confront conflict was the most common strategy used by administrators. Mayes shared his experience of involving the "naysayers" on committees and sending them to SLC workshops and conferences. According to him, "We had our negative folks face the concept in person. This strategy allowed them to air their concerns and question folks who had been through the restructuring." Yancy concluded, "Most of our conflict was resolved through face to face communication; as long as everyone feels a part of the solution, most conflict is avoided or circumvented." Carver alluded to her practice of peer conferencing. "We had to learn to put our differences on the table and come together to reach and agreement. Anyone affected by the outcome was expected to provide input," she added.

Resolving Conflicts: Political Framework. No responses were provided indicating that developing power by bargaining, forcing, or manipulating others to win was an administrative strategy for dealing with compelling or constraining forces.

Resolving Conflicts: Symbolic Framework. Three responses were provided indicating that administrators developed shared values and used conflict to negotiate meaning. "Conflict coexists with change; the best way to handle the conflict is to be a good listener," according to Lester. According to Lester, developing buy-in into common values creates a team who is willing to work better in overcoming conflicts. Knight suggested, "talk about conflict on a smaller scale. In our monthly SLC meetings, teachers feel more comfortable within their group of teachers to express themselves if there is an area of conflicts." "The responsibility then lies on the leaders to take that conflict where it needs to go to be resolved," he added. Garvin reported, "Our leadership meetings had to change. Instead of administrators reporting changes, team members reported conflicts and challenges. Through root-level analysis, we would uncover the root cause and create solutions to overcome it." According to Garvin, "the meetings were less directed and negative; instead they were empowering and proactive."

Table 13
Resolving Conflicts Framework Analysis

Framework	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Strategies	Maintain organizational goals - having authorities resolve conflict	Develop relationships by having individuals confront conflict	Develop power by bargaining, forcing, or manipulating others to win	Develop shared values and use conflict to negotiate meaning
Number of Responses	3	5	0	3

Table 14

Respondent Resolving Conflicts Framework Analysis

Respondent	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Jim Mayes		Involving the "naysayers" on committees and sending them to SLC workshops and conferences		
Mary Yancy	Cases where we [administrators] had to make some decisions; they weren't always popular	As long as everyone feels a part of the solution, most conflict is avoided or circumvented		
Gil Brass	Must have someone at the top who knows what's going on			
Bill Knight				In our monthly SLC meetings, teachers feel more comfortable within their group of teachers to express themselves if there is an area of conflicts
Betty Garvin				Through root-level analysis, we would uncover the root cause and create solutions to overcome it.
Kathy Lester		We have to teach consensus building rather than taking majority votes		Conflict coexists with change; the best way to handle the conflict is to be a good listener
Keisha Carver		Put our differences on the table and come together		

		to reach and agreement.
Leon Eason	Even in gather stakeholder involvement, someone has to make the final decision	
Carl Young		Determine our absolutes and negotiate on minor issues

It was evident through the interview process that the change process from comprehensive high schools into smaller learning communities created a great deal of conflict among stakeholders. Most administrators dealt with the conflict by having stakeholders gather together in meetings (faculty meetings, retreats, department meetings) to identify the conflict, to identify the parties affected by the conflict, and to identify possible solutions to resolve the conflict. Some administrators felt that in order to eliminate conflict that they make informed decisions after gathering input; others felt a more directive approach was more appropriate. Three administrators alluded to their practices of identifying conflict and then guiding their faculties to one of three types of conclusions: (1) a authoritative decision made by the principal, (2) an informed decision where stakeholders provided input and the principal made the final decision, and (3) a collaborative decision where everyone, including the principal, shares in the responsibility of making the decision. In the opinion of the researcher, this was the best example of a symbolic approach to dealing with conflict by training faculty members to value their professional opportunity to be involved in the process of resolving conflict.

Goal Setting: Structural Framework. The largest number of responses dealing with goal setting fell within the structural framework. Five responses were provided

indicating goal setting primarily keeps the organizations headed in the right direction. For Mayes and Young, the NCLB accountability measure of AYP provided the direction for their schools. Beyond AYP, Young said, "our goals were established along with our strategic direction." According to Lester, "You have to establish goals to know where you are going. If you don't then the organization is spinning wheels." Knight made a similar conclusion when he shared, "knowing the goals is only half the battle; you must measure your progress and discuss the next steps if you are to achieve them."

Goal Setting: Human Resource Framework. Three responses were provided indicating that goal setting should keep people involved and communication open. According to Knight, goal setting and strategic planning go hand in hand.

> We identify goals for the school, we identify goals within our SLC, and
> we identify professional goals for each employee within the evaluation
> piece. Goal setting allows each individual to set goals and the determine
> strategies to achieve them, whether the goal is a district goal, school goal,
> or personal goal.

Garvin concluded, "Being able to meet as a group and look at our kids within the SLC helps us really come up with a plan to help kids. These are more like intervention strategies to make sure we hit our target; the goal gives us a common language."

Goal Setting: Political Framework. Only one response was provided indicating that goal setting provides an opportunity for individuals and groups to make interests known. "With the establishment of our freshmen academy, every teacher had input into what its purpose would be, particularly those of our faculty who also had children in our

school," according to Yancy. "Teachers developed the goals based on the interests of students, teachers, and parents to see their children succeed," she added.

Goal Setting: Symbolic Framework. Two responses were provided indicating that goal setting helped to develop symbols and shared values. "Each SLC developed goals and strategies to assist kids in being successful. The next step for us was to develop school improvement goals for the entire school based on the input of each SLC; through consensus we developed common targets and benchmarks and celebrated every month at our faculty meeting; these occasions became a bit competitive, but something everyone looked forward to," shared Eason. Carver reported, "Our data wall became symbolic of our success in reaching our goals. It gives people something to shoot for and something by which they can hold themselves accountable."

