

**A Case Study Examining the Social and Educational Impact of
Public School Consolidation on Families and Students of
Sumter Central High in Rural South Alabama: After Year One**

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**MPA, Valdosta State University, 2000
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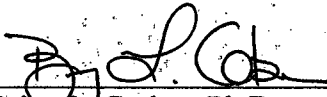
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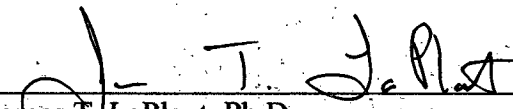
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ABSTRACT

As the economy continues to decline, increasing consideration for schools and districts to merge is possible. Decisions to merge should include the impact to the students and families in their distinctive communities because all are different. This case study examined the impact of the consolidation of two rural south Alabama high schools, Livingston and Sumter County, after one school year, on students and their families in three specific areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school and parental educational support.

For this case study, the researcher utilized surveys that were distributed to parents/guardians and educators to obtain their perspective about the impact of consolidation in the three specified areas. The surveys of both groups were corroborated to assist in substantiating the validity of the responses.

The findings revealed that the majority in both groups perceived the three surveyed areas were about the same after consolidation. However, a small percentage in both groups perceived some areas were better at the *current* location than the *previous*; some perceived areas were worse. Two major findings were associated with the location of the *current* school. The first finding was that the statistical test used in this study indicated very strong evidence of a relationship between the physical location of the *current* school and parental educational support. The second finding was that travel by school bus to the *current* school's location is longer (in distance and time) than what it was to the *previous* school. The modal group now travels 6-10 miles where before they traveled 0-5 miles. Comments provided by the parents/guardians along with the theoretical and conceptual framework, assisted in explaining the impact the mileage

difference, to include the consolidation of schools, has had on the students and their families. The possible effect on academic achievement was also assessed. Overall this case study, although limited in scope, helps to demonstrate that prior to implementing a consolidation policy a thorough assessment of the area, to include the families of students, is needed. By including in the assessment externalities that impact learning, better consolidation decisions are possible.

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This project is also dedicated to the loving memory of my Mom, Selena Lindsey Foster. Three things I treasure most about my Mom are, her faith in God, love for her children, and the courage she displayed in trying to complete her education even after giving birth to ten children.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Amount of Time: The number of minutes.

Consolidation: The words consolidation, merger, reorganization, and unification are used interchangeably and mean the combining of facilities.

Consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools: The combining of two high schools, Livingston and Sumter County, created a new high school: Sumter Central High School (SCHS).

Disciplinary Problems: A disciplinary action is any infraction occurring during a school-sponsored activity where students, who were under the authority of school personnel, participated in an action that resulted in a parent, guardian, or another person in authority being notified.

Educators: Those directly involved in the instruction and discipline of students to include administrators. When specific terms are used, the word is intended to mean that particular function/person, such as principal.

Guardian: This word is used interchangeably with parent to mean the person responsible for caring for the student.

Indiscipline: This term, derived from two dictionaries, means lack of discipline or control (Haller 1992, 154-155).

Location: The physical address where SCHS is located.

Merger: The words consolidation, merger, reorganization, and unification are used interchangeably and mean the combining of facilities.

Parent: This word is used interchangeably with guardian to mean the person responsible for caring for the student.

Parental Educational Support: The personal involvement of parents/guardians in the academic life of their child. This involvement includes attending school related events such as Open House, parent-teacher conferences, PTA/PTO, etc... Parental educational support does not include pageants, pep rallies, graduation, sporting events and extra-curricular activities.

Poverty: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, "... a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition [is used] to determine who is in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated for inflation using Consumer Price Index (CPI-U)" (2012b).

Reorganization: The words consolidation, merger, reorganization, and unification are used interchangeably and mean the combining of facilities.

Rural Area: Because this research specifically identifies the area of study as rural, the following definitions used by the U.S. Census Bureau are provided for clarity. Rural includes all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area. There are two types of urban areas. Those areas of 50,000 or more people, commonly called Urbanized Areas (UAs), and areas of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people are called Urban Clusters (UCs) (2012e). This research deals primarily with consolidation in rural areas.

School Personnel: This word means all personnel working in the school system besides educators.

Sumter Central High School (SCHS).

Unification: The words consolidation, merger, reorganization, and unification are used interchangeably and mean the combining of facilities.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

School consolidation continues to be a topic of discussion in many geographical areas. Along with discussing the process is the concern decision makers have about the creditability of data used to determine the feasibility of consolidation. This concern is reasonable as Bard, Gardener, and Wieland (2005) noted in the Rural School Consolidation Report prepared for the *National Rural Education Association's* (NREA) Executive Board. The authors referenced Jonathan Sher who reported that, "the majority of research on school consolidation was done by those wanting to perpetuate the urban, industrialized mind set, and to convince others to believe that consolidation was worthy "rather than try to find some objective truth" (2005, 6). Literature provides some support for skepticism about motives of those supporting consolidation.

Purpose of Study

This study sought to understand the impact of consolidation from the subjective perspective of the families of students who experienced consolidation in 2011. The families' viewpoint is crucial in determining the impact of consolidation because the affect on the students and their families was perhaps greater than what others experienced. In addition, the impact may have affected students' education. By knowing the impact(s) that families endured, policy makers can make informed decisions

regarding consolidation, as well as prepare for the changes that may arise when a future merger occurs.

Statement Guiding Study, and Research Areas Identified

The specific inquiry that guided this research involved evaluating how the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools affected students and the family members of students who attend Sumter Central High School (SCHS), the new school. This study evaluated survey responses from the students' families in the following three areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support. Educators were also surveyed but only in two of the three areas, disciplinary actions and parental educational support. The researcher believes parents are more knowledgeable about the actual time their child(ren) spent on the school bus than educators. The educators' perspectives in the two areas were used as comparative data to assist in determining the impact upon students and their families.

Statement of the Problem

The closure of two high schools, and then the establishment of a new school affected the social order that had been in place for decades. The two changes that students of SCHS and their family members encountered which were the basis for this research are listed below:

- A new school: According to WTOK.com, (a TV news website) students from two high schools combined resulting in SCHS starting its first school year of operation in August 2011 (2012a; 2012b). With the combining of the schools, a legacy of archrival teams (Livingston Cougars vs. Sumter

County Wildcats) has been dissolved. As a result, the archrivals are now allies (Sumter Central Jaguars) (Personal email communication with Glory McAboy on April 2, 2013).

- Different school location: The new school, SCHS, is located in York, Alabama, at a site between the previous high schools' location. The distance of SCHS from the previous locations of Livingston and Sumter County high schools is 3.77 and 5.46 miles respectively (Livingston 2013c and Sumter 2013d). In addition, the previous schools were located in a populated area within their respective city, whereas now the new school is located on the periphery of each city.

Importance of Study

Studies documenting parents' subjective views about consolidation are needed to supplement what communities already know about its affects. One particular area of interest in this study is parental educational support. This issue is important because, "[s]everal studies suggest that parent involvement, a factor positively associated with SES, [socioeconomic status] improves student attitudes toward school, homework habits, school attendance, and overall level of academic achievement" (Feuerstein 2001, 29). Because parental involvement is positively connected to academic achievement, it is wise to include information about the impact of consolidation on families whenever consolidation of schools is considered.

The search strategies used to locate literature for this study did not result in an abundance of current relevant information about consolidation. Only one source was located documenting the impact of consolidation on students and their families from their

perspective. Therefore, a second reason for this study is to generate additional original useful information to supplement existing sources as well as to expand policy makers' understanding about the holistic affects of consolidation, particularly in rural areas.

Personal Interest in Consolidation

The topic of school consolidation was chosen because of the continuing importance of education to the researcher and society. Most importantly, education changes people. Education gives humans "... skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways" (Coleman 2011, 295). For this reason, any function that impinges upon a person's education should be identified and then properly addressed so that learning may occur.

A final reason for the interest is that the two consolidated schools are located within the researcher's hometown school district. One of the schools, Sumter County High, is where four of the researcher's siblings and other family members graduated. Prior to consolidation, one of the siblings worked in both schools as a mobile educator teaching technology, and is currently employed as a counselor/teacher at SCHS, the new school.

Thoughts on Objectivity and Studying the Outcome of Consolidation

For more than 30 years, the researcher's residence has been located outside of the geographical area where the consolidation occurred. For this reason and others, the researcher remained detached from the consolidation process thereby eliminating any bias that may otherwise be attached to this research. The role of the researcher's sister in this study was to distribute the surveys and then collect the sealed responses from students and educators. Although an educator, she was not a participant in the study.

Additionally, this research was based on responses from those living in and directly affected by the consolidation process. Therefore, no reason exists for any partiality on behalf of the researcher while conducting, analyzing and recording the results of this study. While disassociation does have its advantages, so does association. The primary reason why access to the participants and data was granted hinges on the fact that the researcher had a connection to the school by being a former resident of Sumter County, along with personal kinship with a school employee. Without these associations, access to personnel to obtain permission to conduct this study would have been difficult.

Usefulness and Limitation of Information

Information derived from this study only measured the impact in one geographical location and in the three areas specified. Consequently, it is not intended nor assumed that this study is inclusive of all locations and functions that could be impacted by consolidation. The number of educators who participated in this study was small. Therefore, statistical analysis of this data was not warranted. However, the analysis is presented for informational purposes only. Even so, findings derived from this study provide citizens in this school district with an understanding of the impact of consolidation in the three areas of inquiry. As a case study, the results may also prove instructive for decision makers and families in other locations considering school consolidation. As a result, the responses provide decision makers with an opportunity to identify and measure benefits associated with the consolidation process and/or to address areas of concern that may not have been previously considered. From this perspective, decision makers can be proactive and properly address areas/functions that may become fragile in the consolidation process.

Furthermore, when decision makers are empowered with knowledge, resolutions can be developed prior to problems occurring. This approach should result in the consolidation process being strengthened.

Organization of the Research

Chapter 1 introduced the study, provided a rationale, and described the purpose for the research. Also included are the statements guiding the research and the specific areas of focus, statement of the problem, importance of the study, the researcher's personal interest in the topic, thoughts about objectivity in studying the outcome of consolidation, and the usefulness and limitations of information that this study produced.

Chapter 2 provides literature that supports this topic. Most sources only provided information about one or two areas (variables) studied. The "Rural School Consolidation Report" (Bard, Gardner, and Wieland 2005) that provided the history of mergers, and relevant information from previous studies related to consolidation was used extensively. A more recent study that also contained historic information is included. The conclusion and recommendations presented within this report are listed, as well as parents' perspectives about mergers that occurred in different geographical locations. Theories and concepts that were useful in explaining findings related to the three hypotheses are also provided.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used, my role as a researcher, the participants' role, and the format in which the findings are presented. The two surveys used to collect data from the parents/guardians of students and educators are described and then referenced as attachments. The research question that guided this study is, "how did the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools impact the family

members of students who currently attend Sumter Central High School in the three areas identified?”

Based on preliminary findings, the following hypotheses were derived.

- *Hypothesis No. 1: The consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools affects disciplinary problems amongst students.*
- *Hypothesis No. 2: The location of SCHS affects the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school.*
- *Hypothesis No. 3: The location of SCHS affects parental educational support.*

Limitations of the study are also included.

Chapter 4 provides a description of both schools prior to consolidation as well as the demographics of the students. The new school's location and service area are included to assist in understanding the structure of the new organization, which is the research site. Findings from the study, the analyzed responses of the parents/guardians, as well as the educators' are all presented in a tabular format along with graphic representation. Responses from these two study populations are presented primarily in a quantitative format. Cross-tabulation and *Pearson's Chi-Square* were the statistical tests used to assess the relationship among the categorical variables studied.

Chapter 5 focuses on interpreting and discussing the findings presented in the previous chapter. Findings were contrasted to the research literature with regard to the research question guiding this study. Hypotheses were assessed and theoretical perspectives and concepts were applied to the research findings. Within each hypothesis section, suggestions are offered to assist those making decisions about school

consolidation proposals. Recommendations for future studies are also presented. Finally, the researcher's reflections along with a summary and conclusion bring the chapter and study to a close.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This research focuses on studying the impact that school consolidation had on students and families from their perspective. Missing from nearly all the resources examined for this research was data relating specifically to the impact of school consolidation on families, to include their viewpoint about the merger. This absence may result in decision makers being misinformed about the feasibility of consolidation because the holistic affects are not being assessed and/or relative findings are not published. The impact on families, which simultaneously affects the educational process for students, must be factored into the decision making process. By demonstrating the impact of school consolidation on students and their families, the utility of including this information in future feasibility studies will be apparent. With more complete information in hand, policy makers will be empowered to make better decisions and this should reduce the number of problems typically associated with merging schools and districts.

Overview of the Literature

My argument for this study was supported by information derived from several resources referencing the history, feasibility, and concerns associated with school consolidation. The literature review consists of four distinct sections. The first section

provides a summary of the historical background of consolidation from four sources. One source was written in the 1890s, and the remaining three were written in 1992, 2005, and 2011, respectively. The latter two were national studies. The document written in 2005 was a comprehensive report describing several studies about the history of and issues related to consolidation. The 2011 document provided a current overview of what research related to consolidation revealed and meant. The second section in this chapter reviewed the results of three consolidation studies. One was a reconsideration of a previous study. Although none of the studies pertained directly to schools in Alabama, the information provided was useful in examining reasons schools and districts considered consolidation as an option. The third section contains scholarly sources covering issues that were universal to school and districts such as school size, discipline, and barriers to family involvement—diversity, poverty and school morale (social identity). The fourth and final section is discussion relating to the theoretical and conceptual framework that guided this research. The theories and concepts that were determined to be the most relevant are: 1) Symbolic Interactionism, 2) Functional Analysis, also known as Functionalism, Structural Functionalism, or Systems Theory, 3) Rational Choice Theory, 4) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and 5) Social and Human Capital.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of school consolidation and its history. Also included are topics addressing issues that have been associated with previous school mergers. Nearly all studies reviewed lacked input from the families and students who were or would be directly affected by the merger. Understanding the history, physical areas affected, as well as the social and educational impact of consolidation on students

and their families, suggests that educating students is not just in the hands of professionals. The parents' role in the educational process of their child is significant (ERS 2006; Feuerstein 2001; and Hill and Taylor 2004). This role may become more crucial when school consolidation occurs.

Historical Perspective

Introduction

Included in this section is information relating to four different resources that provided documentation relating to the history of school consolidation. The first account was written in the 1890s when consolidation was in its infancy. Therefore, not much detailed information is presented. This article is important because it identified some pros and cons associated with rural schools that occurred during the 1890s. The second account is research relating to school consolidations that occurred during the twentieth century. In this study, the researcher/author conveyed two specific reasons in support of mergers. The third historical account is a Rural Consolidation Report (from now on, the Rural Consolidation Report will be called the Report) prepared for the *National Rural Education Association* (NREA). This Report served a dual purpose. First, it provided historical information not covered in the previous sources. Second, it provided an extensive assessment of the impact of consolidation primarily from the system's perspective up to 2005. The fourth historical account is a brief published in 2011 that provided a current assessment of data related to the consolidation of schools and districts. This document detailed the efficiencies achieved with consolidation and discussed the possibility that some efficiencies may have been exceeded. This document was the only source that provided survey information pertaining to the families' perspective about the

impact of consolidation. However, the information provided in one study was not obtained until eight years after the merger. Therefore, even this source lacked a timely assessment that reflected the perspective of the students and families directly affected by the merger.

Consolidation Historical Account #1:

Problems Associated with Rural Schools in the 1890s

Funding plays a significant role in meeting the educational needs of students. Even as early as the 1890s, school funding was a concern (Blodgett 1893). The belief held by many people was that additional funding would “greatly improve” existing schools (Blodgett 1893, 76). Rural schools in particular were threatened by the lack of available funds. This threat existed, as Blodgett (1893) noted, because of differences in pay, and social and school systems for the city and country (the rural areas). Because of the many problems that existed, effective ways in which to address the issues were needed (Blodgett 1893). In the city, longer hours for school attendance were sought as a replacement for supervision of children. In the open country, supervision was not a problem because children were treated as capital by assisting in raising or harvesting products under parental guidance. While the city could quite easily generate the number of students and funds needed to organize schools, less money was generated from rural occupations, even with the help of children. This lack of funding, resulting from what Blodgett called, a “poverty of numbers” made it much more difficult to maintain a school (1893, 72).

Regardless of these difficulties, even in the 1890s, schooling was important and deemed necessary. As a result, creative and inexpensive ways of providing educational

services to some students were utilized. Georgia used ambulatory schools in geographical areas that met two essential requirements: the area lacked a permanent centralized building, and the area had a relatively low number of students needing educational services (Blodgett 1893, 76). In general, the weakness of rural schools was they often lacked two essential components: funding—the wages for teachers—and an adequate number of students (Blodgett 1893, 78).

Accomplishment Associated with Rural Living in the 1890s

Blodgett noted one significant advantage of rural opposed to city living associated with children: character development. Children living on the farm learned far more valuable lessons than what children in more formal settings learned. Blodgett concluded by stating, “No school-room exercises with children accustomed only to brick walls and paved streets can do for them in certain important elements of character and knowledge what is done for the country child by his surrounding conditions, even with the drawbacks of unrest and discontent with which so many endure rural life” (1893, 71-72). This influence was so distinctive that Blodgett considered rural knowledge to be “inaccessible to his city cousin” (Blodgett 1893, 71-72, 74). Character development in children in rural areas also benefitted teachers in the rural school system by lessening challenges typically associated with teaching. In contrast, teachers in city schools were not as fortunate (Blodgett 1893, 78).

Consolidation Historical Account #2

Emil J. Haller’s (1992) article, *High School Size and Student Indiscipline: Another Aspect of the School Consolidation Issue?*, briefly recapped the history of school consolidation. He noted that in the past, the one-room elementary schools and small high

school graduating classes with less than 20 students were considered the norm. The new norm has resulted in an increase in the size of school buildings as well as the number of students graduating from high school. Haller reasoned that the size differences are attributed to the transformation of education in rural America, which has resulted in a reduction in school districts from over 150,000 in the 1900s, to 16,000. This transformation movement appeared to have stopped in the early 1970s (Haller 1992, 145). Data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau from the United States Department of Commerce website indicates that the U.S. currently has more than 14,000 public school districts (2012c). This figure represents another decrease of about 2000 districts that occurred over the duration of nearly 40 years—from the 1970s to 2010.

According to Haller (1992), during the last decade of the 20th century, a renewed interest in school consolidation surfaced that appeared to focus on two areas. One was in the area of course offering for certain academic subjects. For example, smaller schools' consideration of advanced academic course offerings tends to be less flexible than larger schools. The second area of focus was another decline in rural population (1992, 145-147).

To clarify the reasons in support of school and district consolidation, Haller focused on what he called "the twin pillars of equity and efficiency" (1992, 146). He reasoned that, "Small schools are alleged to be inequitable because they are unable to offer the comprehensive programs typically found in larger institutions" (1992, 146). This lack of course offering may lead to high school students in smaller schools not receiving the same educational opportunities available to students in larger schools, even those in close proximity (Haller 1992, 146). Haller reasoned that because small schools

are considered less efficient than larger schools, “[h]ence, they are unreasonably burdensome to taxpayers” (1992, 146). Consolidation of districts and/or schools was viewed as one practical way to decrease the tax liability for citizens.

Consolidation Historical Account #3

National Study from mid 1800s to 2005

The Report, developed by NREA’s Consolidation Task Force provided the most comprehensive information about the history of mergers from the mid 1800s up to the year 2005. The Task Force members, Joe Bard, Clark Gardener, and Regi Wieland, referenced over 90 sources, including actual studies on mergers, when compiling this report. The general idea behind consolidation was that a “more thorough education” was thought to be attainable by combining smaller schools (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 1).

Many factors contributed to consolidation. In rural areas, schools became more accessible because of advancements in the transportation industry, to include better roads in which to travel that reduced the amount of time needed to gathered students. In urban areas, “[t]he prevailing belief during the industrial revolution was that education could contribute to an optimal social order using organizational techniques adapted from industry” (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 1). Using this approach, the “one best model” was established for educational facilities, which unquestionably provided for an overhaul of rural schools (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 1).

School Size: Does it Matter?