Table 15
Goal Setting Framework Analysis

Framework	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Strategies	Keep organization headed in the right direction	Keep people involved and communication open	Provide opportunity for individuals and groups to make interests known	Develop symbols and shared values
Number of Responses	5	3	1	2

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Table 16
Respondent Goal Setting Framework Analysis

Respondent	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Jim Mayes	NCLB standards set the goals and directions for our school			
Mary Yancy			Teachers developed goals based on interests of students, teachers, and parents to see their children succeed	
Gil Brass		Intervention strategies to make sure we hit our target; goals gave us a common language		
Bill Knight	Knowing the goals is only half the battle; you must measure your progress and discuss the next steps if you are to achieve them	Goal setting allows each individual to determine strategies to achieve them, whether the goal is a district, school goal, or personal goal.		
Betty Garvin		Being able to meet as a group and look at our kids within the SLC helps us really come up with a plan to help kids		
Kathy Lester	You have to establish goals to know where you are going. otherwise you're spinning wheels			
Keisha Carver				Our data wall became symbolic of our success
Leon Eason				Occasions (faculty meetings) became a bit competitive, but something everyone looked forward to

The majority of administrators felt that goal-setting was an important process that set the direction for the organization. Many indicated they spent the late spring reviewing school performance data with their stakeholders to determine the new direction for the upcoming year. The human resource and political strategies revolve around keeping people involved. One administrators shared the perspective of gathering student progress data every 4 ½ weeks. She shared that the data could simply be gathered by producing a standardized report; however, it was more important that members of the faculty be involved in reviewing the data and developing means for addressing the needs of students. One administrator identified an outward symbol (a series of charts utilized to display student achievement data). Others referred to the goal-setting process as a way to build consensus and identify the shared values and goals of the members of the organization.

Communication: Structural Framework. Five responses were provided indicating that communication was utilized to transmit facts and information. "Communication has to take more than one form in order to make sure that all stakeholders know what's going on," according to Lester. With SLCs, lines of communication become much clearer than a traditional high school according to Knight. "It's very clear cut as to who deals with what issues; you know where to go to get the information you need," he added. Garvin suggested that communication should be "frequent and in varied forms. I often

communicate information verbally and then follow up in writing to make sure the facts aren't misrepresented."

Communication: Human Resource Framework. The largest number of responses dealing with communication fell within the human resource framework. Nine responses were provided indicating communication should represent an exchange of information, needs, and feelings. Young provided an example in using technology [Intranet] "where teachers can go and express concerns completely anonymously. Reponses and replies are made to every concern and some folks even asked for clarification." Eason shared, "Our monthly SLC meetings encourage open discussion concerning students' progress and faculty frustrations. Our people have become accustomed to sharing their feelings concerning all aspects of school…sometimes too much (jokingly)." Brass shared, "we knew we had passed a milestone when teachers began asking questions about students' home lives and conditions." Knight shared the change in his leadership team. According to him the move to SLCs required a need to "have a representative team where people could exchange ideas and think outside the box in order to meet the needs of students."

Communication: Political Framework. Only one response was provided indicating that communication was used to influence or manipulate others. Mayes stated that his school presented every success along the stages of implementation with their local board of education. He shared, "While our BOE supported us in writing for the SLC grant, they still remained unsure of the restructuring. We took advantage of every opportunity to share the successes in supporting our decision hoping to influence their understanding and support of SLCs."

Communication: Symbolic Framework. While no responses were provided

indicating that communication was utilized in telling stories as a strategy for dealing with

compelling or constraining forces in implementing SLCs, many of the participants

recounted specific experiences in relating the strategies they used to deal with

constraining forces.

Table 17
Communication Framework Analysis

Framework	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Strategies	Transmit facts and information	Exchange information, needs, and feelings	Influence or manipulate others	Tell stories
Number of Responses	5	9	1	0

Table 18
Respondent Communication Framework Analysis

Respondent	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Jim Mayes		If someone is affected by a decision, we involve them in the process	We took advantage of every opportunity to share the successes in supporting our decision hoping to influence their (BOE) understanding and support of SLCs	
Mary Yancy	We inform our stakeholders of all issues	Our administrators become more of a facilitator in meetings rather than directing the discussions		
Gil Brass		We knew we had passed a milestone when teachers began asking questions about students' home lives and conditions		

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Bill Knight	It's very clear cut as to who deals with what issues	We have a representative team where people could exchange ideas and think outside the box in order to meet the needs of students
Betty Garvin	Frequent and in varied forms	SLC meetings allow us a small forum to discuss teachers' challenges and frustrations
Kathy Lester	Communication has to take more than one form in order to make sure that all stakeholders know what's going on	Our leadership expanded from 5 members to 25 members – more representative of the school
Keisha Carver	Critical function – someone needs to coordinate efforts (newsletter, articles, emails, etc.)	We established an open door policy – anything was fair game as long as a solution was also presented
Leon Eason		Our monthly SLC meetings encourage open discussion concerning students' progress and faculty frustrations
Carl Young		We use technology to allow teachers to ask for clarification or provide input into any issue in our building

Every administrator who was interviewed stated that communication was a

critical component to overcoming constraining forces in implementing smaller learning

communities. Almost two-thirds of the participants' responses indicated that the

communication process should be a forum where participants can readily exchange not

only information, but also their feelings, needs, and frustrations. While others shared

multiple forms of communication, most forms were formal or structured in nature. No

administrator indicated that he/she used stories or anecdotes to transmit information and few indicated that the communication process should be used to manipulate or influence others.

Meetings: Structural Framework. The largest number of responses dealing with meetings fell within the structural framework. Five responses were provided indicating that meetings were formal occasions for making decisions. "If we don't have frequent meetings anything can be assumed and many times the assumptions are incorrect, according to Lester. Carver shared that her school has an established meeting schedule at the beginning of the year. "Since they are scheduled in advance, we have an agenda, stay on track, and resolve issues; however, occasionally you have to provide opportunities for unexpected problems that may arise which need to be discussed," she added. Garvin shared a similar practice. "We have a set time to meet, we know what we will be discussing – kids are a huge part – and we remain consistent."

Meetings: Human Resource Framework. Three responses were provided indicating that meetings were informal occasions for involvement and sharing feelings. Yancy summarized, "I think that meetings whether they are community meetings or whether they are teacher meetings or whether they are informal SLC or faculty luncheon meetings are crucial because it keeps you in contact with positive forces that are working in school as well as the negative forces."

Meetings: Political Framework. No response was provided indicating that meetings were competitive occasions to win points.

Meetings: Symbolic Framework. The least number of responses for meetings fell within the symbolic framework. One response was provided indicating that meetings

were a sacred occasion to celebrate and transform the culture of the organization. "While I think meetings are important as a forum for bringing about other strategies, I think it's the least important strategy. However, the fact is that we do them once a month and eat once a month and everyone looks forward to the opportunities to share with each other," stated Young.

Table 19
Meetings Framework Analysis

Framework	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Strategies	Formal occasions for making decisions	Informal occasions for involvement, sharing feelings	Competitive occasions to win points	Sacred occasions to celebrate and transform the culture
Number of Responses	5	3	0	1

Table 20
Respondent Meetings Framework Analysis

Respondent	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Jim Mayes	We have a set time to meet, we know what we will be discussing – kids are a huge part – and we remain consistent			
Mary Yancy		Keeps you in contact with positive forces that are working in school as well as the negative forces		
Gil Brass	Need to be structured and involved students			
Bill Knight		We hope to avoid conflict with having everyone express concerns and disagreements and		

			then provide explanations
Betty Garvin	Since they are scheduled in advance, we have an agenda, stay on track, and resolve issues		
Kathy Lester	If we don't have frequent meetings anything can be assumed and many times the assumptions are incorrect		
Keisha Carver		We provided multiple means for faculty to express their concerns (even anonymously) and then address them at each SLC meeting	
Leon Eason			We have them once a month and eat once a month and everyone looks forward to the opportunities to share with each other
Carl Young	Should respect everyone's time and accomplish something		

The majority of administrators expressed that meetings were a formal occasion for discussion and making decision which should include agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets. A few indicated that they had utilized informal meeting, usually over lunch or a retreat setting, to solicit input and reactions to items before decisions were made. One administrator said she started every faculty meeting with a celebratory element like birthdays, accomplishments, or a job well done in order to set a positive tone for the meeting.

Motivation: Structural Framework. Two responses were provided indicating that motivation comes through economic incentives. Lester has provided economic incentives on a small scale which she said, "creates competition among SLCs to determine who will have the best attendance or passing rate. Monetary incentives are necessary, but they don't have to be on a large scale." "Our kids will compete for anything from a movie ticket to a free lunch coupon from a local restaurant," shared Brass. He added, "gift certificates are another great way to reward achievement and success."

Motivation: Human Resource Framework. Four responses were provided indicating that motivation was a result of growth and self-actualization. Yancy shared, "I think one of the best strategies for motivation is to create success. We put things out there in small pieces to assure ourselves that we are creating success." Garvin revealed, "I think it helps to have a smaller group of kids and being able to work with them on things that are important to them, their goals and objectives, and being able to get together in a group and motivate each other."

Motivation: Political Framework. Four responses were provided indicating that motivation comes through coercion, manipulation, and seduction. "Once we saw the expectations for NCLB and AYP and where we stood on the continuum, there was no choice but to change; accountability provided the major portion of our motivation," stated Mayes. Yancy reported a similar experience. "Change is a difficult process. Our administration had to force a lot of change through while emphasizing federal accountability. Once we began experiencing success, internal motivation followed," shared Lester.

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Motivation: Symbolic Framework. The largest number of responses dealing with motivation fell within the symbolic framework. Five responses were provided indicating that motivation came by way of symbols and celebrations. Yancy shared that in addition to scheduled monthly meetings for sharing information and student achievement, these meetings occur and informal luncheons to celebrate small successes. "We find at least one item to celebrate each time we gather; sometimes it's as simple as sharing a miniature chocolate bar with everyone. Teachers come to expect that "small" celebration," she added. "At the beginning of each year, we rally our troops; we emphasize the successes of the previous year and set higher expectations for the upcoming year," shared Lester. According to Knight his school celebrates through positive reinforcement and the cheerleading approach. "The focus of what is discussed is success. We've moved from a doom and gloom approach to what we are doing to create the success we have experienced," he added. Carver summarized:

> Do whatever you can to motivate the teachers, because when the teachers
> are happy they will do everything they can in order to have successful
> students. That's very important. A kind thank you, a treat every now and
> then, the brag board we have, providing teachers with lunch, are all ways
> to motivate them.

Young concluded, "The emphasis on celebration and eating together has increased the intimacy. I don't know if we'll ever get 100% participation, but at least it lets the faculty know that they matter to the administration and that we want to celebrate when we have something good."