With consolidation issues facing various communities, the low number of students receiving educational services in each school was a concern. James Conant,

author of *The American High School Today*, studied this criterion, in conjunction with consolidation. Conant believed that, "...the most outstanding problem in education was the small high school, and that the elimination of small high schools would result in increased cost-effectiveness and greater curricular offerings" (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 2). From Conant's studies, a solution to the efficiency and academic issues that troubled small schools was derived. He concluded that, "...in order to offer the best possible college preparatory curriculum, a high school should have at least 100 students in its graduating class" (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 2). However, more recent studies on school and/or district size conflicts, rendering the conclusion that there are no universally agreed upon sizes for schools or districts (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 8). Although a universal size does not exist, the Report included findings from studies conducted by Howley and Bickel that did provide some guidance on the appropriate size for schools and/or districts. This research concluded, "the lower the socioeconomic status of the students and/or district, then the school enrollment should be small" (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 8). While recognizing the fact that additional information is needed to define what researchers Howley and Bickel meant by "small," no such information was provided in the Report.

Consolidation Decisions: Who Makes Them and Why?

The Task Force found many forces behind consolidation. Policy makers, private businesses, educational professionals, and other professionals—those who knew what was best—all contributed to the consolidation process. The professionals used consolidation as a technique to remove power from within the rural districts for the sole purpose of centralizing power. Once centralized, community desires were ignored (Bard,

Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 2-3). Specifically, “[p]arents and educators in rural communities who were interested in preparing students for life rather than educating them as “human capital” to contribute more to the nation’s well being, were considered backward and not knowledgeable enough to know what was best for education” (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 3): One primary goal associated with centralizing power was to produce students with the knowledge needed to response to national demands (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 2).

With space exploration on the rise, international competitiveness had its role in consolidation (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 2). “Both Sputnik and the Cold War [a period of global tension between the United States and the Soviet Union (NASA 2013)] created increased concerns that small high schools, most of which were rural, were not developing the kind of human capital needed to promote national security” (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 2). In the 1980s, the Nation at Risk report prompted the need to produce students who had the necessary “skills and values who would contribute to a national, social economic order” (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 3).

Consolidation: The Role of Economic Forces

The Task Force also noted that “economic downturns,” specifically in rural areas, also contributed to school consolidation (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 3). Two distinct eras were listed in the Report. The first occurred over a long time span—approximately 40 years. From 1933 to 1970, more than 30 million people left the farms in rural areas in pursuit of jobs in urban areas. With the decrease in rural population, to include students, some schools voluntarily combined thus minimizing the financial crisis. The second economic downturn occurred during the 1970s and 80s. Advancements in

technology in the 1980s contributed to the farm crisis, which once again resulted in a decline in the rural population. Again, with the loss of rural jobs, many people fled to urban areas where jobs were more plentiful (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 3).

Communities' Response to and Involvement in Consolidation

Research argues against larger schools. Studies have shown that the adage "bigger is better" is not true for everyone impacted by mergers. In fact, school consolidation is considered burdensome to some families because it creates greater hardships for children (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 4). Although concerns from community members were common, involvement in the consolidation process was often times limited because decision makers simply neglected to solicit their viewpoint. However, studies have shown that choosing not to include community members in the consolidation process have had adverse affects on educational participation and that "community disintegration increased" (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 4).

The community's response and resistance to consolidation was obvious. Common phrases that expressed citizens' reaction to consolidation were "loss of community identity" or "loss of community attachment" (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 5). The Report also referenced a study completed by Alan Peshkin that recorded the reaction of a citizen indicating the importance of the school to the community, thus disagreeing with consolidation measures: "Mansfield has a hard enough time now keeping on the map. If they moved the school, it'd be much harder. People go to things at school now even if they don't have kids in school. This is a football town and people know the kids. I'd hate to see consolidation. I like the things the way they are" (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 5). In some areas, the only source of social activity in rural areas was the school.

The school also provided employment for many community members and was the focus of many community and school activities (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 7).

Three comparative studies relating to the outcome of consolidation was referenced in the Report. Findings noted in the three studies suggest that successful consolidation outcomes are usually the result of having multiple decision makers, open communication, culture awareness, and public meetings. Adhering to guidelines will ensure that areas of concern will receive the appropriate attention from all parties prior to consolidating (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 5).

Advantages and Disadvantages Associated with Small Schools

According to the Task Force, research has demonstrated that some small schools existed simply because of their geographical location. From a study completed by Columbia University, several positive characteristics associated with small schools were noted. This study indicated that small schools were shown to have strengths not found in large schools. Some strengths were, the teacher-to-pupil ratio was lower, more students were involved in extracurricular activities and/or took academic courses, and some experienced a closer connection to their communities (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 6-7). Another finding noted in the Report was, “[r]esearch does not appear to support the assumption that the quality of school life is better when small schools consolidate or with larger schools” (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 7). This finding suggests any size school can adequately provide the educational services needed. It further suggests that Haller’s concern about small schools’ course offerings is reasonable, but certainly not applicable to all schools (1992, 146). Interestingly, “[u]rban school administrators themselves have turned to creating “schools within schools,” concluding

that large schools create an impersonal climate that contributes to school failure for some students” (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 7). Again, this action suggests that bigger does not appear to be the best learning environment for all students. A comparative percentage of students failing in larger versus smaller schools was not included in the Report. What was listed in the Report were four factors known to affect student achievement: “smaller school size (300 – 500 students); smaller class size, especially in elementary schools; challenging curriculum, and more highly qualified teacher[s]” (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 11).

Consolidation: Measuring the Impact

A natural effect of consolidation involves a loss of the community’s tax base and fiscal capacity (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 9). This effect is also noticeable in areas outside the classroom. One area noted in the Report was transportation for students. The Task Force referenced a study completed by Lu and Tweeten in which they found that bussing students negatively affects students’ achievement success. Specifically, the study revealed for every hour a fourth grader spent riding a bus, achievement scores were reduced by 2.6 points. For high school students the loss was .5 points (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 10).

Research focusing on the impact of consolidation by students and parents observed that there is a sense of feeling anonymous in bigger schools. Some of these students in larger schools seem to “disappear and fall through the cracks”; whereas others become system problems who give up on school and drop out (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 10).

Extracurricular activities were also affected. In larger schools, participation is limited because of the number of students competing. Because of this, only the “best” are chosen leaving the mediocre students with no opportunity to cultivate his/her particular skill, which leaves them with extra idle time. Additionally, a long bus ride impacts performance as well as attendance to participate in the activity (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 10).

Summary of NREA’s Task Force Findings

Following are the findings noted precisely by the Task Force (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 12).

- The educational and financial results of state mandated school district consolidations do not meet legislated expectations.
- There is no “ideal” size for schools and districts.
- “Size” does not guarantee success—effective schools come in all sizes.
- Smaller districts have higher achievement, affective and social outcomes.
- The larger a district becomes, the more resources are devoted to secondary or non-essential activities.
- Local school officials should be wary of merging several smaller elementary schools, at least if the goal is improved performance.
- After a school closure, out migration, population decline, and neighborhood deterioration are set in motion, and support for public education diminishes.
- There is no solid foundation for the belief that eliminating school districts will improve education, enhance cost-effectiveness or promote equality.
- Students from low-income areas have better achievement in small schools.

Although not all of the findings in the Report (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005) correspond directly to the variables identified in this study (disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support), those that are relevant will be discussed more fully in

Chapter 5 and others may be areas recommended for future studies. The primary reason for including all the findings is to clarify what this Report made known about the effects of consolidation in conspicuous areas, thereby providing a basis in which to research the effects in areas that are not as obvious.

Consolidation Historical Account #4

National Study: 2011

“Consolidation of Schools and Districts: What the Research Says and What it Means” developed by the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) in 2011 provided the most current overview of school and district consolidations. This study also detailed an economic outlook in regards to the possible continuation of school and district mergers. The authors, Craig Howley, Jerry Johnson, and Jennifer Petrie referenced nearly 80 different sources when producing this brief. Many of the same sources cited by the Consolidation Task Force members when writing the Report (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005), were used in this brief. Likewise, much of the historical account was the same.

Most important to this research was the distinction between the literatures, econometric studies and school quality studies, the authors used in preparing their brief. They reasoned that, “[e]conometric studies of district consolidation tend *not* to include the value of important educational contingencies such as extracurricular participation rates, parental involvement, and community support. These are what economists consider “externalities”—they don’t count in the analysis” (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 1). Yet, in their brief, the authors demonstrate the intrinsic value associated with school quality studies. In the same manner, the researcher’s study seeks to add to the educational

literature by analyzing the subjective perspective of the parents of students and educators who experienced consolidation in 2011. Incidentally, sociologists refer to these contingencies as “cultural capital” which implies an immeasurable wealth unrelated to currency (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 9).

Studies Reflecting the Subjective Perspective of Parents and/or Students

The outcome of recent consolidation studies that provided the subjective perspectives of parents and/or students was included in the authors’ brief. Each study yielded different, yet distinctive results. Findings from one study noted an adjustment period among all three groups—students, teachers and administrators—was experienced. Of the three groups, students were the most successful in adapting, as well as those associated with the receiving school (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 7). This finding may suggest that an adjustment period is a typical characteristic associated with consolidations. No specific information was provided regarding the length of time or the areas in which adjustments were necessary.

The West Virginia and Ohio studies provided opposing views of school consolidation experiences of parents and students. The West Virginia study was cited by students and their families as, “inflicting considerable harm” (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 7). Some differences experienced by the students at larger schools were:

[T]hey received less individual attention, endured longer bus rides to and from school (and hence longer days), and had fewer opportunities to participate in co-curricular and extracurricular activities. ... Families’ experiences included fewer opportunities to participate in formal school governance roles ... and increased barriers to participating informally in their children’s education: increased travel time, for example, proved a barrier to volunteering, visiting classrooms, and taking part in parent-teacher conferences (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 7).

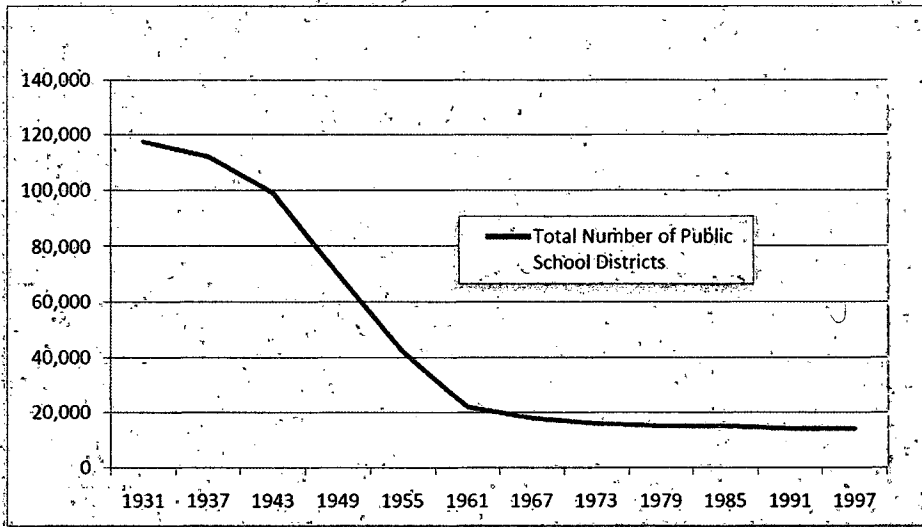
The remaining study investigated the perceptions of Ohio parents and students. This study was conducted eight years after a school district consolidated. Although no specific information was presented, other than the fact that the consolidation was based on a local decision, the findings indicated an overall satisfaction with the outcome (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 7). However, the late assessment does provide reason for speculation.

Districts, Schools and Students: Past and Present

Howley, Johnson, and Petrie (2011) also provided data detailing the historical account of public school districts in the U.S. This account, although very similar to the Report developed by NREA's Consolidation Task Force, provided a more detailed analysis of the trend. One chart developed by the authors, depicting the change in the number of schools and districts in the U.S. from the 1930s to 1990s, is presented in Chart 1 on the following page (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 2).

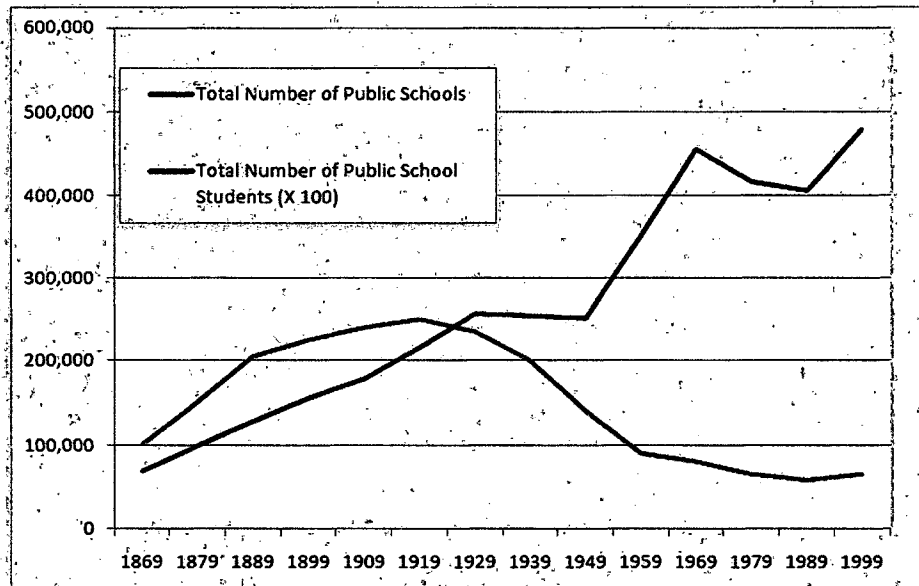
Chart 2, another visual developed by Howley, Johnson, and Petrie, provides the total number of public schools and students attending these schools (2011, 3). The number of public schools started decreasing in the early 1900s and continued that trend for nearly a century. Simultaneously, the number of students increased. The charts on the following page, summarize and depict the collective findings (2011, 2-3).

Chart 1: Total Number of Public School Districts, 1931-1997 (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 2)



Source: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/PB-Consol-Howley-Johnson-Petrie.pdf>

Chart 2: Total Number of Public Schools, 1869-1999 (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 3)



Source: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/PB-Consol-Howley-Johnson-Petrie.pdf>

In order to accommodate the number of students in public schools, as displayed in Chart 2, the size of public schools (along with the number of students in the schools) increased. In fact, "...today, the 500 largest school districts are so large that they enroll 43% of public school students nationwide; the remaining 17,453 enroll the remainder" (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 6). As a reminder, this educational restructuring is primarily the result of consolidation.

Why Consolidate?: Benefits Linked to Consolidations

According to Howley, Johnson, and Petrie, consolidation and centralization of schools were two of the most common business practices adopted by educational managers. The former practice, consolidation, started around 1920 (2011, 2). To determine the benefits associated with these practices, research was conducted starting in the 1930s and continued up to the 1970s. Benefits listed by the authors were, "...single-grade classes (age-grading), specialized subject-matter teachers, more intense professional supervision and leadership, and, increasingly, free transportation to and from school" (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 2). As noted by the authors, James Conant's 1959 book, *The American High School Today*, was the major catalyst credited for the consolidation movement. Subsequently, the last major push for larger schools took place in 1970 (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 3).

The authors reasoned that because original consolidation goals have been exceeded, they are now obsolete. Mentioned in the brief were five state-level studies that have resulted in the same conclusion—that consolidation goals have been exceeded. A final point made by the authors is that additional state-level studies are needed to determine if the same outcome exists nationwide (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 3).

A Relook at School Size: Does it Matter?

Limited details relating to one very recent study conducted in Indiana's elementary schools were provided by Howley, Johnson and Petrie. This study examined changes in enrollment size and provided yet another peculiar outcome of consolidation by directly linking the effects of changes in size to student achievement. This "shocks to enrollment" study revealed that an increase in size resulted in a significant reduction in student achievement (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 9).

The researcher conducting the current case study contemplates whether the results noted above are short or long-term. Specifically, if time is merely an ingredient needed by teachers and/or students in which to adjust to new diversity issues that are effecting teacher and/or learner outcomes, or whether the findings are indeed permanent. The recipients' adjustment to consolidation was a finding noted in a previous study referenced in the brief. In that study all three groups—students, teachers and administrators reported a negative experience associated with consolidation (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 7).

Every community is unique. Therefore, the authors' recommend that individual assessment of a community, especially regarding schooling issues, be conducted prior to consolidation occurring. One reason given for the individual assessment is that a blanket state consolidation policy may have distasteful effects, especially in areas with "markedly different" socio-demographic characteristics (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 10). In this regard, the authors' recommendation is that, "[c]onsolidation proposals involving low-wealth and minority communities especially need to be very carefully reviewed, with community participation strongly cultivated" (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 10).

Summary of the NEPC's Findings

The findings recorded by Howley, Johnson, and Petrie are provided below (2011, 11-12). These findings provide the most current effect and outlook for school and/or district consolidations that were located.

- In many places, schools and districts are already too large for fiscal efficiency or educational quality; deconsolidation is more likely than consolidation to achieve substantial efficiencies and yield improved outcomes.
- Financial claims about widespread benefits of consolidation are unsubstantiated by contemporary research about cost savings
- Claims for educational benefits from systematic statewide school and district consolidation are vastly overestimated and have already been maximized. Schools that are too large result in diminished academic and social performance, and some evidence suggests that the same conclusion applies to districts that are too large.
- Which deconsolidations would likely produce improvement can be judged only on a case-by-case basis,
- Impoverished places, in particular, often benefit from smaller schools and districts, and can suffer irreversible damage if consolidation occurs.
- Overall, state-level consolidation proposals appear to serve a public relations purpose in times of fiscal crisis, rather than substantive fiscal or educational purposes.

As noted with the Task Force's summary, not all findings provided by the authors of the brief correspond directly to the variables identified in this study (disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support). Those that are relevant will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5 and others may be areas recommended for future studies. Again, the primary reason for including the findings is to clarify what is known about the effects of consolidation in conspicuous areas, thereby providing a reason to research the effects in areas that are not as obvious.

Historical Summary

The four accounts provided an overview of school consolidation from the mid 1800s to approximately 2010. As Blodgett (1893) noted, at critical times in history, the merging of school districts was necessary and thereby deemed as the proper response. Author and researcher, James Conant supported consolidation for academic and economic reasons (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 2; Howley, Johnson and Petrie 2011, 3-4). Haller, a current researcher, referenced the same reasons when examining rural consolidations, but referred to them as the “twin pillars of equity and efficiency” (Haller 1992, 146). Two different research groups, one consisting of Bard, Gardener, and Wieland (2005) and the second, Howley, Johnson, and Petrie (2011) agreed on at least four important aspects relating to consolidation: First, in current times it is not always the best solution (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 11-12; Howley, Johnson and Petrie 2011, 10); Second, decisions should be made based on a case-by-case assessment (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 11-12; Howley, Johnson and Petrie 2011, 10). Howley, Johnson, and Petrie added that consolidation outcomes for communities with “markedly different socio-demographic characteristics” will be “markedly different” (2011, 10). Third, the inclusion of all community members in the decision making process is important (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 5; Howley, Johnson and Petrie 2011, 7-8); and finally, no universal effective school size was established. The Report concluded, stating that, “there is not an ideal or optimal district or school size that is universally agreed upon” (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 8). Meanwhile, Howley, Johnson, and Petrie did reference a study that linked school size to achievement scores at one particular school. However, this study focused on “shocks to enrollment” with no specific size

mentioned other than the fact that an increase in enrollment negatively affected student achievement (2011, 9). One major difference in the historical accounts is that only authors Howley, Johnson, and Petrie specifically mentioned a need for more quality studies of school or district consolidations to accompany the econometric studies that are currently being used in the decision making process (2011, 1, 9).

Consolidation: General Studies

Introduction

Two additional studies not included in the historical section are provided below. These studies did not provide a historical account of consolidation as detailed as the previous sources, but focused primarily on studies undertaken specifically related to financial feasibility. Both studies presented findings from the system/district level. One study was unique because it provided a pre- and post-analysis of the financial costs in an area where consolidation occurred. The second study addressed the possibility of merging the same school districts at two separate times, once in 2003 and then again in 2010. In all three cases, the financial feasibility for consolidation appears to have not been substantial.