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Table 21

Motivation Framework Analysis

Framework	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Strategies	Economic incentives	Growth and self-actualization	Coercion, manipulation, and seduction	Symbols and celebrations
Number of Responses	2	4	4	5

Table 22

Respondent Motivation Framework Analysis

Respondent	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Jim Mayes			Once we saw the expectations for NCLB and AYP and where we stood on the continuum, there was no choice but to change	
Mary Yancy		We put things out there in small pieces to assure ourselves that we are creating success		We find at least one item to celebrate each time we gather
Gil Brass	Kids will compete for anything from a movie ticket to a free lunch coupon from a local restaurant			
Bill Knight			When we moved teachers, we made deals; some agreed, some have to be forced	Our school celebrates through positive reinforcement and the cheerleading approach
Betty Garvin		Being able to get together in a group & motivate each other		

Kathy Lester	Monetary incentives are necessary, but they don't have to be on a large scale		Our administration had to force a lot of change through while emphasizing federal accountability	At the beginning of each year, we rally our troops; we emphasize the successes of the previous year and set higher expectations for the upcoming year
Keisha Carver		Constantly reviewing data to recognize our achievement		Do whatever you can to motivate the teachers, because when the teachers are happy they will do everything they can in order to have successful students
Leon Eason			We sold some teachers simply on benefits they would receive from moving to SLCs	
Carl Young		We made a paradigm shift from discussing gloom and doom issues to our achievements		The emphasis on celebration and eating together has increased the intimacy

Of the nine strategies proposed by Bolman and Deal in dealing with organizational change, motivation was the only strategy in which the symbolic framework had the highest percentage of responses. One-third of the participants' responses dealt with symbols and celebrations being the source of motivation for overcoming the constraining forces of implementing smaller learning communities. The political framework and human resource framework tied with an equal number of responses. The majority of participants indicated that coercion and manipulation were manifested through federal and state mandates, while other administrators indicated that their employees were intrinsically motivated by seeing professional and personal growth.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the compelling and constraining forces experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities and analyze the strategies used by administrators to overcome the constraining forces using Bolman and Deal's frameworks for reframing organizations. The researcher identified seven compelling forces experienced by administrators while implementing smaller learning communities including: accountability, achievement, affiliation and sense of belonging, data-driven decision making, equity, teacher attitudes and satisfaction, and truancy and dropouts. Secondly, the researcher identified seven constraining forces experienced by administrators while implementing smaller learning communities including: cultural expectations; demands on staff; fiscal and physical constraints; implementation strategies; large numbers within SLCs; laws, regulations, policies, and procedures; and rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations.

In analyzing the strategies utilized by administrators to overcome constraining forces through Bolman and Deal's frameworks, the researcher found that the majority of strategies provided by participants fell within the human resource framework. The second largest group of responses fell within the structural framework followed by the symbolic framework and then the political framework.

Table 23
Comparative Chart for Frameworks

Framework	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Number of Responses	39	42	10	20

Table 24

Top Five Compelling and Constraining Forces

COMPELLING	FREQUENCY	
Affiliation/Sense of Belonging	6	
Accountability	5	
Achievement	5	
Data-Driven Decision Making	4	
Truancy & Dropouts	4	
CONSTRAINING	FREQUENCY	FRAMEWORK
Rigidity, Defensiveness, & Low Expectations	6	Human Resource
Cultural Expectations	4	Human Resource
Fiscal & Physical Constraints	2	Structural
Large Numbers within SLC's	2	Structural
Demands on Staff	2	Structural

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the compelling and constraining forces experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities as well as analyze strategies used by administrators to overcome the constraining forces using Bolman and Deal's frameworks for reframing organizations. The researcher proposed to categorize the strategies used to overcome constraining forces into four categories of change: structural framework, human resources framework, political framework, and symbolic framework.

The researcher conducted nine interviews with high school principals who had implemented SLCs in their high schools. The nine interviewees were a representative sample of 49 restructured high schools within 13 school districts in the state of Georgia. These 49 high schools were participants in a federally funded smaller learning communities grant for the purpose of restructuring a larger, comprehensive high school with an enrollment of 1,000 students or more into smaller subunits. These smaller autonomous subunits of larger schools operate as a separate entity, running its own budget and planning its own programs. Additionally, smaller learning communities are known as: autonomous small schools; focus or theme-based schools; historically small schools; freestanding schools; academies; alternative schools; schools-within-schools; schools-within-buildings; house plans; career academies; pathways; pods; clusters; mini-schools; multiplexes; scatterplexes; charter schools; pilot schools; or magnet schools. Examples found in the research included: comprehensive high schools of 1,000 students

or more being subdivided into grades house (i.e. 9th grade house, 10th grade house); career

focused academies (i.e. School of Health, School of Business); subgroups with

specialized curriculum (i.e. fine arts academies, technology academies); and other various

types. The research on SLCs did not support subdividing high schools based on academic

abilities, whether those abilities are categorized as academic deficiencies or academic

giftedness, socio-economic backgrounds, or other demographic indicators.

Data analysis was conducted as an activity simultaneously with data collection,

data interpretations, and narrative report writing. The researcher transcribed each

interview session and categorized the responses into four re-organizational frameworks,

according to descriptors provided in Bolman and Deal's research, using a color coding

system [Appendix B]. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect anonymity: Jim Mayes; Mary

Yancy; Gil Brass; Betty Garvin; Kathy Lester; Keisha Carver; Leon Eason; Carl Young;

and Bill Knight. The categories were: structural framework; human resources framework;

political framework; and symbolic framework. The researcher examined the findings to

determine if common experiences existed among administrators concerning the

compelling and constraining forces of implementing a smaller learning community as

well as common strategies for overcoming constraining forces.

The following research questions were developed to guide the research process:

1. What are the compelling forces experienced by Georgia high school principals
   implementing smaller learning communities?

2. What are the constraining forces experienced by Georgia high school
   principals implementing smaller learning communities?

3. What frameworks for reframing organizations do Georgia high school principals use to deal with the constraining forces of implementing smaller learning communities?

Current Status of High Schools

Based on national research and reports indicating the poor academic performance of America's high schools and the achievement gaps that exits among subgroups, the U.S. Department of Education developed a strategic plan that serves as a map for all Departmental activities and investments, *the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*. The writers of the plan specifically focused on, among other areas, improving the performance of high school students and holding educators accountable for raising the academic achievement level of all students. The U.S. Department of Education set forth to work with states to ensure students attain the strong academic knowledge and skills necessary for further success in postsecondary education and adult life; to encourage students to take more rigorous courses, especially in the areas of math and science; and to commit to ensuring the nation's schools are safe environments conducive to learning. Through *NCLB,* members of the US Department of Education have sought to pressure local educational agencies to close the achievement gaps between subgroups of students, including disadvantaged students, minority students, and students with disabilities, compared to their peers and to encourage schools to change their culture so all students receive the support and high-quality instruction they need to meet higher expectations. High school administrators are, therefore, faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles to reforming their educational environments.

Most high school have remained structured the same way over the last 50 years, but recently, some high schools have begun to implement smaller learning communities based the on the suggestions of researchers that the positive outcomes associated with SLCs stem from a school's ability to create close, personal environments in which teachers can work collaboratively, with each other and with a small set of students, to challenge students, support learning, and increase student achievement. In the state of Georgia 49 schools have undergone the transitions into smaller learning communities. This represents 14.1% of the high schools in Georgia.

Discussion of Findings

Compelling Forces

The literature revealed ten compelling forces as the forces that have influenced high school administrators to implement smaller learning communities. These ten factors are achievement, affiliation/belonging, cost, curriculum quality, equity, parent involvement and satisfaction, preparation for higher education, safety and order, teacher attitudes and satisfaction, and truancy and dropouts (Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Bickel, 1999; Cotton, 1996a; Cotton, 1996b; Cushman, 1999; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, & Moss, 2000, Mitchell, 2000; Oxley, 1989; Oxley, 1996; Oxley, 2000; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1998; Raywid, 1999; Roellke, 1996; Wasley, Fine, King, Powell, Holland, Gladden, & Mosak, 2000; Wasley & Lear, 2001). The researcher identified seven compelling forces for Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. These seven forces were convergent with the literature: accountability; achievement; affiliation/belonging; data-driven decision making; equity; teacher attitudes and satisfaction; and truancy and

dropouts. Two additional compelling forces, accountability and data-driven decision making, were not found in the review of literature.

The most frequent compelling force for Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities was affiliation / sense of belonging. In the review of literature, a large number of authors referred to smaller learning communities as a means for developing individual personalization for students in large environments where many only felt like a number. In school environments where student populations exceed 1,000 students, administrators felt many students lost identity among the large number of students trafficking through their buildings on a daily basis, particularly students who could not identify with a club, organization, athletic, or fine arts group. With a rising number of single parent homes in poverty, Georgia administrators are looking for ways to not only develop relationships with kids, but provide meaning and relevance to a curriculum that seems disconnected to their daily lives.

Several administrators were also aware of the achievement gaps between subgroups of students. Two administrators shared the results of a recent survey of students who had dropped out of school that revealed feelings that teachers did not care about them, acting as if they only taught for the paycheck. From a teacher's perspective, administrators revealed that teachers often taught as many as 180 kids per day. They felt they lacked the time and resources to provide one on one instruction, tutoring for struggling students, and make parent contacts.

Each administrator interviewed for this study shared his/her review of recent literature and the information gathered form SLC conferences through which they learned the benefits of smaller learning communities. Almost all of the

participants summarized that the single most important factor of SLCs was personalization, providing a common group of students with a common group of teachers. Most administrators utilized a practice of looping kids for two or three years with the same set of teachers. Other schools had utilized career interests to create a thematic approach to the curriculum hoping to tie in areas of post-secondary and financial interest to students in order to keep them engaged. In every case, administrators emphasized the importance of their faculties taking the time to contact parents and establish a positive rapport as well as develop a level of caring trust with each student. Some administrators admitted that the process to find such a faculty was difficult and in some cases even involved terminating faculty members and changing the hiring process to emphasize the importance of relationship building.

This study converged with the findings of previous researchers that smaller school environments act as a facilitating factor for other desirable practices to improve climate. Administrators concluded the success of the personalization of their schools through SLCs as evidenced by increased student attendance rates, lower frequencies of disciplinary action, a rise in school pride, lower usage of alcohol or drugs, increased student achievement on standardized test scores, increased promotion rates, and increased graduation rates. The SLC administrative arrangement not only empowered teachers but freed up more of the principal's schedule, allowing him/her to work collaboratively with his/her faculty on important issues, mainly getting to know their students.