Consolidation: Study #1

In the study conducted by Streifel, Foldes, and Holman (1991), their objective was to determine if any financial advantages or disadvantages existed for districts that were combined. A comparison of revenue and expenses for three years before and three years after the districts combined were analyzed for results (1991, 15). According to the authors, the uniqueness of their study was that “no other studies were found that

compared pre-consolidation financial data with corresponding post-consolidation financial data” (1991, 19).

The authors further noted that although consolidation had been an issue of debate in rural communities for over 100 years, prior to 1970 there was evidence supporting the reorganization of institutions based on improved educational opportunity for students and reduced costs (Streifel, Foldes, and Holman 1991, 13). However, their more recent findings did not indicate any significant advantages to consolidation (Streifel, Foldes, and Holman 1991, 15).

Consolidation: Study #2

In June 2010, an Illinois based school, Lemont High School District 210, completed what was entitled a “Consolidation Feasibility Study” (2010). This study revisited a prior decision against consolidation that was made in October 2003. In the most recent study, the three reasons for revisiting consolidating were related to the feasibility of the educational program and financial resources, and to improve articulation between the middle and high school curriculum. The study reached the same conclusion as the 2003 report stating that consolidation did not present a savings for the Lemont community.

Summary

These three studies, two of which were conducted on the same school, focused primarily on the financial feasibility of school consolidation. Yet, all studies failed to demonstrate that merging schools would result in significant advantages, improved education and cost savings. Furthermore, neither study included information regarding the impact of consolidation to students and their families—the recipients of the merger—

from the recipients' perspective. Obtaining this data would provide policy makers with even more information that can be used to enhance consolidation decisions.

Consolidation: General Schooling Issues

Introduction

The process of consolidating schools and/or districts is complex. This study was not designed to discuss every issue associated with the process. Instead, the following topics are those that are addressed in this study and are grouped in accordance with how they were presented in the referenced sources: 1) school size and disciplinary problems, 2) parental involvement to include barriers to family involvement: diversity, income poverty and cultural awareness (social identity), and 3) transportation and location of school.

School Size and Disciplinary Problems

Haller's study provided historical data about mergers, and then addressed the question of "whether the creation of large rural schools is likely to increase student indiscipline" (1992, 146). According to Haller, the term "indiscipline" is referenced in two dictionaries as meaning "[l]ack of discipline or control. *A campus problem of student indiscipline*" (1992, 154-155). The purpose of Haller's research was to determine whether student indiscipline was contributed to the location—in a rural area—or the size of a school (1992, 147). Haller's analysis revealed that, "[t]ruancy and more serious forms of misconduct are likely to become worse when small rural schools are consolidated. But barely" (1992, 154). Haller does not suggest that consolidation be dismissed because of this finding, but proposes "... modest changes in practice could offset the slight negative effects of a consolidation" (1992, 154). Drawing from Haller's

statement, studies that outline the negative effects of consolidation are needed in order to recommend changes in practice that would be effective.

Parental Involvement

Several articles were located that communicated the importance of parental involvement in the schooling process (Feuerstein 2001; Hill and Taylor 2004; and ERS 2006). Feuerstein's article (2001) identified five basic categories of parental involvement: "(a) school choice, (b) decision making through formal structures or site-based councils, (c) teaching and learning, [attending conferences and volunteering] (d) effect on the physical and material environment, [a safe and comfortable school environment] and (e) communication" (2001, 29-30). These categories cover a variety of areas where parental influence can affect learning.

In addition to the five basic categories, Feuerstein (2001) referenced a study conducted by Sui-Chu and Willms in which four types of parental involvement were identified: discussion in the home, supervision in the home, school communication and school participation. Of the four, the most powerful indicator of student academic achievement was student-parent discussion in the home (Feuerstein 2001, 30).

Parental involvement for high school students is thought to decrease, primarily because of perceived academic rigor (Hill and Taylor 2004, 161). However, a resource provided by the Educational Research Service (ERS), noted that parents, regardless of their background, are interested in their children's academic success. ERS also noted that children benefit from parents' involvement (2006, 1). Therefore, no matter how different the involvement of parents is, involvement is still vital to the academic success of

students. Research has also found that the attitude of the school staff plays a key role in determining whether parents collaborate with the school (ERS 2006, 4).

The importance of two-way communication, a type of parental involvement, was examined. According to research,

[s]tudents do best when parents and teachers understand each other's expectations and stay in touch with one another regarding the child's learning habits, attitudes toward school, social interactions and academic progress.... Communication between the school and the home is most effective when it flows in both directions, and schools should distinguish between efforts to inform parents and opportunities to communicate with parents (ERS 2006, 5).

Most notably, the resource pointed out that barriers to family involvement exist. These barriers must be identified in order to implement procedures that will assist in facilitating needed communication.

Barrier to Family Involvement: Diversity

Today, diversity among students is one of the biggest challenges schools are facing (Hill and Taylor 2004, 162). Some issues associated with diversity are demographic characteristics such as social economic status (SES), ethnicity, cultural background and other parental characteristics (2004, 162). According to authors Hill and Taylor, parents from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to be involved in the educational process of their children than those from lower SES backgrounds. This lack of involvement may be due to a variety of issues including, "nonflexible work schedules, lack of resources, transportation problems, and stress due to residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods" (Hill and Taylor 2004, 162). Illiteracy and language barriers are also factors (ERS 2006, 5). Unfortunately, the misperception of teachers who are culturally

different from their students may mistake the absence of parental involvement to mean a disinterest for the child's education (ERS 2006, 6-7; Hill and Taylor 2004, 162).

According to Hill and Taylor, parental school involvement declines as students grow up. Unsurprisingly, elementary schools are more likely to encourage parental involvement than middle and high schools. Although the involvement at the elementary level is different from that of middle and high school students, research has not differentiated between the types of involvement and how it is reflected in learner outcomes (2004, 163).

Because of the importance of parent involvement, some schools are finding ways to be proactive. In September 2012, Georgia announced the formation of a Parent Advisory Council. The online version of *The Valdosta Daily Times* (VDT) newspaper stated that the primary purpose of the Council is to focus on ways to increase parental involvement in schools. The 36 members that comprise this committee are parents who were nominated by their local school districts and then chosen by a committee representative from the Georgia Department of Education. These 36 parents will solicit feedback from other parents regarding, "policies, projects, and materials that influence students and their families" (VDT 2012). The Council's purpose is to increase student success by actively engaging parents in the educational process of their child(ren) (VDT 2012). Programs that help to identify and remove barriers are beneficial to the educational process (ERS 2006, 5-6; VDT 2012).

Barrier to Family Involvement: Income Poverty

In *The Effects of Poverty on Children*, authors Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Greg J. Duncan provided a practical definition for income poverty by declaring it as "the

condition of not having enough income to provide the basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter” (1997, 55). In their report, they concluded that “... family income can substantially influence child and adolescent well-being” and that “[f]amily income seems to be more strongly related to children’s ability and achievement-related outcomes than to emotional outcomes” (1997, 67). The authors’ insight further substantiates the fact that income poverty does affect the academic outcome of students because it tends to lessen parental involvement in the child’s academic life (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997, 67; Hill and Taylor 2004, 162). Although educational involvement is normally lessened, Blodgett emphasized that of the children reared in the rural area—those often acquainted with lower economic status—possessed more important elements of character and knowledge than those raised in the city (1893, 71-72).

Barrier to Family Involvement: Cultural Awareness (Social Identity)

Because change is constant, policymakers are constantly striving to generate new and/or improved policies based on the needs of their constituents. In this endeavor, barriers to family involvement in the educational process of a child can unknowingly be erected particularly when diversity, especially culture, is misconstrued or overlooked. Therefore, culture awareness is fundamental to effective policy making. Researcher Abe Feuerstein mentioned at least three theories relating to cultural capital that assisted in understanding differences in parental involvement (Feuerstein 2001, 31). The first theory mentioned by Feuerstein was Pierre Bourdieu’s. This theory focused on the economic differences that exist between teachers and students’ households. Bourdieu reasoned that schools tend to produce students that embody the social standing of its teachers. These teachers communicate well with parents of their same SES but tend not to relate to those

of lower SES. This "...bias toward middle- or upper class values puts working-class students and parents at a distinct disadvantage because they must adapt to the dominant culture of the school to meet teacher expectations" (Feuerstein 2001, 31). ERS also noted, "...some families' culturally based beliefs about the appropriate roles for parents and educators may differ from those of educators representing mainstream society" (2006, 6). Engaging in cultural awareness provide a means to assist in understanding different groups which in turn helps in minimizing and/or eliminating barriers. As noted by Khatidja Chantler, in an article focusing on therapy, "[t]he 'fixedness' of cultures is an approach that is favoured by multi-culturalists who argue that understanding other people's cultures is crucial to competent and sensitive practice" (2005, 242).

Transportation and Location of School

Transportation problems are presumed to be attributed to families not having adequate finances and/or access to some mode of transportation. This problem may simply be the result of income poverty. Nevertheless, transportation and/or the location of schools play a significant role in the learning process of students. Research cited by the Task Force provided evidence of how elementary and high school students' academic grades are negatively affected when riding the bus for one hour (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 10). The West Virginia study cited by Howley, Johnson, and Petrie, not only mentioned instances of students having longer bus rides to and from school after consolidation, but also fewer opportunities for students to participate in co-curricular and extracurricular activities (2011, 7).

Just as the location of the school can contribute to a lack of student involvement in extracurricular and co-curricular activities, it may also affect parental involvement.

Hill and Taylor's research attributed a lack of involvement of parents from lower SES backgrounds to a variety of issues including, "nonflexible work schedules, lack of resources, transportation problems, and stress due to residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods" (2004, 162). ERS also included transportation issues as one factor that significantly affects parents' involvement in their child(ren) education (2006, 5-6). The West Virginia study noted that some families experienced fewer opportunities to participate in school related events, increased barriers to participating in their children's education that included increased travel time hindering volunteering, visiting classrooms, and attending other school related functions (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011, 7). Although not mentioned by name, these are some educational contingencies that researchers Howley, Johnson, and Petrie suggest be considered in the consolidation analysis because ultimately, they do affect the learning process (2011, 1).

Summary

This section provided information about issues that are common to schools. Because these areas have been identified, more research associated with the families' perspective is still needed in order to understand the holistic impact of consolidation. Furthermore, because each service area is culturally unique, findings will vary. System information must not overshadow or substitute for the parents/guardians' perspective. Once-enlightened, policy makers will be empowered to address concerns and make decisions that will help strengthen areas that are easily overlooked and negatively impacted.

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Theoretical concepts help to clarify research by explaining the structure of things and how they work. For this study, the following three theories; symbolic interactionism, functional analysis (also known as functionalism and structural functionalism or systems theory) and rational choice, plus two concepts—Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and social and human capital—were used to examine and then interpret the findings related to the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools. The purpose of the study was to determine the impact that school consolidation had on students and families from their perspective in the following three areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support.

Symbolic Interactionism Defined

The term symbolic interactionism is “a theoretical perspective in which society is viewed as being composed of symbols that people use to establish meaning, develop their views of the world, and communicate with one another” (Henslin 2010, 23). Although Herbert Blumer (2011, 242) “coined the term,” Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead actually developed this sociological perspective (Henslin 2010, 23). Cooley’s contribution explained how “...our sense of self develops from interaction with others” (2010, 68-69). Mead’s input came from observing people when they play. When at play, we learn to understand other people by putting ourselves in their shoes. In doing so, we take on the role of the other person because our response to stimuli is based on our interaction with a symbol (2010, 68-69). The meaning of the symbol will result in a

specific response based entirely upon the definition of that symbol to a person. Therefore, the behavior of a person is not based on any outside stimuli, "... but arises instead from how he interprets and handles these things in the action which he is constructing" (Blumer 2011, 244). To simplify, the following examples of how a stick may be used assist in clarifying this term. One person may use a stick as a tool in propping open a window. Another person may use the same stick as a weapon. A third person may use the same stick as a walking cane.

Symbolic Interactionism: Application to Consolidation Study

When Livingston and Sumter County High schools consolidated, a new school was built to house the students and educators. As a result of the acquisition of a new school including the name and mascot, the identities (symbol) attached to the previous schools were lost. Symbolic interactionism assists in understanding and interpreting the students' and parents/guardians' reactions to the loss by focusing on relevant changes obtained from the study. Specifically, comments provided by parents/guardians and educators will assist in identifying reasons for various actions.

Functional Analysis Defined

"The central idea of functional analysis is that society is a whole unit, made up of interrelated parts that work together" (Henslin 2010, 25). From the perspective of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, society is viewed as living organisms with each part having a function. When society fulfills its functions, the result is a harmonious balance (Henslin 2010, 25). This "organic analogy" was elaborated by Robert Merton who used functional analysis "to refer to the beneficial consequences of people's actions: Functions help keep a group (society, social system) in balance" (Henslin 2010, 26). The

functions that Merton described could be either a manifest (intended) or latent (an unintended) action (2010, 26).

According to Merton, a manifest function is a direct action that is in response to a need. The term latent function is used to describe an unintended consequence that helps a system adjust. A third function, a latent dysfunction, is one that hurts a system. Whenever units stop working as required, they become fragile and uncooperative. At this point, intervention is necessary. Efforts must be made to help units function as intended. Otherwise, the system could continue to malfunction indefinitely (Henslin 2010, 26).

Functional Analysis: Application to Consolidation Study

In the 1890s as noted by Blodgett (1893) and Haller (1992), mergers were needed for the betterment of the community. In this case, consolidation would be a manifest function because it was accomplished for a specific reason, to improve school functioning. In this study relating to the consolidation of two rural schools in Alabama, the reason for the consolidation was not being studied. The focus of the study is the impact of consolidation on students and their families from their perspective. The potential relevance of this theory to the present study, is, that due to the location of the school, which is farther away from the family residences in distance than the previous location of both schools means that disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, and/or parental educational involvement may have been negatively impacted. The system's manifest function, (response to a need) may have resulted in a latent function (a function that helped the system to adjust) or a latent dysfunction (a function that weakened the system). Survey

responses and comments provided by parents/guardians and educators will assist in identifying and understanding the various actions that occurred.

Rational Choice Theory Defined

When people set goals, are aware of their constraints, have evaluated the costs and then proceed to acquiring their goal, they are considered as responding rationally. Although this behavior may not be rational according to the public's definition, it only means that the person is responding in accordance with the goals, constraints and cost that they have established (Guell 2010, 310). Rational choice theory simply means that people respond the best way according to their circumstances based on their definition of the situation.

Rational Choice Theory: Application to Consolidation Study

This theory was relevant to the study of the consolidation of schools in Alabama because of the specific conditions in the area that exist. Although these conditions are not the focus of this study, it is necessary to consider them when applying theories and concepts. First, SCHS is located in a high poverty area. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as posted on the U.S. Department of Commerce website, the poverty level in 2006-2010 in Sumter County, the location of study, was 34.8% (2012d). An area having a low percentage of college graduates may also assist in explaining the lack of parental involvement in the students' education. Drawing from Bourdieu's theory, the cultural capital in the area should be considered when explaining the results of the survey responses and comments provided by parents/guardians and educators (Feuerstein 2001, 31). Demographic data obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's website is used to address the issue of poverty. Information from the University of Alabama is used to

address the education factor. Specifically, the educational level of citizens 25 years or older in Sumter County, Alabama with a bachelor's degree will be discussed.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Defined

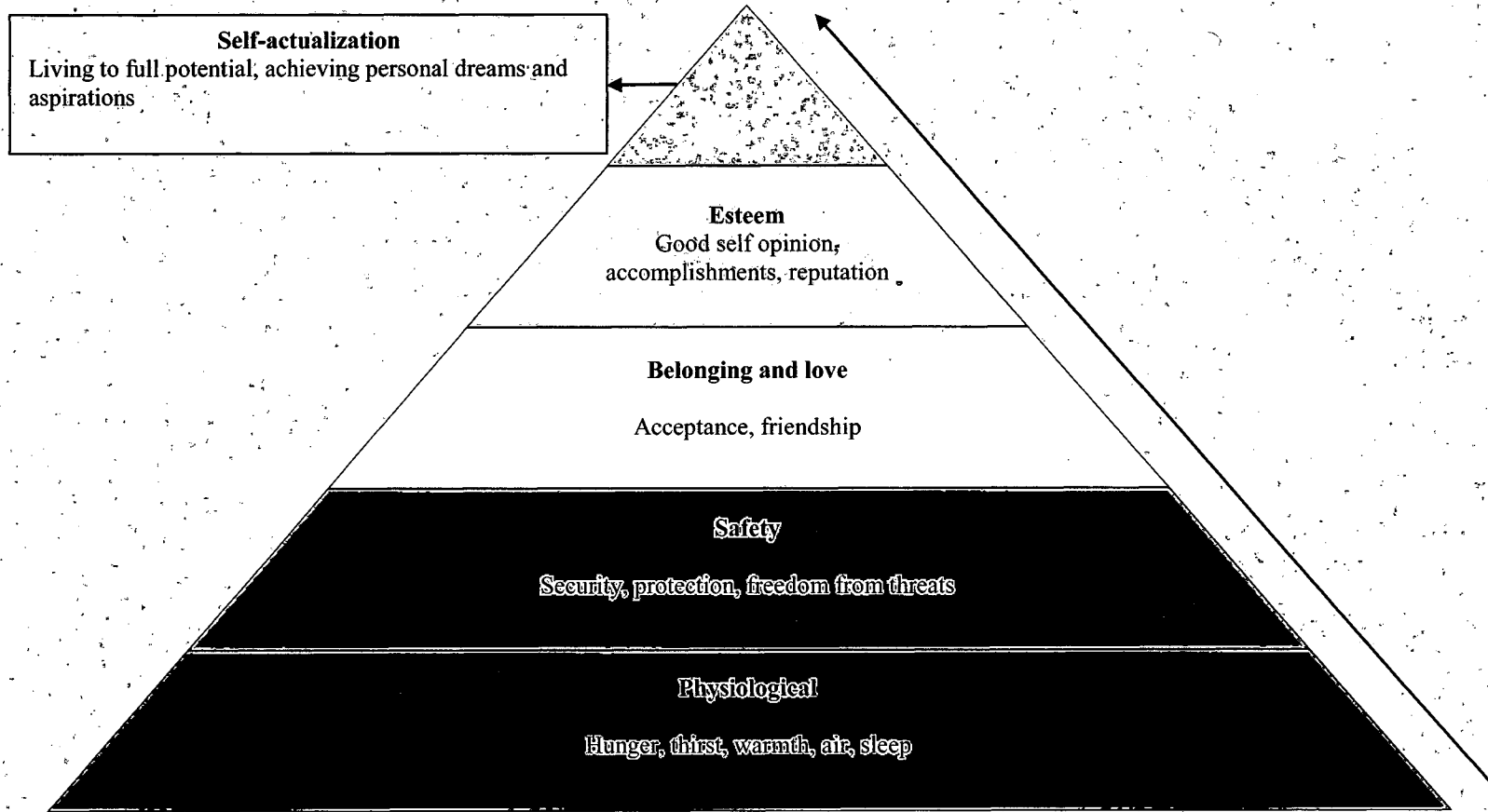
The Abraham Maslow Hierarchy of Needs is a framework that presents the order of needs that people aim to satisfy. This Needs Hierarchy was developed by Maslow in the 1940s and helps to describe the factors associated with a person's motivation.

Maslow's "needs theory" is divided into five areas; physiological, safety, which are the two basic survival needs, and three others: belonging and love, esteem, and self-actualization (Gazzaniga, Heatherton, and Halpern 2010, 381-382). Figure 1 on the following page provides a simulated visual of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs triangle depicting the five areas described (2010, 381).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Application to Consolidation Study

This theory is used to help explain the behavior associated with a lack of involvement specifically from parents in poverty-stricken regions and areas with considerable high illiteracy rates. According to the "Alabama Adult Education and Family Literacy Plan," approved by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education, "[l]iteracy is a powerful determinant of an individual's life chances and quality of life" (2012, 6). Therefore, in Chapter 5 the educational attainment of those living in this rural south Alabama area was assessed and perceived actions described based on the various categories of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs chart.

Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Gazzaniga, Heatherton, and Halpern 2010, 381)



Social and Human Capital Defined

Human capital is created when people acquire skills and knowledge that enable them to function in new ways (Coleman 2011, 295). Social capital is a byproduct of positive relations among people in which a cooperative response is achieved (Bourdieu 2005, 76; Coleman 2011, 295). An educational system functioning properly will produce both human and social capital.

Social and Human Capital: Application to Consolidation Study

Prior to the consolidation of schools, students at Livingston and Sumter County High schools were already facing issues associated with income poverty. According to *Alabama's Education Report Card 2010-2011*, approximately ninety percent of students attending schools in Sumter County during this school year received reduced or free meals (Alabama Department of Education 2012, 14). Reduced and free lunch status is an indicator of poverty. A weakened economy compounded the troubles that were already affecting every social structure in that area. Because social and human capital is a product of several functions, the magnitude of the impact is based on the severity indicated by the participants when completing the research instrument.

Summary of Theories and Concepts

The three theories and two concepts discussed assisted in explaining behavior that occurred when the two schools consolidated. Symbolic interactionism helped to describe the emotions that people had in relation to the meanings of school for them. Functional analysis explained the outcome associated with the group's consolidations efforts. The entire "new" way of schooling for the area which included a new school, a new name, location and mascot, disrupted the families and students' normal way of life with many

other perceived negative consequences. These negative impacts may have caused the new system to be rejected, thereby rendering it ineffective. The two theoretical perspectives, symbolic interactionism and functional analysis, each focusing on a different feature of social life, were useful in analyzing behavior related to school consolidation. By using both, a more comprehensive understanding of social life was achieved (Henslin 2010, 29).

Rational choice theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs were useful in describing people's actions as they related to choices made that were not beneficial to the system. These 'rational' choices could represent those decisions that were made by the families of students that provided for their most basic needs when facing dilemmas.

The concept of social and human capital was useful in explaining the effects of the disengagement of parental involvement in the educational process of their child(ren). Collectively, the theories and concepts provided an explanation for the response and concerns that could be easily manifested when school consolidation occurs especially if a merger is perceived as not being in the best interest of the constituents.

Research Question

How did the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools impact the students at Sumter Central High School (SCHS), and their families in the following three areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support?

The above question was assessed during this study to determine the impact that school consolidation had on the students and their families. To perform the assessment, a questionnaire was distributed to families of students attending SCHS to measure their

viewpoint on questions addressing the following areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support. A similar questionnaire was distributed to educators at SCHS addressing only two of the areas: disciplinary actions and parental educational support. After analyzing the questionnaires, the theories and concepts presented in this chapter were used to explain the responses.

Symbolic interactionism guides the discussion of responses related to disciplinary actions and parental involvement. Although the new mascot is not a focus of the study, schools and their mascots function as a means of identifying members of a particular group. This membership solidifies relationships within the group. An extension of this membership may also be extended to the entire community. When schools consolidate and relocate, those symbols that once solidified relationships no longer exist. This loss can be detrimental resulting in a spirit of apathy as well as anger among members. Anger within a school system may result in disciplinary problems among students, which may be compounded because of the 'loss of attachment' with the school system or even the lessening in parental involvement.

Functional analysis assists in explaining responses related to educational support (parental educational involvement) and the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school. Naturally, an increase in educational support is viewed as a positive (manifest) action. However, a decrease in educational support would be a latent dysfunction because it is a negative action that occurred because of a manifest action: school consolidation. A reduction in parental support may contribute to increased disciplinary actions thereby compounding the latent dysfunction. In addition, the amount

of time students spent on the bus traveling to and from school may also be classified as a latent dysfunction if educational goals are not achieved. The aforementioned point regarding academic achievement is included because of its importance; however, this topic is not a primary focus of this research, but may be recommended as a future study. Survey responses and comments from parents/guardians will assist in determining their perspective about the new school's location and whether there has been any change in the educational support provided to their child(ren).

Rational choice theory assists in explaining the individual choices made by the parents/guardians based on their response to whether the school's location negatively affected their parental educational involvement. This theory also has a potential for explaining an increase in disciplinary actions that may occur because of a decrease in parental involvement.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides explanations for responses related to the three areas: disciplinary actions, school location and parental educational support. When a person lives in poverty, most likely the two areas of fundamental needs, physiological (which include hunger, thirst, warmth, air, and sleep) and safety are not being met and if they are, it's usually not on a consistent basis. Because needs are not met, two characteristics are evident: one, the person will make what is assumed to be a rational decision in order to satisfy a need, and two, a desire for the next level of satisfaction is usually not obtained. Therefore, in the areas of education, the importance of parental involvement in their child's education, the third level in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, is normally not obtained. Attention must be given to the deficient level; otherwise, postponement of the next level of "need" is almost certain. Another issue that may be

associated with this concept is an increase in disciplinary actions that may result because of the decrease in parental involvement. The new school's location could also be related to need satisfaction.

Lastly, social and human capital helps to explain the impact of consolidation on students and their family members in the three areas of study as well. The concept of social capital has been applied to address a variety of issues (Bourdieu 2005, 76; Robinson and Green 2011, 77). Education or the lack thereof, is certainly no exception. Coleman's rational choice theory (2011) is useful in clarifying how parental involvement may be impacted when consolidation occurs. Just as social relationships are important to the operation of businesses, the relationship that school personnel have with parents, and vice versa, is also important. This relationship between parents and teachers is one of mutual trust. Parents typically put faith in the teachers and the school system to educate their child. Teachers normally expect parents to be involved in their child's education. A parent who does not participate in the "trust" that has been bestowed in them contributes to a deficit in social capital. Even though the reason for the broken trust may be a 'rational' one, the results are the same—weakened social capital that is evident because the educational system is normally blamed for not producing human capital. Once diminished, social capital is very difficult to re-establish (Bourdieu 2005, 76; Robinson and Green 2011, 78).

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of consolidation and its history. Knowing the history and purpose, from its documented infancy to date, assists in examining the pros and cons associated with such action. In particular, the case studies served as

supportive information in describing previous actions associated with the consolidation of schools. The theories assisted in understanding and explaining the responses provided by the families of students who were impacted by the recent merger of Livingston and Sumter County high schools. Collectively, the information from this chapter was used to answer the research question and then to offer suggestions for current situations as well as recommendations for future studies.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapters 1 and 2 discussed how school consolidation throughout the century has become an issue of much controversy. The chapters explained the reasons for the consolidation movement by reviewing the history along with the advantages and disadvantages associated with mergers in rural areas. In Chapter 1, the research question was presented along with identifying areas that were impacted as a result of the consolidation of two schools. This chapter describes the methodology, procedures and data collection process used for this study along with research concerns and restraints.

Specifically, this study examined the social and educational impact of school consolidation on students and families in rural south Alabama. Its purpose was to measure the impact of school consolidation on students and their family members in three specific areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support. This study will also demonstrate that a thorough assessment, which includes the people who will be impacted by the decision, is valuable and should be considered pre- and post- consolidation.

Procedure

Permission to conduct this study was provided by Sumter County's School Superintendent, (then interim) Mrs. Katie Jones-Powell, as well as the principal of

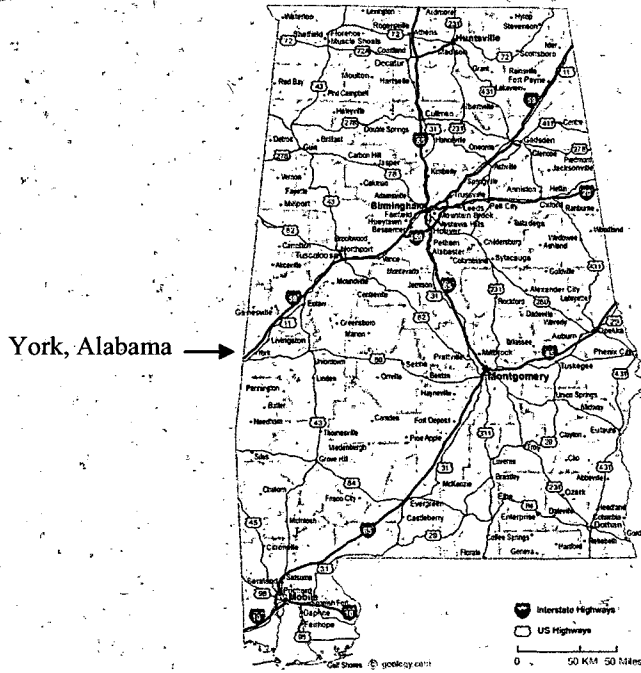
SCHS, Mr. Eric J. Hines. Because this study involved human participants, the screening form for graduate student research, along with the permission notifications were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Valdosta State University (VSU) for approval. This research was granted approval on October 22, 2012 (see Appendix A).

The methodology used to conduct this study was data collected at the research site, secondary sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, Alabama's Department of Education, maps maintained by the University of Alabama, a website housing SCHS's information, websites of the two previous schools, scholarly sources, and calculated mileage information from interactive maps. Collectively, this information provided an answer to the research question: How did the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools impact the students at SCHS and their families in the following three areas, disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support.

Data Collection

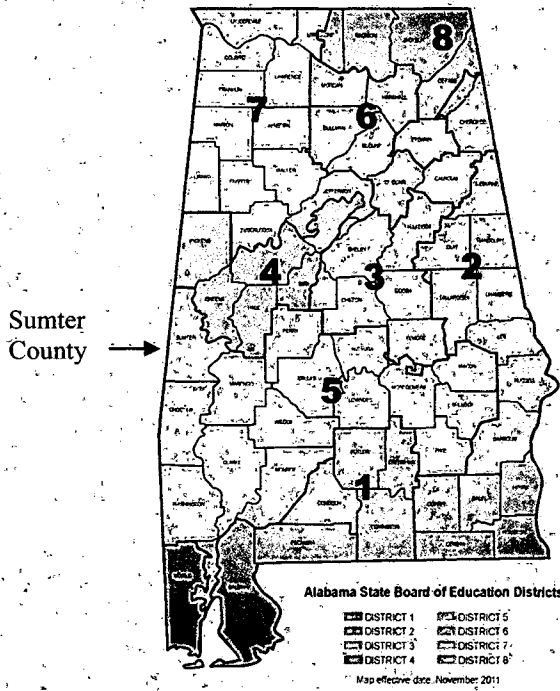
The research site was SCHS. The school is located in Alabama's State Board of Education District 5, in Sumter County, York, Alabama (see maps on the following page.) This study consisted of collecting data from two study populations, the families of students in grades 11 and 12 currently attending SCHS and educators currently employed at SCHS. The total school student population was 644 as of September 28, 2012: students in grades 11 and 12 were 175 and 156 respectively, and the number of educators was approximately 50 (Personal email communication with Glory McAboy on September 28, 2012).

Figure 2: Map of Alabama Cities – Alabama Road Map [Location of York, Alabama]



Source: <http://geology.com/cities-map/alabama.shtml>

Figure 3: ALSDE: School Information: County [Alabama State Board of Education Districts]



Source: <http://www.alsde.edu/home/SchoolInfo/CountyMap.aspx>

The U.S. Department of Commerce's website provided limited demographics for Sumter County (see Table 1). These data provided an assessment of poverty, median household income, population, persons per square mile, and education attainment in the county in which SCHS is located, in comparison to the State's. In most cases, the two most current data for each category are provided. The most recent date, September 26, 2013, is provided in the top blue section, the latter, October 23, 2012, in the bottom orange section (2012d; 2013).

Table 1: U.S. Department of Commerce Data: Poverty

	Sumter County	State (Alabama)
Persons below the poverty level, percent (2007-2011)	38.0%	17.6%
Persons below the poverty level, percent (2006-2010)	34.8%	17.1%
Median household income (2007-2011)	\$21,964	\$42,934
Median household income (2006-2010)	\$25,338	\$42,081
Population (2012)	24.7% W/74.4% B	70.0% W/26.5% B
Population (2011)	25.5% W/73.6% B	70.1% W/26.5% B
Persons per square mile (2012) (Data not provided)		
Persons per square mile (2010)	15.2	94.4
Persons with a bachelor's degree or higher (2007-2011)	13.6%	22.0%
Persons with a bachelor's degree or higher (2006-2010)	12.8%	21.7%

Source: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/01/01119.html>

A letter of consent was provided to every potential participant. The consent letter explained the participant's role in the data collection process, the project's title, researcher's name and telephone number, as well as VSU's IRB contact information (see Appendixes B and C). Each consent letter was accompanied with a questionnaire. The consent letter and questionnaire were packaged together in an envelope and is referred to as the "set." An automated technique was used so that each letter appeared to have been signed in blue ink by the researcher. This technique, along with others, which helps to generate greater response rates was developed by Don A. Dillman and became known as the *Total Design Methodology (TDM) for Mail Questionnaires* (Melevin and Ayres 2009, 141). Since refining, this technique is referred to as the *Tailored Design Methodology* (Melevin and Ayres 2009, 136). Efforts to use letterhead for the consent letter for this research were not successful. This is also another personalized technique known for increasing response rates (Melevin and Ayres 2009, 143).

The survey instrument was mailed to the research site. Once received, the school's counselor, Glory McAboy, who was delegated by the principal as the point of contact for this project, was responsible for distributing and collecting completed questionnaires. The date of distribution, February 1, 2013, was coordinated with Mr. Hines, the school's principal. Most questionnaires were completed and returned to the school within two school days. This relatively short time was feasible for two reasons. First, the surveys were short and easy to complete. Second, an early return date may have motivated parents/guardians and educators to complete the survey in a timely manner. It also served to generate an immediate response instead of the survey being put aside to complete later and possibly never returned. A reminder for students to bring the

completed questionnaires back to the school was announced via the intercom along with other school-related announcements.

Lastly, to assist in response efforts, an incentive, approved and administered by the principal at SCHS, was offered. Since students are required to wear uniforms, a 'dress-down' day was made available to students who returned a survey within the time provided. A 'dress-down' day entails students wearing his/her regular attire to school on a day designated by the principal. Students have been wearing uniforms since 1999 (Personal email communication with Glory McAboy on January 18, 2013 and February 23, 2013). The principal will oversee the scheduling and implementing of this incentive. Because this study only made provisions for students in grades 11 and 12, an in-house survey that addressed end-of-year requirements was administered to students in grades nine and 10. This strategy made available to all students at the high school an opportunity to participate in the 'dress-down' day (Personal email communication with Glory McAboy on January 18, 2013 and February 23, 2013).

The fifth period teacher of applicable students received one *set* for each student assigned to his/her class. The students' survey contained the identifier "Parents/Guardians" along with two labels. One label contained the following statement, "A Study Examining the Social and Educational Impact of School Consolidation on Students and Families of Sumter Central High in Rural South Alabama: After Year One." The following statement was on the second label, "Please return to the school by February 5, 2013. Thank you." Once the students arrived home, they were expected to give the questionnaire to their parents/guardians. Directions on the questionnaire asked that the parent or guardian who was the most knowledgeable of their child's education to

complete the form. Once the survey was completed, parents/guardians were directed to place the questionnaire back inside the envelope provided and then seal the envelope. To assist in remembering to seal the envelope, a label with the following reminder, "Please seal the envelope after placing the completed survey inside and before returning to the school. Thank you." was included on the flap of the envelope. The survey return due date was within two school days. The sealed envelope containing the completed questionnaire was returned to the homeroom teacher who then returned the envelope to the counselor.

The school counselor also distributed the questionnaires to all educators on site. The educators' questionnaire contained the identifier "Educator" along with two address labels. These labels contained the same information as did the labels for the parents/guardians envelopes. Once the educators completed the questionnaire, it was placed in the envelope provided, sealed and then returned to the counselor. Although the counselor is an educator, she did not participate in the survey.

Both groups were initially given two school days in which to complete and return the questionnaire to the school counselor. At the expiration of this time, the questionnaires the counselor had in her possession were returned to the researcher via priority mail. Additional surveys were returned to the counselor after the due date but within the same week. These surveys were also returned to the researcher via regular mail at the end of the same week.

Research Design

For this case study, a mixed methods approach was used. No existing test instruments were located that would provide the measurement needed to answer the

research question. Therefore, the researcher developed two questionnaires, one for the parents/guardians of students attending SCHS, the other for educators at SCHS. The surveys did raise questions of reliability and validity; however, both were designed to solicit responses directly related to the hypotheses being studied.

One questionnaire was used to collect responses from the parent or guardian of students in grades 11 and 12 currently attending SCHS. The three areas covered in this questionnaire were disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support. Collectively, this survey consisted of 10 questions (see Appendix D). Questions 1 and 2 were used as screening answers to ensure only surveys from parents/guardians whose child(ren) were students in grades 11 and 12 were included in the analysis. Question 3 measured the variables in Hypothesis No. 1. Questions 4-8 measured the variables in Hypothesis No. 2. Finally, Questions 4, 5, 9 and 10 measured the variables in Hypothesis No. 3.

The second questionnaire was distributed to educators at SCHS. The two areas addressed were disciplinary actions and parental educational support. Collectively, four responses were solicited (see Appendix E). Questions 1 and 2 were used as screening responses to ensure only surveys from educators who experienced consolidation and provided service to students in grades 11 and 12 were included in the analysis. Question 3 measured educators' perceptions of disciplinary problems; one of the variables in Hypothesis No. 1. Question 4 measured educators' perceptions of parental support, one of the variables in Hypothesis No. 3. The question related to the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school was omitted from the educators' questionnaire. The researcher believed that parents were more knowledgeable about the

actual time their child(ren) spent on the school bus. This firsthand account from parents contributed to understanding the impact that consolidation has on students and families, which is the focus of this research.

A phenomenological approach was used when measuring the impact that the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools had on students and their family members. The questionnaires solicited quantitative and qualitative responses.

The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 21 was used to examine the quantitative responses. The collected data was analyzed using univariate analysis. A frequency distribution for each question was presented in a table format along with a graphic representation. Presenting data in this format allowed for corroboration through data triangulation of the parents/guardians data to that of the educators' data in the two areas previously identified. Both sets of quantitative data, parents/guardians and educators, were corroborated thru data triangulation. This technique of using multiple sources helps to establish the dependability and trustworthiness of information (Patten 2009, 157). Cross-tabulation and *Pearson's Chi-Square* were the statistical tests used to assess the relationship, the direction of the relationship, and the statistical significance of the relationship among the categorical variables studied (Bryman 2008, 334-335).

The qualitative responses captured the individual responses that the participants conveyed. These responses were analyzed and grouped according to the various themes presented. As suggested by Steele and Breese, the methods chosen were those the researcher felt would produce the most accurate understanding of the social reality being questioned (2009, 5).

Hypotheses

The three hypotheses presented below were studied using the procedures outlined in this chapter.

- Hypothesis No. 1: The consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools affects disciplinary problems amongst students.
- Hypothesis No. 2: The location of SCHS affects the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school.
- Hypothesis No. 3: The location of SCHS affects parental education support.

Research Limitations

Methodological Constraints and Concerns

Electronic assessment was not an option because Internet access in this rural area is very limited. The United States Department of Commerce Computer and Internet Use report indicated that as of October 2010, in the state of Alabama only 72.2 % of households had computers (2012a). The researcher believed that the number of households in Sumter County is significantly lower than the state's percentage primarily due to the high poverty level and low income figures provided in Table 1.

The researcher was highly dependent upon the school's counselor to distribute, collect, safeguard the completed questionnaires, and then to mail the completed forms to the researcher. There was a concern about the educators' willingness to participate in the survey. In regards to the family members who completed the survey, the researcher was also concerned about how literacy in this rural area affected the population's understanding of the survey. Generally, people living in high poverty areas are fearful of the government's involvement in their lives; therefore, they are hesitant about responding

to questions/surveys (Lawless and Fox 2001, 380-381). To minimize the participants' hesitancy about completing the questionnaire, demographic information was omitted. Information available from Alabama's Department of Education website provided data related to the socioeconomic status (SES) of families and the race of students attending SCHS during school year 2011-2012. (See Tables 2 and 3 below.) The SES of families was perceptible when considering the fact that 90.86% of high school students at SCHS qualified for free or reduced meals, which is an indication of poverty (2013). The race of nearly all students (99.5%) attending SCHS was Black. Additional school information was obtained from the appropriate *Alabama's Education Report Card*.

Table 2: Alabama Department of Education: Free and Reduced Meals School Year 2011-2012

SCHS's Total Enrollment	Free Meals	Reduced Meals	Total Percentage
711	606 (85.23%)	40 (5.63%)	646 (90.86%)

Source: <http://www.alsde.edu/publicdatareports/default.aspx>

Table 3: Alabama Department of Education: Race/Black (B) School Year 2011-2012

SCHS's Total Enrollment	Grade 09	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total
711	167 (165 B)	183 (183 B)	169 (169 B)	192 (191 B)	711 (708 B) (99.5% B)

Source: <http://www.alsde.edu/publicdatareports/default.aspx>

The survey was conducted during the month of February, which was midway into a new school year. Because the survey was conducted at this time, situations may have occurred during the beginning of the school year that may not have been easily recalled. In addition, responses from parents/guardians and educators may not be as detailed as the

researcher desires. One obvious limitation of the study is that the case study design is not generalizable to other school systems facing consolidation.

Ethical, Moral, and Political Considerations

The results of this survey may reveal satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction in certain areas. Some areas of satisfaction may include those that were not mentioned in the survey. As mentioned by Howley, Johnson, and Petrie, some “[a]ccounts of educators suggest that consolidation may result in professional benefits (such as improved professional development opportunities, increased salaries and enhanced job security), but it may also result in personal costs (including increased stress, loss of confidence and heavier reliance on support network)” (2011, 7). It is also possible that technological capabilities that were not available at the previous schools could be a benefit. Handicap accessibility and other accommodating structural designs could be an area that is improved for students. Since only limited areas are the focus of this study, additional space was provided on the questionnaire to allow survey respondents to offer their comment(s) about any area whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied.

One particular area studied in this research where parents/guardians comments were solicited included the new school’s location. This area is important because the new location would affect the distance that students travel to and from school on the bus. The location would also impact visits to the school by parents/guardians, which could also influence disciplinary actions.

Findings from this study could identify areas where parents/guardians need assistance, whether financial or transportation, in order to provide better educational support to students. Identifying issues is problematic because it necessitates a response

from decision makers. Additionally, because the consolidation has already occurred, findings in this research could reveal areas that should have been, but were not properly assessed adding to or intensifying dissatisfaction with decision makers.

Study Population

All surveys were submitted anonymously. Because this study was conducted after the completion of the first school year, but midway through the second school year, information related to ninth and tenth grade students and their families was not collected. In most cases, these students would not have previously attended one of the schools that were consolidated. Only families who had students attending SCHS at that time in grades 11 and 12 participated in the study. Additionally, only responses from families having a student or students who previously attended one of the two consolidated schools, Livingston and Sumter County High, were analyzed. The responses provided by parents/guardians to Questions 1 and 2 on the questionnaire (see Appendix D), identified these students.

In the event one or more students were not promoted and remained in grades 9 or 10, they did not participate in this study. The number of students in this category was not expected to have a substantive impact on the results of this study. Neither will information be analyzed from educators who did not work at one of the merged schools because their response would be based entirely on their current atmosphere and not from any previous experience related to one of the preexisting schools. The response provided to Questions 1 and 2 on the educators' questionnaire (see Appendix E), identified these educators.

Regrettably, this research did not include comparison data related to graduation rates or academic performance. Information directly related to academics would have extended beyond the scope of the current research.

Distribution of Results

When feasible to do so, results from this study will be shared with the superintendent of Sumter County schools and principal of SCHS, the persons providing consent for the study to be conducted. Findings will also be made available to others who desire to obtain the results. Information may also be used in other research projects.

Research Question

The questionnaires were designed to address the following research question: How did the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools impact the students at Sumter Central High School and their families in the following three areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support.

Study Delimitations

This case study is limited in its generalizability. The findings will not yield the same results as other studies; however, the importance of this study is to establish evidence that demonstrates the necessity of assessing the needs of students and their families prior to consolidating in order to ensure that the constituents' commitment to and satisfaction with education is not diminished.

By assessing student and family needs and then implementing solutions along with the consolidation process, mergers can be successful. Assessments conducted pre- and post-consolidation will assist policy makers in determining whether

parents/guardians perceive that students and families are better or worse off after consolidation.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that the students would give the *set* to their parents/guardians so that the questionnaire would be completed, if desired. The researcher assumed that a significant number of parent/guardians and educators would complete the questionnaires.

Resources

All resources used for this research have been obtained without cost. The existing data were resources that were publicly available and did not identify any individual participants. The researcher provided the total funding associated with conducting this research.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter addresses the following research question: *How did the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High Schools impact the students at Sumter Central High School (SCHS), and their families, in the following three areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support.* As stated in Chapter 1, this study sought to understand the impact of consolidation from the subjective perspective of the families of students who experienced consolidation in 2011. The families' viewpoint was crucial in determining the impact of consolidation because the effect on the students and their families was greater than what others experienced and the impact may affect students' education. By knowing the impact(s) that families experienced, policy makers can make more informed decisions regarding consolidation and prepare for the changes that may arise when a merger occurs.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a description of the three schools of interest; Livingston and Sumter County High, the two schools that consolidated, and SCHS, the newly built school. The second section is divided into two parts. The first part provides information related to the parents/guardians' survey that addresses the three hypotheses which guided this study. The second part provides

information related to the educators' survey that addresses two of the three guiding hypotheses of this study. The third and final section provides an analysis of the information from both parents/guardians' and educators' surveys that have been corroborated through data triangulation in the two specified areas noted in Chapter 3: disciplinary actions, and parental educational support.

Pre-Consolidation: Description and Location of the Consolidated Schools

Prior to August 2011, two high schools in Sumter County, Alabama, Livingston and Sumter County High, provided educational service to students in grades 9 through 12. Livingston High was located within the city limits at 108 North Street in Livingston, Alabama. Once eligible, students attending Livingston Junior High could enroll at Livingston High School. The junior high school provided educational services to students in kindergarten through eighth grade (Livingston Junior High School 2013). It is also located within the city limits at 1351 North Washington Street in Livingston, Alabama and was a distance of 1.97 miles from Livingston High (Livingston 2013b). According to public data available at Alabama Department of Education's website, the number of students enrolled at Livingston High during its last school year of operation (SY), 2010-2011, was 377 of which 89.12% were eligible for reduced or free lunch (2013). According to *Alabama's Education Report Card 2010-2011*, reduced or free lunch is an indicator of poverty (2012, 3). The educational system refers to these students as disadvantaged. The public data also indicated the race and ethnicity of the student population was 100% Black (Alabama Department of Education 2013).

Sumter County High School was located within the city limits at 902 4th Avenue in York, Alabama. This student body consisted of students from three junior high

schools. These schools, all of which were located in different cities, were: Kinterbish, located at 5586 Kinterbish 10 in Cuba (Kinterbish), Alabama, North Sumter located at 3300 Panola Parkway 34 in Panola, Alabama, and York West End located at 515 Lincoln Street in York, Alabama. In an email correspondence on April 2, 2013, Glory McAboy, a counselor at SCHS, stated that North Sumter was also a feeder school to Livingston High, depending on where the homes were located. This was an imaginary line that was recognized within Sumter County's Public Schools System. The distances of the schools from Sumter High were 10.32, 34.44, and 1.29 miles respectively (Sumter 2013b; 2013c; 2013e). These junior high schools provided educational service to students in kindergarten through eighth grade (Alabama State Board of Education Plan 2020 2013, 241; Sumter County Schools 2013). According to Alabama Department of Education's public data records, the number of students enrolled at Sumter County High during the last SY, 2010-2011, was 382 of which 92.15% lived in poverty, thereby eligible to receive reduced or free lunch (2013). The data also note the race and ethnicity of the student population consisted of 378 (99%) Black, 2 White, 1 Asian and 1 Multi-Race (1%) (2013). Tables 4 and 5 list the statistics of both schools as noted above. Table 4 lists the junior high school(s) serviced and mileage information. Table 5 lists the high school(s)' social demographics.

Table 4: Junior High Schools Serviced and Mileage Information for SY2010-2011

Livingston High		Sumter County High	
Junior High School Serviced (Grades K - 8)	Distance from High School	Junior High Schools Serviced (Grades K - 8)	Distance from High School
Livingston	1.97 miles	Kinterbish	10.32 miles
		*North Sumter	34.44 miles
		York West End	1.29 miles

* North Sumter was also a feeder school to Livingston High, depending on where the homes were located.

Table 5: Livingston and Sumter County High Schools' Social Demographics for SY2010-2011

Name of High Schools	Grades 9 – 12 Student Population	Grades 9 – 12 Eligibility for Reduced/Free Meals	Grades 9 – 12 Race and Ethnicity
Livingston	377	89.12%	100% Black
Sumter County	382	92.15%	99% Black and 1% other

Source: <http://www.alsde.edu/publicdatareports/default.aspx>

Prior to 2011, technical classes for qualifying students attending both Livingston and Sumter County high schools were offered at Bell-Brown Career Technical Center (2013). This facility is located in Livingston, Alabama at 111 MLK Parkway which was .07 from Livingston High and 9.15 miles from Sumter County High (Livingston 2013a; Sumter 2013a). Transportation to and from the facility was provided by the schools (Bell-Brown 2013).

Post-Consolidation: Description and Location of SCHS, the New School

According to the TV news website, WTOK.com, consolidation of the two schools was initially rejected because the citizens would be levied with an increase in property tax that was needed to fund a new school building. After the citizens voted to reject the bond referendum, the Sumter County School District Board of Education was tasked with making the final decision regarding the use of bond money to build a new building in order to consolidate the two schools (2009).

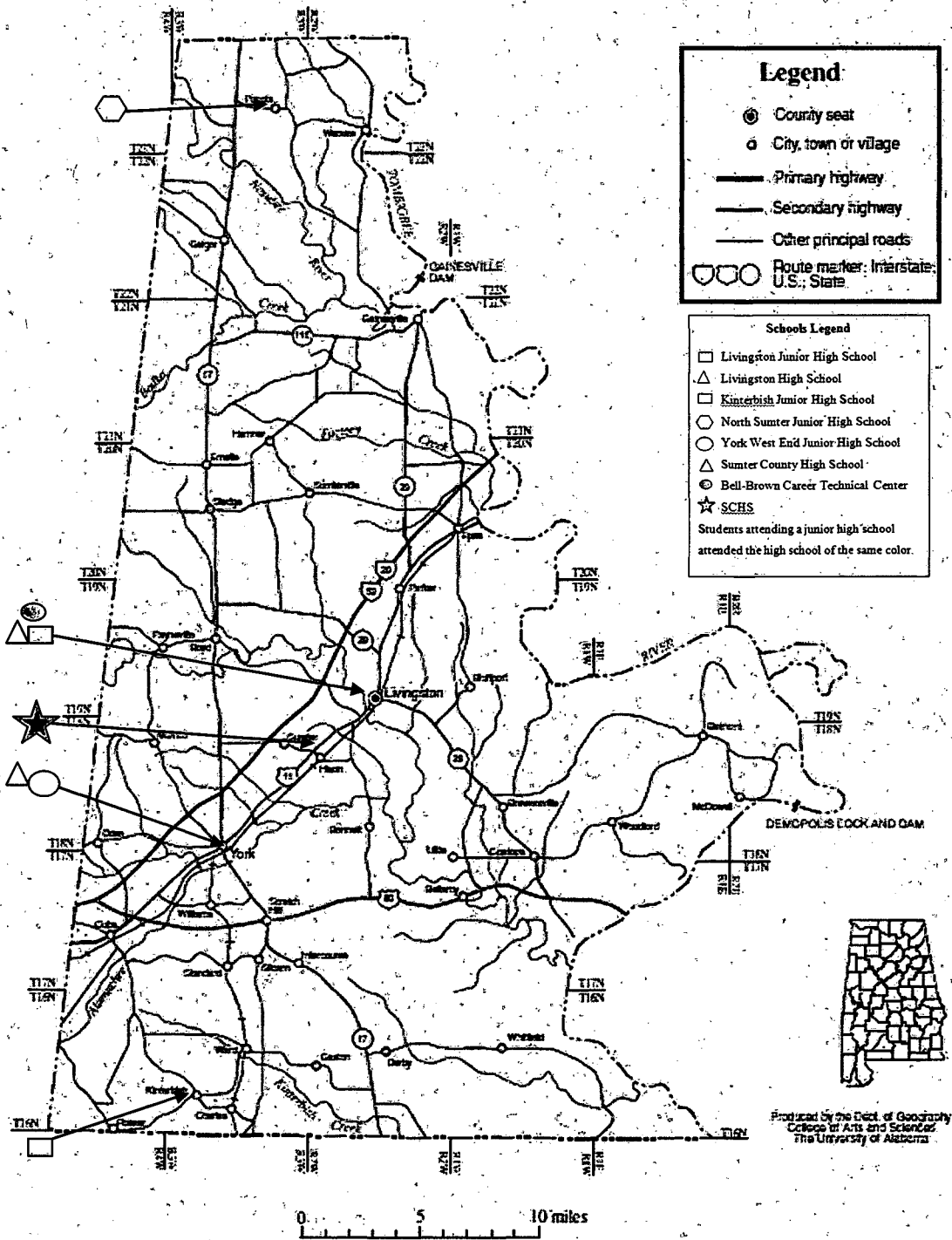
SCHS completed its first school year in May 2012 (WTOK.com 2012a; 2012b). This new school is located in the same school district as were Livingston and Sumter County high schools. However, SCHS was not built on either school's property. Geographically, it is located in an area between the two previous schools. The physical address is, 13878 US Highway 11, York, Alabama. The distance of SCHS from the

previous location of Livingston High is 3.76 (Livingston 2013c). The distance of SCHS from the previous location of Sumter County High is 5.46 miles (Sumter 2013d).

Technical classes for students are still offered at Bell-Brown Career Technical Center. The Center is located 3.69 miles from SCHS (Sumter 2013). Transportation to and from the facility continues to be provided by the school.

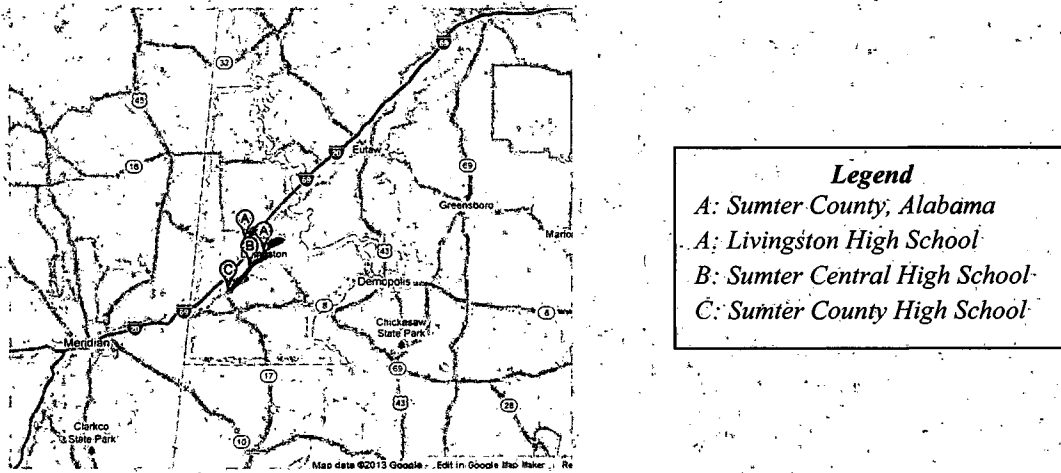
The map in Figure 4 outlines the educational servicing (service) area for Sumter County schools. This Alabama Map, produced by the Department of Geography, College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Alabama, is provided on the following page (2013). The population information on the map was removed and replaced with a legend indicating the previous location of Livingston and Sumter County High schools, the current location of the new high school, SCHS, as well as the following existing schools: Livingston, Kinterbish, North Sumter and York West End junior high schools and the Bell-Brown Career Technical Center. Figure 5 provides the location of the two consolidated high schools, Livingston and Sumter County, and the new school, (SCHS). Figure 6 provides the map location and distance of the previous schools from the new school (SCHS).

Figure 4: Alabama Map: Sumter County
 Department of Geography, University of Alabama



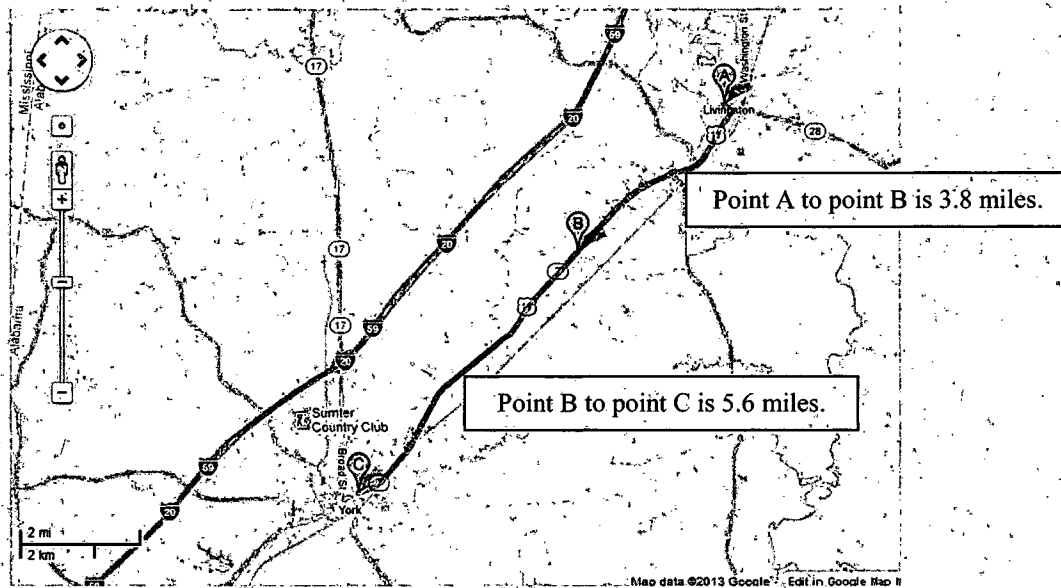
Source: <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/contemporarymaps/alabama/counties/sumter.pdf>

Figure 5: Sumter County, Alabama [Location of Previous and Current High Schools]



Source: <http://goo.gl/maps/GyGAN>

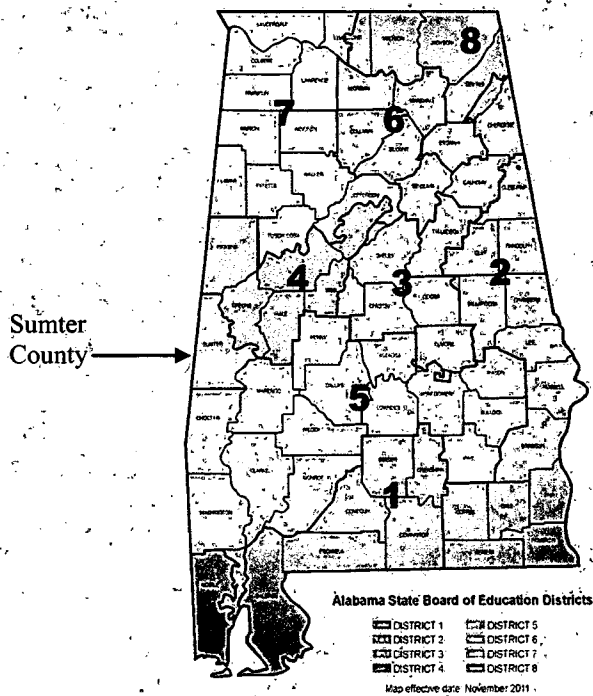
Figure 6: Sumter County, Alabama [Distance of the Previous Schools from the New School (SCHS)]



Source: <http://goo.gl/maps/o1TDc>

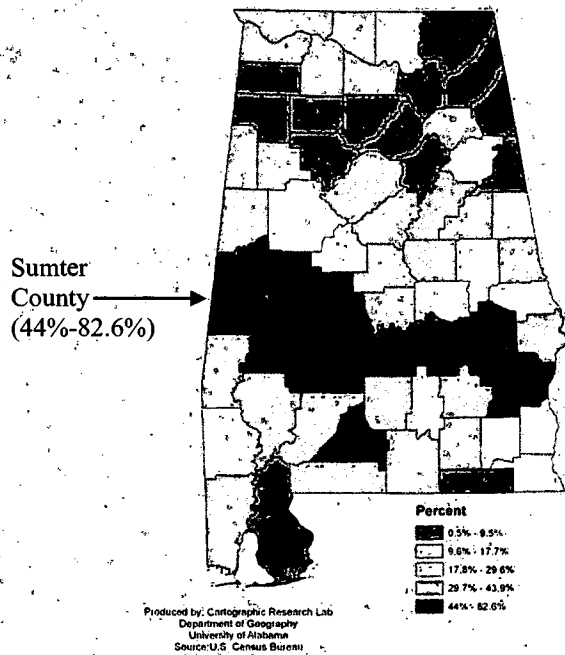
Three additional maps outlining the area of study are provided in Figures 7, through 10. Figure 7 is a map that was included in Chapter 3 (as Figure 3) but is included in this section to provide a relook at the school districts in the state of Alabama (2013). Figure 8 outlines the Black population in the entire state (Alabama Maps 2010a). Figure 9 provides a visual indicating the poverty areas, by county, in the state of Alabama (Alabama Maps 2008). Figure 10 provides the number of citizens 25 years or over with a bachelor's degree with comparative information for 2000 and 2010 (Alabama Maps 2010b). Collectively, these maps provide a look at the demographics and social aspects of the county of study, Sumter, and the surrounding area. Consideration of these aspects, race and ethnicity, poverty, and education (citizens 25 years or older with a bachelor's degree), will assist in applying theories and concepts along with understanding the recommendations and suggestions for future studies presented in Chapter 5.