Accountability and achievement were the second most frequently reported compelling forces shared by Georgia high school principals. These compelling forces are largely driven by national and state mandates to increase student achievement. While most administrators admitted that their faculties had been previously committed to high student achievement, many did not realize the wide achievement gaps revealed by the data analysis until they were forced to face the issue. As they and their faculties began to examine student achievement data by subgroups, they quickly found themselves developing intervention initiatives targeted at subgroups, and eventually at individual kids. One administrator shared that academic grouping within math classes had lead economically disadvantaged and minority students to take classes that did not teach the content which was accessed on the state's graduation tests. Unfortunately for administrators, these achievement principles, which have been assumed to be the unspoken fundamental purposes of education, have been thrust into the national spotlight. While most administrators felt that accountability and increased student achievement were compelling forces for SLCs, some shared that they felt the national spotlight on achievement was forcing some students to become frustrated with the process, leaving the educational system for substandard work experiences. This finding was convergent with the literature which indicated SLCs provided the operational mechanism for increasing and enhancing student performance and for boosting student achievement.

Truancy and dropouts factors, equity factors, and factors dealing with teacher attitudes and satisfaction were rarely discussed by participants. Based on the review of literature, these are issues that are frequently observed at the national level in America's high schools. Truancy and dropout rates are encompassed in accountability and

achievement factors as addressed in Georgia's annual accountability standards as well as

equity factors evidenced by state accountability standards which are disaggregated by

ethnic, socio-economic, and instructional subgroups. While the positive inference would

be that factors dealing with teacher attitudes and satisfaction are not issues of concern

within these schools, these issues have taken a back seat to accountability and

achievement due to the increasing political pressure. Administrators seem to be

continually seeking to assist teachers in balancing their loads between classroom

management, instructional planning, providing timely feedback to students, and

maintaining open lines of communication. The balancing act becomes extremely difficult

in an age of high stakes accountability where schools and teachers can be quickly labeled

ineffective and in need of improvement.

Although identified in the review of literature, other issues such as cost,

curriculum quality, parent involvement and satisfaction, preparation for higher education,

and safety and order were not mentioned by participants of this study as factors for

school reform (Cocklin, 1999; Cotton, 1996a; Gladden, 1998; Haller, Monk, Spotted

Bear, Griffith, and Moss, 2000; Halsey, 2004; Oxley, 1996; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1995;

Raywid, 1999; Steifel, Berne, Iatarola, and Frucher, 2000). While these forces are evident

in the national literature, most Georgia high schools are not located in metropolitan or

urban areas, thereby limiting some factors which are experienced by other administrators.

Most of these issues have taken a back seat to the national focus of student achievement.

Constraining Forces

The literature revealed eight constraining forces as the forces experienced by

administrators in implementing smaller learning communities. These eight factors are

comprehensive curriculum; cultural expectations; demands on staff; fiscal and physical constraints; implementation strategies; large numbers within smaller learning communities; laws, regulations, policies, and procedures; and rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations (Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Bickel, 1999; Cotton, 2004; Cotton, 2001; Cushman, 1995; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Mitchell, 2000; Oxley, 2004; Raywid, 1996; Raywid, 1995; Roellke, 1996; Wasley & Lear, 2001). The researcher identified seven constraining forces for Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities. These seven forces were convergent with the literature and included: cultural expectations; demands on staff; fiscal and physical constraints; implementation strategies; large numbers within smaller learning communities; laws, regulations, policies, and procedures; and rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations.

The main constraining forces, having a frequency of four or more responses, for administrators implementing smaller learning communities as an organizational restructuring efforts were: (1) a sense of rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations on the parts of all stakeholders and (2) to desire to maintain cultural expectations. These two areas accounted for 58.8% of the responses. While this is a large percentage, it represents a small number of respondents.

For the majority of administrators, teacher stakeholders were the group that was most resistant to change. Administrators reported that a portion of their faculties did not expect SLCs to reform student achievement and many were not willing to undergo major structural renovations within their building. Some administrators reported teacher resignations over issues of moving classrooms, teaching additional courses, and in some

cases simply the change process. Many reported that the SLC process realigned some of their leadership roles and responsibilities, causing a redistribution of power to different individuals, a fundamental characteristic of Bolman and Deal's political framework.

The second most commonly reported constraining force was cultural expectations. In most cases, administrators referred to stakeholders' expectations of keeping their schools the way they remembered it. Stakeholders were referenced as teachers, classified employees, and community members. In one case, an administrator shared the expectations that a segment of his student population did not anticipate having to take industrial or career-related classes. Parents expected a traditional academic approach for their children. In some cases these traditional expectations would lead to stakeholder resistance. Again, the number of responses for cultural expectations reported as a constraining force was minimal.

The researcher found that tangible constraining forces are of little concern to faculty members or administrators involved in high school reform efforts, including restructuring into smaller learning communities. Many concerns including large student populations, laws and regulations, physical building constraints, and financial constraints seem to have been overlooked by administrators as issues beyond their control.

Accountability issues seem to drive the efforts to reform these high schools into providing more positive school cultures and environments for greater student achievement. Most administrators felt that federal and state accountability measures were forcing a change based on research-based strategies. Rather than be dictated a restructuring strategy from external sources, administrators reported they worked through their stakeholders and chose SLCs as their model. The sense of urgency created by

federal and state accountability standards provided administrators with a quasi-mandate

for moving forward with school reform. These issues fall more into Bolman and Deal's

categories involving structural and human resources. The main concerns from

stakeholders seem to be the psychological questions including, but not limited to, 1) how

will this change affect me?; 2) We've never done this before; 3) We've done this before

and it won't work this time either; 4) Things are just fine, we don't need to change.

While administrators must deal with these constraining forces, they seem to take a back

seat to the change process. These issues seem to revolve around the political and

symbolic frameworks referenced in Bolman and Deal's work.

Strategies for Reframing Organizations

Bolman and Deal recommend that in order for administrators to be effective, they

must see their organizations from multiple angles (or frameworks). They, therefore, do

not make a recommendation that one framework is superior to others, simply another

lenses through which the leader can view. Therefore, the researcher's analysis of

administrative strategies did not seek to provide the best option for dealing with

constraining forces, but an understanding of what frameworks were used by

administrators and possible provide insight into other means of affecting positive change

in schools implementing smaller learning communities. For the purpose of this study, the

researcher interpreted the frameworks according to the following: structural framework –

issues dealing with processes, procedures, and operations of the organization; human

resource framework – issues dealing with stakeholders' needs, concerns, and

relationships within the organization; political framework – issues dealing with

distribution of resources, power, and influences, internal and external, to the

organization; and symbolic framework – issues dealing with meaning and defining culture for the organization.

As high schools were restructured by implementing SLCs, all components of the organization were influenced. After completing an analysis of administrative responses using the strategies suggested by Bolman and Deal, the researcher found that the majority of responses fell within the human resource framework. The human resource framework operates from the belief that an organization can be energizing, productive, and mutually rewarding. Administrators reported that the majority of their stakeholders were willing to make the changes necessary to create a more positive environment and increase student achievement. While the change of the traditional high school structure was largely influenced by external forces, SLCs seem to provide a good fit between the organization and the people who work within it. Administrators felt that stakeholder involvement in the implementation process provided individuals with meaningful and satisfying work, while the organizations got the talent and energy they need to succeed. SLCs, according to administrators, provided them with the opportunity to provide a catalyst for teachers and school workers to create positive relationships with students, reduce teachers' class sizes [one of the three major national restructuring initiatives], and increase student achievement and success while still offering the benefits of a large comprehensive high school including a broad curriculum and in some cases more employments opportunities.

Secondly, administrators utilized strategies that fell into the structural framework. It appears that administrators are trying to redefine the roles and responsibilities of their organizations while providing opportunities for stakeholders to give input into the procedures that would be a part of the school's reform, an approach that carries over into

the human resource framework. The structural framework reflects a belief in rationality and that the right arrangements minimize problems and maximize performance. Schools are now directed by accountability standards [goals] that are driving most school reform. Accountability standards seem to have created a structuralistic attitude, based on the indicators in Bolman and Deal's work, toward school reform. Administrators are faced with finding means of having appropriate forms of coordination and controls that ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.

Finally, the small number of responses relating to the symbolic and political framework, respectively, seems to indicate a lack of understanding on the part of administrators in utilizing these strategies for dealing with constraining forces. Most administrative responses seem to relate to the process of defining structural processes and dealing with issues relating to human resources. While these two categories deal, in part, with symbolic and political issues, they rely a great deal on directives which are defined by the administrator. It appears that the majority of power and influence within these schools remains with the principal and/or administrators within the building. Because schools are open systems, political and symbolic issues, as defined by Bolman and Deal, will arise. Most administrators shared from experiences of internal forces that created obstacles and challenges for making changes within their organizational structure like smaller learning communities. Having experienced the implementation of smaller learning communities first hand, it is the belief of the researcher that these issues are the most paramount in restructuring a comprehensive high school.

Conclusions

The researcher framed this study to identify the specific compelling and constraining forces experienced by Georgia high school principals implementing smaller learning communities and analyze the strategies they used to overcome the constraining forces. Since the researcher experienced the restructuring process of a Georgia high school, there are several conclusions the researcher drew directly from the research findings and some indirectly from personal experience.

1. Seven compelling forces were identified as being experienced by Georgia high school principals including: accountability; achievement; affiliation/belonging; data-driven decision making; equity; teacher attitudes and satisfaction; and truancy and dropouts.

2. Because schools operate in an open systems model, internal and external forces play a significant role in the operations. Of the seven compelling forces reported through the research findings, five forces deal with external forces: accountability; achievement; data-driven decision making; equity; and truancy and dropouts.

3. External compelling forces accounted for the majority of the responses given by administrators. The other two responses, affiliation/sense of belonging and teachers attitudes and satisfaction, were classified as internal compelling forces.

4. Most of the compelling forces for Georgia high school administrators and faculties have been a result of federal and state educational mandates to

improve the educational process for students and close the achievement gaps.

5. The majority of constraining forces can be classified as internal forces: cultural expectations; demands on staff; implementation strategies; large numbers within SLCs; and rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations.

6. The minority of the reported constraining forces would be categorized as external forces: fiscal and physical constraints; and laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.

7. Administrators spend the majority of their efforts in overcoming constraining forces dealing with structural and human resource strategies, leaving little time to deal with the political and symbolic frameworks that could possibly have a greater influence on the external forces.

8. Georgia administrators perceive smaller learning communities as an opportunity to maximize several restructuring techniques under one concept to facilitate a change in culture in their traditional high schools.

9. Georgia administrators appear to have primarily used structural and human resources strategies to overcome constraining forces, rarely utilizing political and symbolic strategies.

Implications

High school administrators are faced with overcoming the challenges and obstacles to reforming their educational environments, mainly due to external pressures such as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2000*. The significance of this study for high school principals was having the opportunity to share personal experiences concerning

the compelling and constraining forces, or the lack thereof, in making transitions into smaller learning communities (SLCs). In addition, they had the opportunity to share strategies used to deal with the constraining forces. By providing a framework for strategies, future administrators could have a resource for dealing with the forces involved in implementing smaller learning communities.

Administrators should spend a great deal of time dealing with human resource and structural strategies to deal with these constraining forces for implementing smaller learning communities when individual commitment and motivation are essential to meeting the organization's goals and when those goals are associated with a high quality output. Administrators should seek to provide ample time for stakeholders to understand the purpose of implementing smaller learning communities and the benefits and challenges they present. These opportunities will provide opportunities to allow stakeholder input, to clear misunderstandings, to create understanding and buy-in, and to establish their roles within the organization.