Figure 7: Alabama State Board of Education Districts



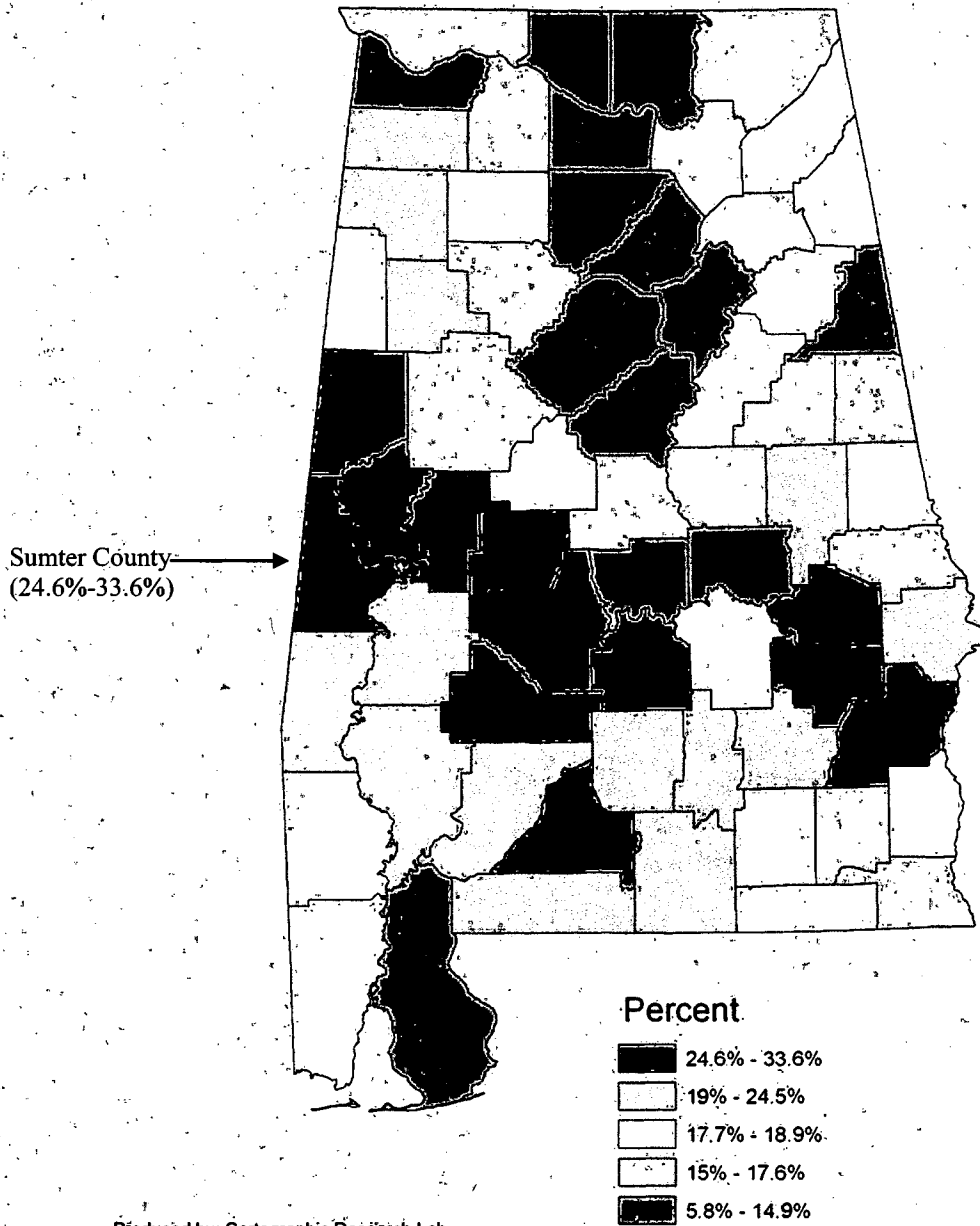
Source: <http://www.alsde.edu/home/SchoolInfo/CountyMap.aspx>

Figure 8: Alabama's Black Population by County: 2010



Source: <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/contemporarymaps/alabama/demographics/Percent%20Black%202010.pdf>

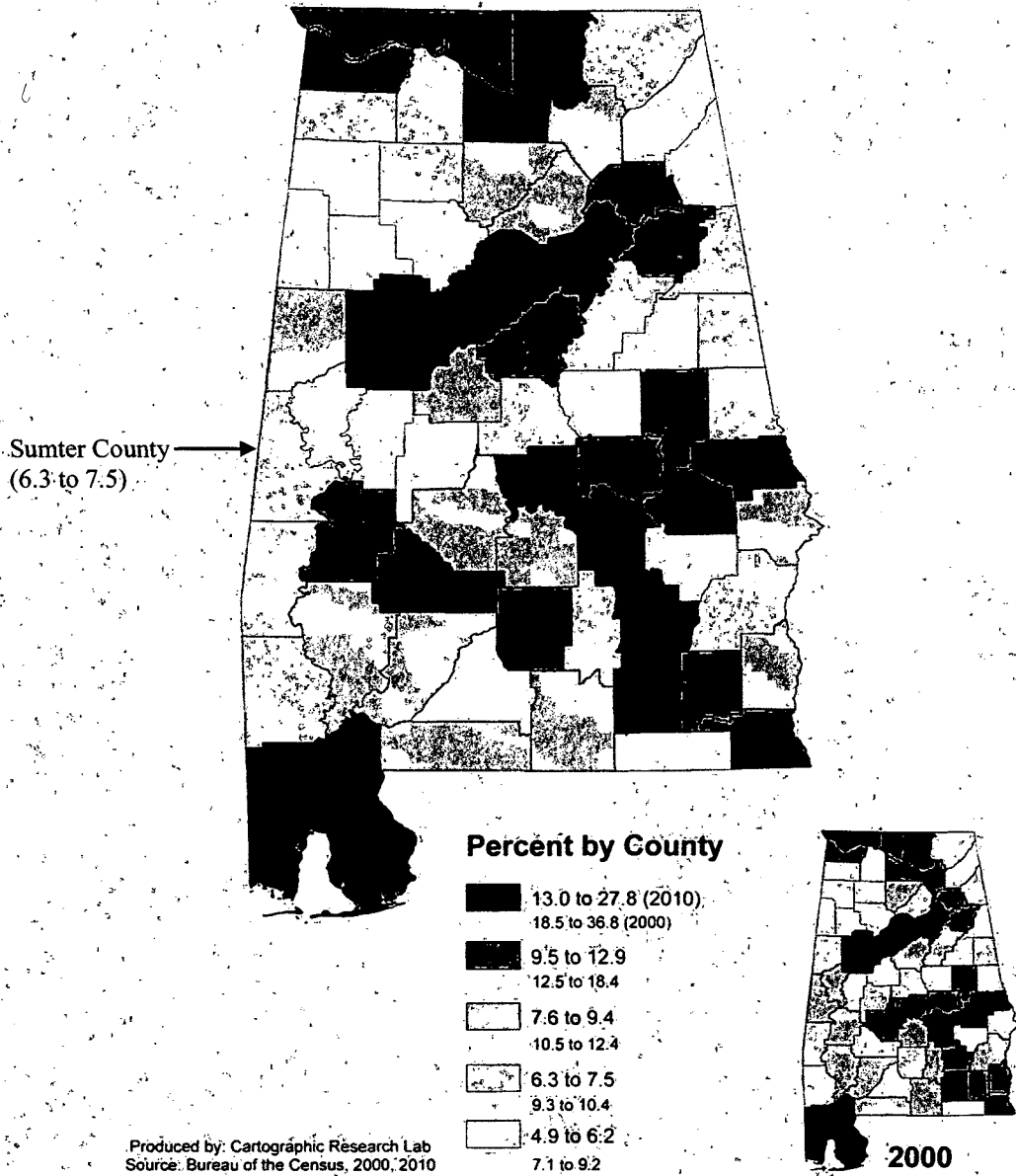
Figure 9: State of Alabama: Population in Poverty by County, 2008



Produced by: Cartographic Research Lab
Department of Geography
University of Alabama
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Estimates Branch

Source: http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/contemporarymaps/alabama/income/all_pov_08.pdf

Figure 10: Population 25 Years or Older with a Bachelor's Degree, 2010



Source:

<http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/contemporarymaps/alabama/education/Population%2025%20Years%20or%20Older%20with%20a%20Bachelors%20Degree,%202010.pdf>

Survey Discussion Concerning Reliability and Validity

Reliability

The instrument used in this study was designed to collect subjective perceptions from two populations—parents/guardians of students and educators at SCHS. Because the measurements are subjective, they are stronger on validity than reliability and generalization is limited to those who completed questionnaires in this study. However, the responses reflect views which relate to themes considered important from the review of the literature.

Validity

This study was designed to measure the subjective views of the parents/guardians of students and educators at SCHS who experienced consolidation in 2011. The parents/guardians' perspective was sought in three particular areas—disciplinary actions, location of school, and parental educational support. The educators' perspective was sought in two of the three areas—disciplinary actions and parental educational support. The response rate of 26 percent for parents/guardians and 27 percent for educators was based on the available population of 284 students and 33 educators respectively. A comment section was provided on each survey for respondents to provide supplementary information relative to the areas of study. A general comment section was provided to allow respondents to comment on any topic. The researcher utilized cross-tabulation and *Pearson's Chi-Square* to assess the probability of independence of the relationship of the categorical data.

Quantitative Findings of Parents /Guardians Surveys and Educator Surveys

This section is divided into two parts. Part I discusses the findings from the survey administered to the parents/guardians of students in grades 11 and 12 at SCHS. Part II discusses the findings from the survey administered to educators at SCHS. Within each part, the percentage return rate, relevance of each survey question, and the applicable hypothesis associated with each question(s) are discussed. The statistical findings are presented in tables and/or graphs throughout each part.

Part I: Parents/Guardians' Survey

The parents/guardians' survey consists of 10 questions. This survey was used to collect responses from parents/guardians of students in grades 11 and 12 regarding their perspective of the merger of the two schools in three specific areas; student disciplinary actions, location of school and parental educational support. The three hypotheses guiding this study are:

- Hypothesis No. 1: The consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools affects disciplinary problems amongst students.
- Hypothesis No. 2: The location of SCHS affects the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school.
- Hypothesis No. 3: The location of SCHS affects parental educational support.

Questions 1 and 2 on the survey (see survey instrument – Appendix D) provided the necessary screens to identify students who did not attend one of the merged schools before attending SCHS and those not in grades 11 and 12. Isolating these responses was crucial because this research focused on recipients who had experienced consolidation. Specifically, actions at the *previous* locations, either Livingston or Sumter County High

schools, were compared to actions at SCHS, the *current* location. Surveys from the identified ineligible groups were removed from data analysis.

Table 6 below, provides an overview of the remaining questions on the survey instrument and also list the variables measured in each question.

Table 6: Parents/Guardians Questionnaire Overview

Parents/Guardians Questionnaire		
Question(s)	Hypothesis	Variables
3	1	Consolidation and disciplinary problems
4, 5, 6, and 7	2	Location and the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school
*8	N/A	Speculative response regarding the ideal time for student to travel to and from school
9 and 10	3	Location and parental educational support

*This question is not linked to a hypothesis.

Findings related to this survey are presented in the following paragraphs. These findings will also be used to corroborate the corresponding responses on the educators' survey presented later in this chapter. Specifically, Questions 3 on both surveys, and Questions 9 and 10 on the parents/guardians' survey along with Question 4 on the educators' survey will compare the students' disciplinary actions and the parental educational support at the *previous* location with those at the *current* location.

Parents/Guardians Survey: Missing Data

Missing data was observed in several sections of survey responses. The missing data code was used to record the following actions: no response, whenever two or more answers were provided for the same question, and/or when the answer provided did not

use the measure specified, for example, an answer indicating a distance of “about 15 minutes” was provided instead of the requested distance in miles.

Parents/Guardians Survey: Distribution and Response Rate

The response rate for the parents/guardians’ survey is 26 percent. According to Alan Bryman, author of *Social Research Methods*, the response rate is the percentage of a sample that agrees to participate in a study (2008, 181). The essential purpose of a high response rate is to eliminate biases that may be associated with the study population. The formula Bryman suggests using when calculating the response rate is presented below (2008, 181).

$$\frac{\text{Number of usable questionnaires}}{\text{Total sample – unsuitable or uncontactable members of the sample}} \times 100$$

The actual computation of the response rate and discussion relative to the numbers used to compute the percentage is provided below.

$$\frac{74}{318 - 34} \times 100 = 26\%$$

Glory McAboy, school counselor and the designated contact person at SCHS, distributed the surveys on February 1, 2013. Her account of the distribution process as described in an email correspondence follows. On February 1, 2013, the day the surveys were distributed at SCHS, the entire student population for grades 9 through 12 was 631. The survey population, grades 11 and 12, was 318; 166 in grade 11 and 152 in grade 12. Thirty-four students in these two grades were absent; 284 were present. The surveys returned by students were in sealed envelopes. Sixty-six surveys were completed and

returned by the requested date. Fourteen additional completed surveys were received within the same week, resulting in a total of 80 surveys (Personal email communication January 18, February 23, March 6, and April 3, 2013). The parents/guardians response rate, based on the number of students present on the day the surveys were distributed, is 28%.

Six surveys were removed and not included in the analysis. These were received from parents/guardians who indicated in Questions 1 and 2 on the survey one of the following: that their child(ren) did not attend either Livingston or Sumter County High before attending SCHS, their child(ren) were enrolled in either grade(s) nine and/or 10, or because the previous school could not be determined. The 74 remaining surveys (N = 74), account for 93 percent of the 80 completed surveys and 23 percent of the 318 eligible population. However, based on the actual number of surveys distributed (284), the response rate for analysis of data is 26 percent.

Parents/Guardians Survey: Quantitative Findings

The tables and charts presented on the following pages (Tables 7 through 19 and Charts 3 through 12) display the findings from the parents/guardians survey. Table 7 lists the categories of all information obtained, the number of responses and percentages received in each category. Table 8 lists the previous high school that the students attended prior to merger. Table 9 lists the current grade level of students. The remaining tables (10 – 19) provide an analysis of the responses obtained in Questions 3 through 10 which address the three hypotheses associated with this study. Charts 3 – 12 are bar graphs which display data visually matching the corresponding Tables.

Table 7: Number of Respondents by Question Content/Variable

	Previous High School	Current Grade Level of Students	Disciplinary Actions of Students	School Location: Distance from Home to Physical Location of Previous School	School Location: Distance from Home to SCHS	Amount of Time Students Spend Traveling on School Bus from Home to School at Previous Location	Amount of Time Students Spend Traveling on School Bus from Home to School at Current Location	Acceptable Time for Students to Ride a School Bus	Parental Educational Support	Physical Location of School
(N = 74)										
Valid N	74	74	67	59	59	72	72	72	68	72
Missing	0	0	7	15	15	2	2	2	6	2

Table 8: High School Attended Prior to Merger

(N = 74)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Livingston High	37	50.0	50.0	50.0
Sumter County High	37	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	74	100.0	100.0	

Table 9: Current Grade Level of Students

(N=74)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
12 th	31	41.9	41.9	41.9
11 th	43	58.1	58.1	100.0
Total	74	100.0	100.0	

Table 10 provides an analysis of the parents/guardians' responses to Question 3 which measured the *previous* and *current* disciplinary actions of students at SCHS. Chart 3 provides a visual of the parental responses.

Table 10: Student Disciplinary Actions

(N = 67)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
About the same number of actions at both locations	37	50.0	55.2	55.2
More disciplinary actions at the current location than the previous location	22	29.7	32.8	88.1
Less disciplinary actions at the current location than the previous location	8	10.8	11.9	100.0
Total	67	90.5	100.0	
Missing	99.00	7	9.5	
Total	74	100.0		

Chart 3: Student Disciplinary Actions

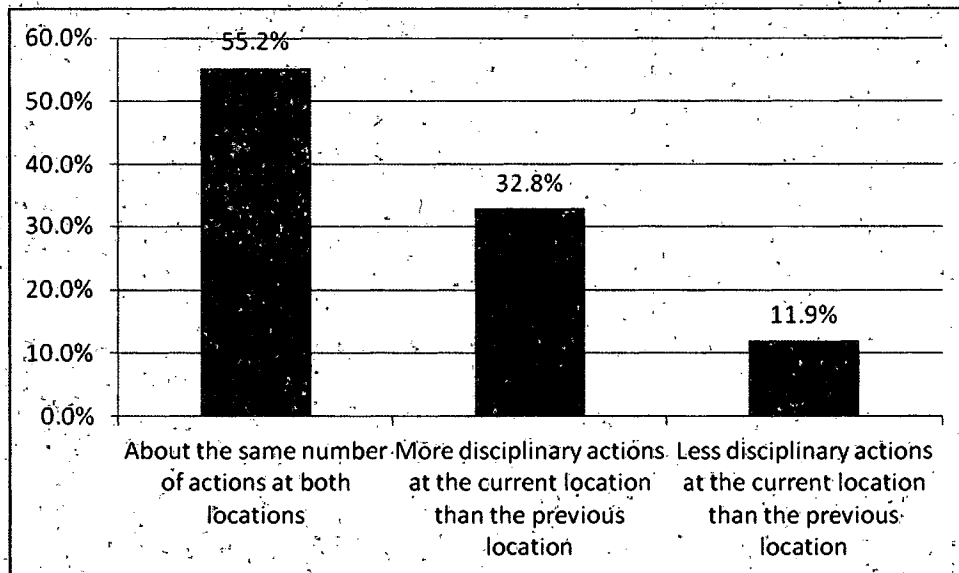


Table 11 provides an analysis of the parents/guardians' responses to Question 4 which inquired about the distance students traveled from home to the physical location of the *previous* school. As requested on the survey, the actual mileage was provided by the parents/guardians. Based on the variety of answers received, the researcher grouped the responses into categories of short, medium, and long distances. The short category was defined as 0-5 miles; medium included the 6-10 miles, 11-15 miles, and 16-20 miles; and long included responses of 21-25 miles, 26-30 miles, and more than 30 miles. Fifteen surveys were coded as missing a response for this question. Nine respondents omitted this section, five indicated time instead of miles, and one answer was not legible. Chart 4 is a bar graph of the parental responses.

Table 11: School Location: Distance from Home to Physical Location of Previous School

(N = 59)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Short distance	24	32.4	40.7	40.7
Medium distance	30	40.6	50.8	91.5
Long distance	5	6.9	8.5	100.0
Total	59	79.7	100.0	
Missing 99.00	15	20.3		
Total	74	100.0		

Chart 4: School Location: Distance from Home to Physical Location of Previous School

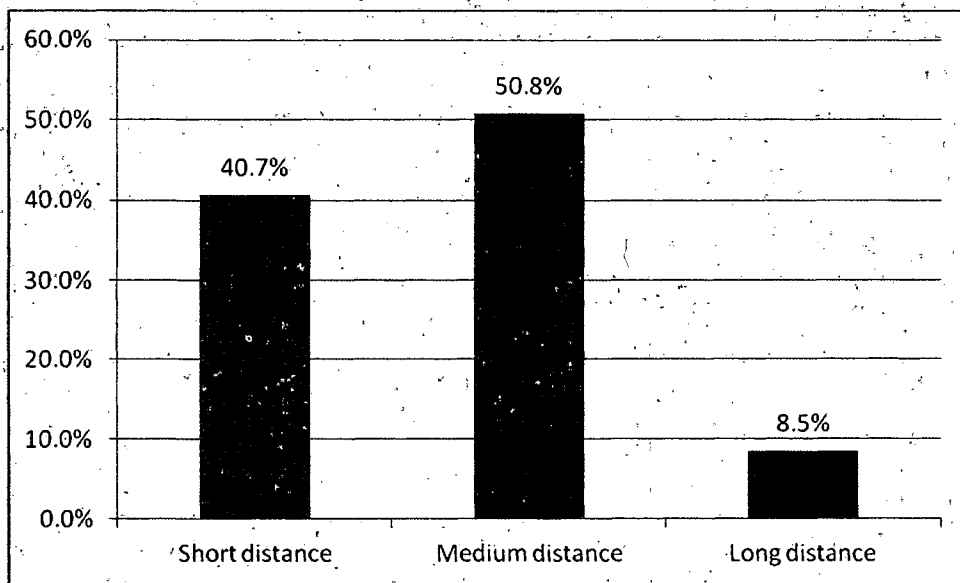
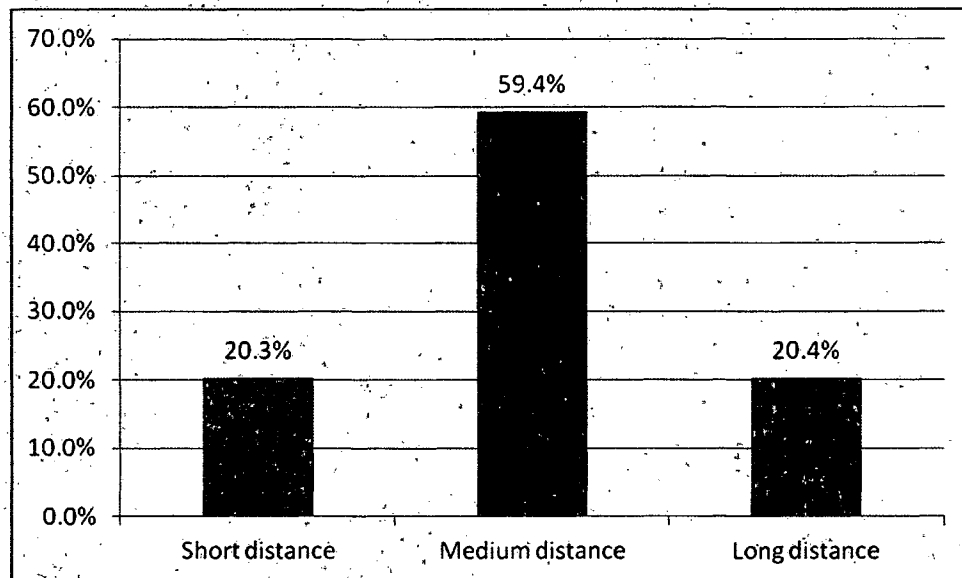


Table 12 provides an analysis of the parents/guardians' responses to Question 5 which relates to the distance students traveled from home to SCHS, the new school. Again, the actual mileage was provided by the parents/guardians. The responses were grouped in the same categories, short, medium, and long, as defined above. In this section, fifteen surveys were also coded as missing responses, which were due to the same reasons as stated above—nine respondents omitted this section, five indicated time instead of miles, and one answer was not legible. Chart 5 presents parental responses as a bar graph.

Table 12: School Location: Distance from Home to SCHS

(N = 59)		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Short distance	12	16.2	20.3	20.3
	Medium distance	35	47.3	59.4	79.7
	Long distance	12	16.2	20.4	100.0
	Total	59	79.7	100.0	
Missing	99.00	15	20.3		
Total		74	100.0		

Chart 5: School Location: Distance from Home to SCHS



The data provided in Tables 11 and 12 were used to compare the *previous* school distances to the *current* school distance. The findings are explained below and presented in Table 13. The original categories of mileage are provided in this Table in order to distinguish the modal group. It also assists in understanding several comments provided by the parents/guardians completing the survey. Chart 6 presents a comparison of parental responses for the school location distances as a bar graph.

Table 13: Parents/Guardians Comparison of School Location Distances

(N = 59)	Miles	Previous School	Previous Percent	Current (SCHS)	Current Percent
Short	0-5 miles	24	40.7	12	20.3
	Total	24	40.7	12	20.3
Medium	6-10 miles	11	18.6	20	33.9
	11-15 miles	13	22.0	9	15.3
	16-20 miles	6	10.2	6	10.2
	Total	30	50.8	35	59.4
Long	21-25 miles	3	5.1	7	11.9
	26-30 miles	1	1.7	2	3.4
	More than 30 miles	1	1.7	3	5.1
	Total	5	8.5	12	20.4
	Grand Total	59	100.0	59	100.0

Table 13 shows travel to the *current* school is longer than to the *previous* school.

The modal group now travels 6-10 miles where before they traveled 0-5 miles.

Chart 6: Parents/Guardians Comparison of School Location Distances

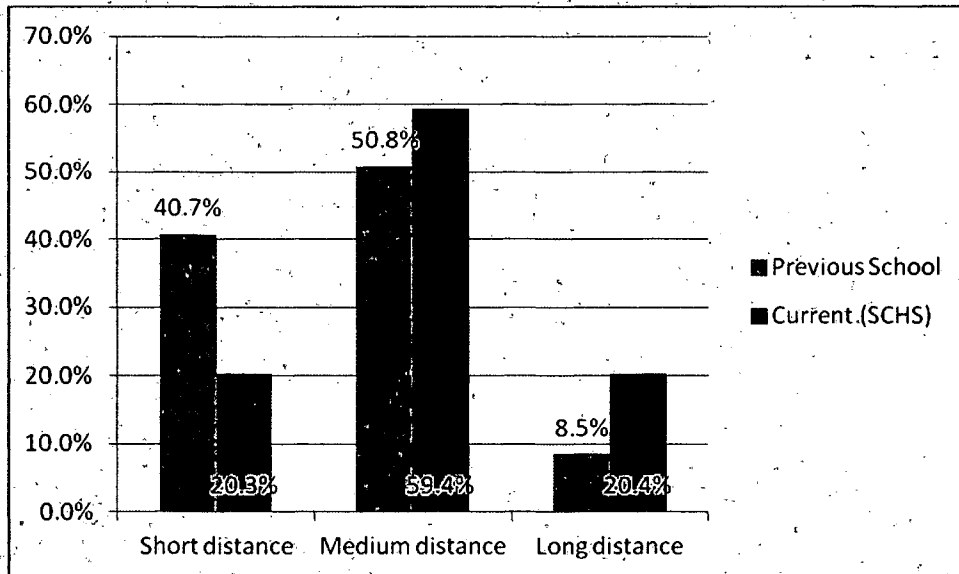


Table 14 provides an analysis of the parents/guardians' responses to Question 6 which addresses the time students spent traveling on the school bus from home to school at the previous location. Chart 7 is a bar graph of the parental responses.

Table 14: Amount of Time Students Spend Traveling on School Bus from Home to School at Previous Location

(N = 72)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 30 minutes	23	31.1	31.9	31.9
More than 30-minutes, but less than 1 hour	23	31.1	31.9	63.9
More than 1 hour	2	2.7	2.8	66.7
Do not know	5	6.8	6.9	73.6
Does not apply/(Did not ride the bus)	19	25.7	26.4	100.0
Total	72	97.3	100.0	
Missing	99.00	2	2.7	
Total	74	100.0		

Chart 7: Amount of Time Students Spend Traveling on School Bus from Home to School at Previous Location

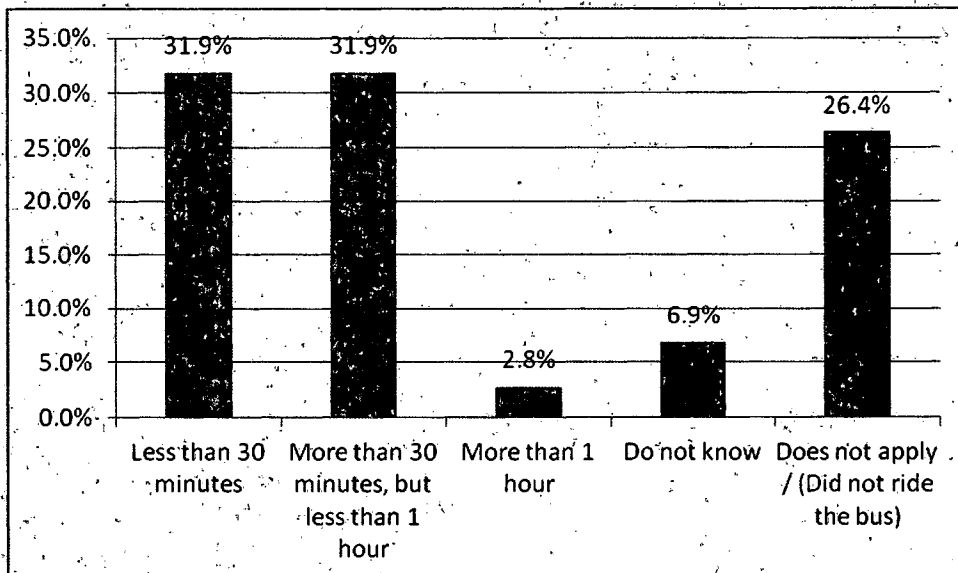
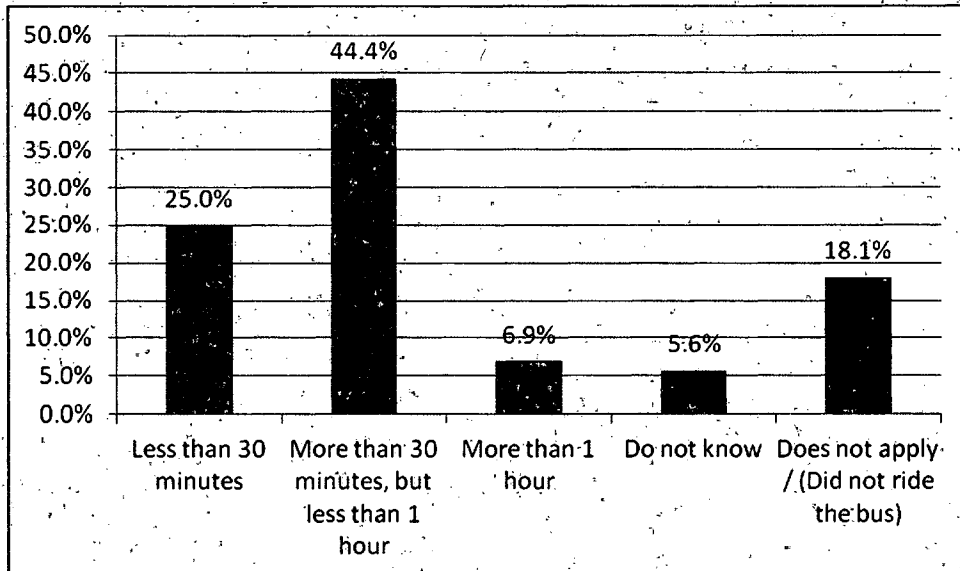


Table 15 provides an analysis of the parents/guardians' responses to Question 7 which relates to the time students spent traveling on the school bus from home to school at the *current* location. Chart 8 is a bar graph displaying the parental responses.

Table 15: Amount of Time Students Spend Traveling on School Bus from Home to School at Current Location

(N = 72)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 30 minutes	18	24.3	25.0	25.0
More than 30 minutes, but less than 1 hour	32	43.2	44.4	69.4
More than 1 hour	5	6.8	6.9	76.4
Do not know	4	5.4	5.6	81.9
Does not apply/(Did not ride the bus)	13	17.6	18.1	100.0
Total	72	97.3	100.0	
Missing	99.00	2	2.7	
Total	74	100.0		

Chart 8: Amount of Time Students Spend Traveling on School Bus from Home to School at Current Location



Data provided in Tables 14 and 15 were used to compare the length of time that students rode the school bus to their *previous* school with the time to their *current* school. The findings are presented on the following page in Table 16. This table reveals that at the *current* location, a decrease of 5 students (6.9%) ride the school bus for less than 30 minutes than at the *previous* location. In the next category, an increase of nine students (12.5%) is affected with longer bus rides at the *current* location. For students who rode the bus more than one hour, an increase of three students (4.1%) are affected with longer bus rides at the *current* location. In the next category, Do not know, a decrease of one student (1.3%) was noted at the *current* location. The remaining category Does not apply/(Did not ride the school bus) a decrease of six less students (8.3%) at the *current* location than the *previous* location. Collectively, 53 students (73.5%) rode the bus at the *previous* location, 59 students (81.9%) students ride the bus at the *current* location. At the *current* location, the number of students who rides the bus increased by six students (8.4%). Chart 9 presents a comparison of parental responses for the time students ride the school bus as a bar graph.

Table 16: Comparison of Time Students Ride the School Bus

Time (N= 72)	Previous School	Percent	Current (SCHS)	Percent
Less than 30 minutes	23	31.9	18	25.0
More than 30 minutes, but less than 1 hour	23	31.9	32	44.4
More than 1 hour	2	2.8	5	6.9
Do not know	5	6.9	4	5.6
Does not apply/(Did not ride the bus)	19	26.4	13	18.1
Total	72	100.0	72	100.0

Chart 9: Comparison of Time Students Ride the School Bus

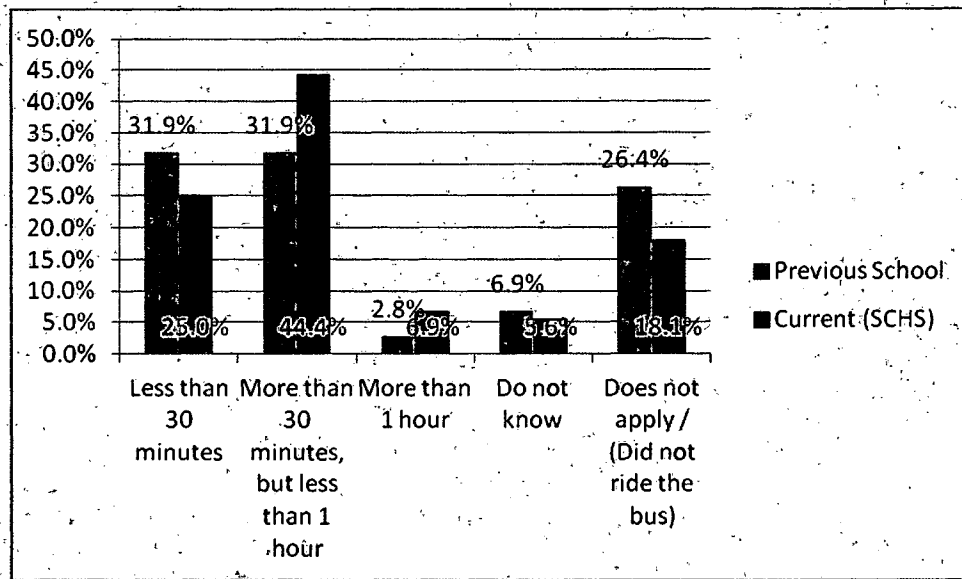


Table 17 provides an analysis of the parents/guardians' responses to Question 8 which asked parents/guardians what they considered an acceptable length of time for students to travel to school on the school bus. Chart 10 is a bar graph displaying the parent/guardian responses.

Table 17: Acceptable Length of Time for Students to Ride School Bus

(N = 72)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 30 minutes	32	43.2	44.4	44.4
More than 30 minutes, but less than 1 hour	33	44.6	45.8	90.3
More than 1 hour	1	1.4	1.4	91.7
Do not know	6	8.1	8.3	100.0
Total	72	97.3	100.0	
Missing	2	2.7		
Total	74	100.0		

Chart 10: Acceptable Length of Time for Students to Ride School Bus

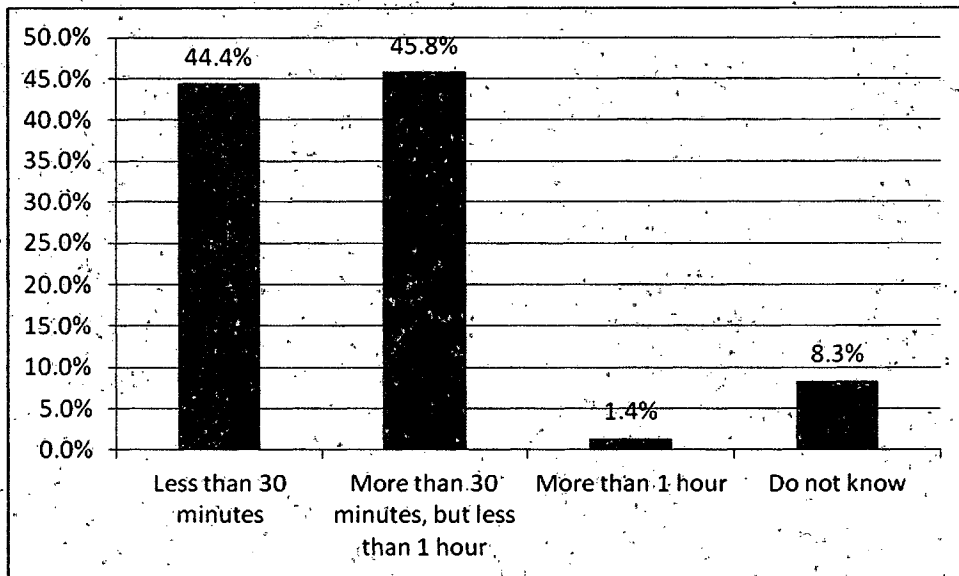


Table 18 provides an analysis of the parents/guardians' responses to Question 9 which addresses parental educational support. Chart 11 is a bar graph displaying the parents/guardians responses.