Since the state of Georgia is not a unionized state and collective bargaining does not exist, administrators are faced with finding creative measures since many of the needs of people within the organization, such as salary and advanced opportunities, are not within the administrator's control. Most administrators admitted that their human resource strategies were intentionally targeted at overcoming the most frequent constraining forces of stakeholder rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations, as well as, cultural expectations. These strategies included opportunities for stakeholders to express concerns, ask questions, share their feelings, and seek understanding.

Administrators who participated in this study seem to have focused a great deal on structural and human resources issues during the implementation of their smaller learning communities. Bolman and Deal's research suggests that when there are high levels of ambiguity and/or scare resources, the leaders should utilize the political and symbolic frameworks. Administrators who ignore the political and symbolic lenses for viewing change will most likely make only temporary changes in their school's structure without sustainability. Because schools are open systems and because school reform involves different groups of stakeholders, administrators will eventually be forced to deal with political and symbolic issues that arise.

Administrators cannot overlook the significance of the political and symbolic frameworks when dealing with constraining forces which arise during a restructuring process. A great deal of ambiguity exists when change occurs. By addressing the power structure, the allocation of scare resources, and by creating meaning and purpose in the change process, these two frameworks can create a strong new cultural climate.

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

This study reinforces the findings of previous research through identifying common compelling and constraining forces which are convergent with the literature. Through this study, the literature may be expanded by the discovery of additional compelling forces, accountability and data-driven decision-making, along with the findings that Georgia high school administrators have dealt with more internal issues

while implementing SLCs than they have in dealing with external factors. The study

revealed limitations regarding the effectiveness of SLCs since many other factors can

have an affect on the improvements in school culture and student performance.

Recommendations

Since 42 federally-funded, reformed, Georgia high schools exist, the researcher

recommends that further research be completed to get a broader sense of the specific

practices utilized by administrators. Furthered recommended is that additional research

be completed examining the political and symbolic frameworks, or lack thereof, utilized

by administrators to overcome high school reform's constraining forces. A future study is

recommended using the participants' comments to develop a quantitative survey to

determine the extent to which administrators utilize or fail to utilize political and

symbolic strategies to overcome constraining forces to change. A final recommendation

would be for research to be conducted surrounding the relationship between federal and

state accountability efforts and student performance in restructured Georgia high schools

as compared to their traditional, comprehensive counterparts.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

| Georgia Southern University |
| Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs |

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Phone: 912-681-5465		Administrative Annex
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-681-0719	Ovrsight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Martin G. Waters
318 Nevils-Denmark Rd.
Nevils, GA-31321

CC: Dr. Barbara Mallory
P.O. Box-8131

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

Date: January 19, 2007

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

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: <u>**H07124**</u>, and titled <u>**"An Analysis of Compelling and Constraining Forces Experienced by Georgia High School Principals Implementing Smaller Learning Communities"**</u>, 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 your proposed research.

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

Sincerely,

Julie B. Cole

Julie B. Cole
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview Questionnaire

1. What compelling forces did you experience implementing smaller learning
    communities?

      ☐ Achievement

      ☐ Affiliation/belonging

      ☐ Cost

      ☐ Curriculum quality

      ☐ Equity

      ☐ Parent involvement and satisfaction

      ☐ Preparation for higher education

      ☐ Safety and order

      ☐ Teacher attitudes and satisfaction

      ☐ Truancy and dropouts

Notes:

2. What constraining forces did you experience implementing smaller learning communities?

Comprehensive curriculum

Cultural expectations

Demands on staff

Fiscal and physical constraints

Implementation strategies

Large student numbers even with SLCs

Laws, regulations, policies, and procedures

Rigidity, defensiveness, and low expectations

Notes:

3. What strategies did you use / are you using to deal with the constraining forces?

(to be completed using Bolman & Deal (2003) Interpretations of Organizational

Process)

Process / Strategy	Structural Framework	Human Resource Framework	Political Framework	Symbolic Framework
Strategic Planning	Creating strategies to set objectives and coordinate resources	Gatherings to promote participation	Arena to air conflict and realign power	Ritual to signal responsibility, produce symbols, negotiate meanings
Decision making	Rational sequence to produce right decision	Open process to produce commitment	Opportunity to gain or exercise power	Ritual to confirm values and create opportunities for bonding
Reorganizing	Realign roles and responsibilities to fit tasks and environment	Maintain a balance between human needs and formal roles	Redistribute power and form new coalitions	Maintain an image of accountability and responsiveness; negotiate new social order
Evaluating	Way to distribute rewards or penalties and control performance	Process for helping individuals grow and improve	Opportunity to exercise power	Occasion to play roles in a shared drama
Approaching conflict	Maintain organizational goals by having authorities resolve conflict	Develop relationships by having individuals confront conflict	Develop power by bargaining, forcing, or manipulating others to win	Develop shared values and use conflict to negotiate meaning
Goal setting	Keep organization headed in the right direction	Keep people involved and communication open	Provide opportunity for individuals and groups to make interests known	Develop symbols and shared values
Communication	Transmit facts and information	Exchange information, needs, and feelings	Influence or manipulate others	Tell stories
Meetings	Formal occasions for making decisions	Informal occasions for involvement, sharing feelings	Competitive occasions to win points	Sacred occasions to celebrate and transform the culture
Motivation	Economic incentives	Growth and self-actualization	Coercion, manipulation, and seduction	Symbols and celebrations

Bolman & Deal (2003). Interpretations of Organizational Process