Table 18: Level of Parental Educational Support

(N = 68)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
About the same level of support at both locations	48	64.9	70.6	70.6
More support at the current location than the previous location	10	13.5	14.7	85.3
Less support at the current location than the previous location	10	13.5	14.7	100.0
Total	68	91.9	100.0	
Missing 99.00	6	8.1		
Total	74	100.0		

Chart 11: Level of Parental Educational Support

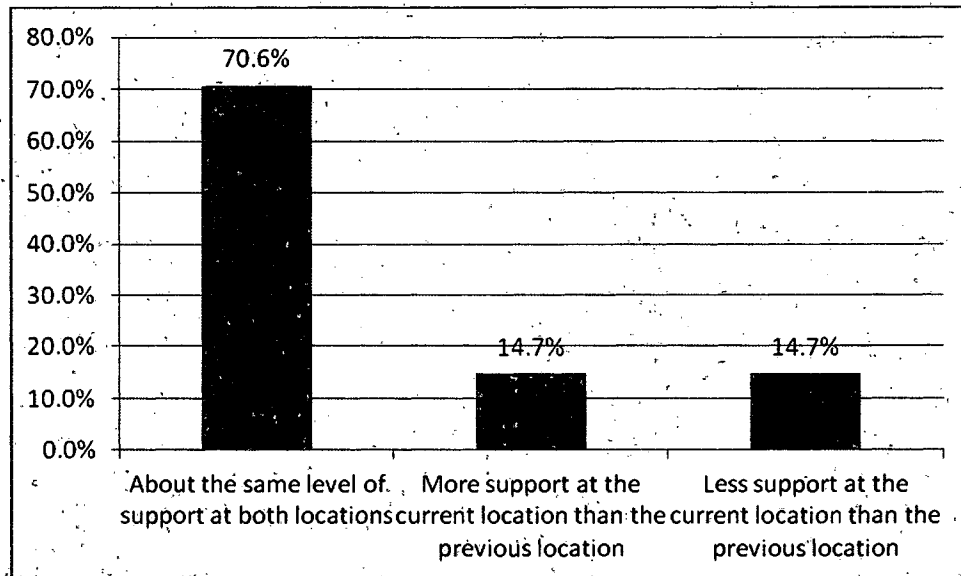
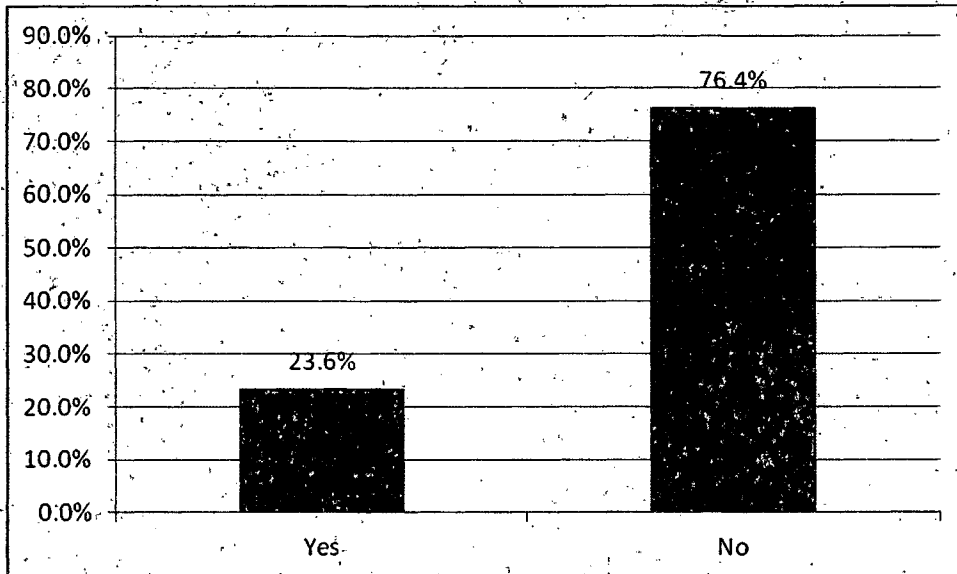


Table 19 provides an analysis of the parents/guardians' responses to Question 10 which asked parents/guardians whether the physical location of the school affected their involvement in their child(ren)'s education. Chart 12 displays the parent/guardian responses as a bar graph.

Table 19: Does the Physical Location of the School Affect Parental Educational Support?

(N = 72)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	17	23.0	23.6	23.6
No	55	74.3	76.4	100.0
Total	72	97.3	100.0	
Missing	99.00	2	2.7	
Total	74	100.0		

Chart 12: Does the Physical Location of the School Affect Parental Educational Support?



Parents/Guardians Survey: Summary of Findings for Part I

This research focused on the subjective views of parents/guardians about the impact of consolidation. The three hypotheses guiding this study and the summary of those findings are presented below.

Disciplinary Problems

Hypothesis No. 1: The consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools affects disciplinary problems amongst students.

Question 3 on the parents/guardians' survey which measured the variables in Hypothesis No. 1 found that the majority, 37 recipients (55.2%), perceived that the same number of disciplinary actions occurred at both locations. However, 30 recipients (44.7%) perceived a change in disciplinary problems among students at SCHS; 22 recipients (32.8%), perceived that more disciplinary actions occurred at the *current* location than the *previous* location; and eight recipients (11.9%) perceived that less disciplinary actions occurred at the *current* location than the *previous* location. Therefore, according to the parents/guardians of students at SCHS who experienced the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools, disciplinary problems amongst students changed. Theories and/or concepts which offer an explanation for these findings are provided in Chapter 5.

School Location

Hypothesis No. 2: The location of SCHS affects the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school.

Questions 4 through 7 on the parents/guardians' survey measured the variables in Hypothesis No. 2. Questions 4 and 5 compared the distance of the schools' *previous*

location from the students' home with the *current* location. The unit of miles was the standard used for measuring distance. Comparative data provided in Table 13 where the responses were grouped in three categories, short, medium, and long distance, provided evidence that students live farther from the location of the *current* school. Additionally, when observing the original categories of mileage provided in Table 13, the modal group is distinguishable. At the *previous* location this group traveled 0-5 miles, now at the *current* location this group travels 6-10 miles.

Questions 6 and 7 compared the amount of time students spent traveling on the school bus from home to school at the *previous* location with the *current* location. Comparative information provided in Table 16 revealed that five fewer students (6.8%) rode the school bus for less than 30 minutes at the *current* location when compared to the *previous* location; an increase of nine students (12.1%) rode the school bus for more than 30 minutes but less than one-hour at the *current* location when compared to the *previous* location; in the next category of more than one hour, an increase of three students (4.1%) is affected with longer bus rides at the *current* location when compared to the *previous* location. At the *current* location, fewer students, 6 (8.1%) are in the category does not apply/did not ride the bus than at the *previous* location. Overall, more students, 32 (43.2%) are in the time range, more than 30 minutes, but less than 1 hour. Thirty-three (45.8%) parents/guardians, the majority, considered this an acceptable length of time for students to travel to school on the school bus. Eighteen students (25.0%) are in the time range, less than 30 minutes. Thirty-two (44.4%) parents/guardians considered this an acceptable length of time for students to travel to school on the school bus. (See Tables 16 and 17).

According to the parents/guardians of students at SCHS who experienced the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools, the distance and amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from the *current* location when compared to the *previous* location changed. Theories and/or concepts which may offer an explanation for these findings and parents/guardians response to the changes are provided in Chapter 5.

Parental Educational Support

Hypothesis No. 3: The location of SCHS affects parental education support.

Based on the results from the two questions which measured parental educational support, the majority of parents/guardians, 48 (70.6%), indicated about the same level of support was provided at the *previous* and *current* locations. However, 20 responses (29.4%) indicated a change; 10 (14.7%) indicated more support was provided at the *current* location than the *previous* and 10 responses (14.7%) indicated less support was provided at the *current* location than the *previous* location. Fifty-five (76.4%) stated no, the physical location of SCHS does not affect their involvement in their child(ren)'s education. However, 17 responses (23.6%) stated yes, the physical location of SCHS affected their involvement in their child(ren)'s education. Collectively, the majority of responses for Questions 9 and 10 revealed that the parents/guardians level of support did not change and/or indicated the location of SCHS did not affect parental educational support. However, 20 (29.4%) parents/guardians noted a change in the level of support, and 17 (23.6%) parents/guardians indicated that the physical location of the *current* school affects parental educational support and this is substantively important.

Therefore, according to the parents/guardians of students at SCHS who experienced the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools, the majority perceived that the location of SCHS did not affect the parental educational support but nearly 25% indicated changes in their level of educational support. Theories and/or concepts which may provide additional insight to these findings are provided in Chapter 5.

Statistical Analysis of the Parents/Guardians' Data

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 21.0, to generate cross-tabulation or contingency tables along with *Pearson's Chi-Square* to assess the probability of independence of the relationship of the categorical data from the parents/guardians' survey. Specifically, the researcher investigated the independence of a relationship between (1) disciplinary actions of students and parental educational support, (2) parental educational support and physical location of school, and (3) disciplinary actions of students and physical location of school. Determining the independence of a relationship assisted in answering the research question for this study, *How did the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools impact the students at Sumter Central High School (SCHS), and their families in the following three areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support?* Although the research question specified three areas, one of the areas, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, is not addressable using cross-tabulation. The researcher feels the 'distance' and/or 'time' questions relate more to students' academic performance. Because academic data was not collected on the survey, this area is beyond

the scope of this study. However, the effect of distance on academic performance was noted by referencing literature sources used for this case study.

Relationship between Disciplinary Actions of Students and Parental Educational Support

Survey Questions 3 and 9 measured the subjective perspective of the parents/guardians survey respondents in regards to the disciplinary actions of students and parental educational support respectively. (The survey questions are provided below.) The results of the cross-tabulations of categorical data indicate there is weak evidence of a relationship between parental educational support and disciplinary actions of students (*Pearson's Chi-Square* = 1.778, *df* = 4, *p* = .77 or $X^2(4) = 1.77$, *p* = .77). Therefore, the relationship between the multiple variables appears to be independent. Parental support appears to have an insignificant effect on the disciplinary actions of students. Because this is a case study, the findings are not generalizable to other geographical areas.

Question 3: In comparison, how would you evaluate the disciplinary actions of your child at the *previous* location compared to his/her actions at the *current* location?

- a. About the same number of disciplinary actions at both locations
- b. More disciplinary actions at the *current* location than the *previous* location
- c. Less disciplinary actions at the *current* location than the *previous* location

Question 9: In comparison, how would you evaluate your level of parental support for your child's education at the *previous* location compared to its *current* location?

- a. About the same level of support at both locations
- b. More support at the *current* location than the *previous* location
- c. Less support at the *current* location than the *previous* location

Relationship between Parental Educational Support and Physical Location of School

Survey Questions 9 and 10 measured the subjective perspective of the parents/guardians survey participants in regards to parental educational support and physical location of school respectively. (The survey questions are provided below.) The results of the cross-tabulations of categorical data indicate there is very strong evidence of a relationship between the physical location of the school and parental educational support (*Pearson's Chi-Square* = 9.019, *df* = 2, *p* = .011 or $X^2(2) = 9.01$, *p* = .011). This finding is significant. While this research is a case study and not intended to be generalizable to other geographical areas, this finding implies that the location of schools may affect parental educational support.

Question 9: In comparison, how would you evaluate your level of parental support for your child's education at the *previous* location compared to its *current* location?

- a. About the same level of support at both locations
- b. More support at the *current* location than the *previous* location
- c. Less support at the *current* location than the *previous* location

Question 10: Does the physical location of SCHS affect your involvement in your child's education?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Relationship between Disciplinary Actions of Students and Physical Location of School

Survey Questions 3 and 10 measured the subjective perspective of the parents/guardians survey respondents in regards to disciplinary actions of students and the physical location of school respectively. (The survey questions are provided below.) The results of the cross-tabulations of the categorical data indicates there is weak

evidence of a relationship between the physical location of the school and disciplinary actions of students (*Pearson's Chi-Square* = 2.002, *df* = 2, *p* = .37 or $X^2(2) = 2.002, p = .37$). Therefore, the relationship appears to be independent. That is to say, the physical location of the school has an insignificant effect on the disciplinary actions of students.

Question 3: In comparison, how would you evaluate the disciplinary actions of your child at the *previous* location compared to his/her actions at the *current* location?

- a. About the same number of disciplinary actions at both locations
- b. More disciplinary actions at the *current* location than the *previous* location
- c. Less disciplinary actions at the *current* location than the *previous* location

Question 10: Does the physical location of SCHS affect your involvement in your child's education?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Summary of Statistical Analysis of the Parents/Guardians' Survey

The researcher utilized statistical test *Pearson's Chi Square* to assess the probability of independence of the relationship of the categorical data collected on the parents/guardians' survey. The case study results suggest evidence of a relationship between the physical location of school and parental educational support. Specifically, the evidence suggests that the location of the schools may determine the parental support received. The case study also suggests independence relationships between parental educational support and disciplinary actions of students as well as the physical location of the school and disciplinary actions of students. These findings are not generalizable to other studies.

Parents/Guardians' Comments on the Survey

Questions 3, 9 and 10 on the survey were used to measure the variables associated with the corresponding hypothesis. Additional space was provided after each question to allow parents/guardians to add relevant comments if desired. Comments provided on the surveys analyzed in this study are summarized in the following paragraphs. All comments are included; similar responses are combined.

Question 3 on the survey asked, In comparison, how would you evaluate the disciplinary actions of your child at the *previous* location compared to his/her actions at the *current* location? Forty-four surveys (59.5%) contained comments in the space provided. The responses from parents/guardians were: their child did not have any, or not a lot of, disciplinary problems; positive and negative comments about the administration; students' maturity level this year contributed to better behavior along with being surrounded with positive people; disciplinary problems resulted because the students from the two different schools did not know one another; bigger school, more students; no ISS at previous school; no after school disciplinary provided at previous school; about the same—same rules same issues; local authorities involvement is a good idea; more students, more work requires different procedures; child around less students; enforcement of uniforms; same policies—some not correct for some students; and wrong treatment for some students.

Question 9 on the survey asked, In comparison, how would you evaluate your level of parental support for your child's education at the *previous* location compared to its *current* location? Forty surveys (54.1%) contained comments in the space provided. The responses from parents/guardians were: always supportive; the same involvement

was given—no more no less; having to travel further; not involved due to work; enjoy new facility; previous location better for parking; better parent/teacher relationship at previous location; more activities at current location than previous; attendance/support increased; no communication from school; teachers are more/less concerned; parent/guardian more involved and felt welcomed; education is child's decision; supportive of PTA; and more support provided because of child's grade status (senior).

Question 10 on the survey asked, Does the physical location of SCHS affect your involvement in your child's education? Forty surveys (54.1%) contained comments in the space provided. To assist in understanding the quantitative data, comments which are categorized by content area below can be instructive. The responses from parents/guardians who indicated the physical location of SCHS does not affect their involvement were: the focus is to help the student; several distance responses indicating the school is closer to home; location not a factor; child loves new location and new school; concern for student's grade (is the reason for involvement); and children riding the bus too long.

- The responses from parents/guardians who indicated the physical location of SCHS does affect their involvement were: the school is farther: not close enough as in the past to allow child to walk home after school, therefore he/she cannot participate in sports; combination of responses relating to location, farther distance, gas, (one respondent indicated gas is now a factor), one vehicle and/or no transportation; job interference; more fights at new school; focus is on dress (attire) not education; and closer location means more involvement in school activities.

A general comment section was provided on the survey to allow parents/guardians to record any thoughts desired. Less than one percent (7) of the surveys displayed written comments in this section. One parent/guardian expressed a desire to sit in on class but due to receiving negative information did not; better treatment of students is needed; all students at SCHS are not given an opportunity to participate in programs—only a select few; students fight all the time—should have stayed two schools; students need to be more involved with one another and pull together—and less violence; some issues at SCHS still need addressing—better planning; and students should dress out more or have more activities.

Theories and/or concepts which offer an explanation for some comments are provided in Chapter 5. Also included in Chapter 5 are recommendations that may be useful in addressing some concerns expressed by the parents/guardians of students at SCHS.

Conclusion

The majority of responses from parents/guardians indicated virtually no change occurred in the following three areas since the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High school which formed a new school, SCHS: disciplinary problems among students, the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support. However, some responses from parents/guardians indicated changes had occurred at the *current* location. These changes, both positive and negative, along with the possible impact to students' education will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Part II: Educators' Survey

A different survey, consisting of four questions, was used to collect responses from educators regarding their perspective of the merger of the two schools in two specific areas; disciplinary actions of students and parental educational support. Questions 1 and 2 on the survey (see survey instrument – Appendix E) provided the necessary screening to identify those who were not employed at one of the merged schools and those not providing service to students in grades 11 and 12. Isolating these responses was crucial because the surveys asked for educators to compare actions at the *previous* locations, either Livingston or Sumter County High schools, to actions of students at the *current* location, SCHS. Surveys from the identified ineligible groups were removed from data analysis. Two hypotheses guided the research regarding the Educator's Survey.

- Hypothesis No. 1: The consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools affects disciplinary problems amongst students.
- Hypothesis No. 3: The location of SCHS affects parental educational support.

Table 20 provides an overview of the remaining questions on the survey instrument and also provides the variables measured in each question.

Table 20: Educators' Questionnaire Overview

Educators' Questionnaire		
Question	Hypothesis	Variables
3	1	Consolidation and disciplinary problems
4	3	Location and parental educational support

Hypothesis No. 2, (The location of SCHS affects the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school), was not included on the educators' survey. The researcher believed parents were more knowledgeable about the actual time their child(ren) spent on the school bus than educators, therefore Hypothesis No. 2 was omitted.

Details and findings related to this survey are presented below. These findings will also be used to corroborate with the corresponding responses from the parent/guardians' survey: specifically, Question 3 which directly inquires about disciplinary actions and Questions 9 and 10 which inquire about parental educational support. Collectively, the questions measure the disciplinary actions and parental educational support at the *previous* location with those at the *current* location by comparing the subjective responses from two different groups, parents/guardians and educators.

Educators' Survey: Missing Data

Missing data was observed in several questions on the Educator's Survey. Missing data was defined as when no response was given or when a response other than the value and/or description requested was provided. For example, a grade level instead of the name of a previous school was provided.

Educators' Survey: Distribution and Response Rate

The response rate for the educators' survey is 27%. The formula provided by Bryman introduced in the parents/guardians' section of this chapter was also used to calculate the educators' response rate (2008, 181).

$$\frac{\text{Number of usable questionnaires}}{\text{Total sample} - \text{unsuitable or uncontactable members of the sample}} \times 100$$

The actual computation of the response rate and discussion relative to the numbers used to compute the percentage is provided below.

$$\frac{9}{48 - 5 - 10} \times 100 = 27\%$$

Appendix F provides a list of the faculty and staff at SCHS on February 1, 2013, for SY 2012-2013 when this research was conducted (Personal email communication with Glory McAboy on January 18, 2013 and February 23, 2013). The total number of personnel on the attached list is 48. Five individuals, the principal, assistant principal, secretary, receptionist and the counselor who administered the survey, Glory McAboy, did not receive a survey. Of the remaining 43 educators, 33 (77%) of those physically present at the school on the day the survey was administered elected to receive a survey. The remaining educators were either absent or attending workshops. Out of the 33 participants willing to receive a survey, 16 educators' surveys (48%), were completed and returned for analysis. Fifteen surveys were returned by the requested date and one was received after the due date, but within the same week. Based on the number of educators (43) eligible to participate in this study and the 16 surveys received, 37% of the eligible population completed a survey. Included in the 16 surveys, were seven surveys that were not included in the analysis. These were from educators who indicated previous employment at another school besides Livingston and Sumter County High and those providing service exclusively to either grade(s) 9 or 10. The reason for excluding grades

9 and 10 is, most students in those grades would not have experienced the consolidation. Students in grades 11 and 12 would have previously attended one of the consolidated schools. To further explain, students in grade 11 would have completed grade 9 in one of the consolidated schools in 2010-2011, and those in grade 12 would have completed the 10th grade in the same year at one of the consolidated schools. For SY 2011-2012 these students would have been in grades 10 and 11; for SY 2012-2013 these students are in grades 11 and 12. The nine remaining educator surveys (N = 9), account for 56% of the 16 completed surveys which is 20.9% of the 43 eligible educators. However, based on the actual number of surveys distributed (33), the 9 respondents included in this analysis is a response rate of 27%.

Educators' Survey: Quantitative Findings

The quantitative results presented here have little if any meaning given the low number of educators' responses (N = 9). The entire quantitative analysis and discussion of quantitative results is presented for informational purposes only. With this point of view, the tables and charts presented on the following pages (Tables 21 thru 25 and Charts 13 through 15) provide educators' survey findings. Table 21 shows the number of educators who responded to survey questions. Table 22 provides the previous school where educators were employed. The remaining tables (23 – 25) provide an analysis of the responses obtained in Questions 3 and 4. Charts 13 – 15 present the data visually in bar graphs which correspond to tabular data displays.

Table 21: Number of Educators Responding to Survey Questions

(N = 9)		Previous School Information	Grade Level of Student to which Service is Provided at SCHS	Disciplinary Actions of Students	Parental Educational Support
N	Valid	9	9	8	9
	Missing	0	0	1	0

Table 22: Previous School Where Educators were Employed

(N = 9)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Livingston High School	4	44.4	44.4	44.4
Sumter County High	5	55.6	55.6	100.0
Total	9	100.0	100.0	

Table 23 provides an analysis of the educators' responses to Question 2. This question identifies the grade level of students whom educators provided service to at SCHS. These responses fulfill the second prerequisite educators must satisfy in order to provide answers to Questions 3 and 4 which inquire about the disciplinary actions of students and the parental educational support provided at the *previous*, and *current* locations. Chart 13 presents the same data as a bar graph.

Table 23: Grade Level of Students to which Service is Provided at SCHS

(N = 9)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Grade 12, 11, 10, 9	5	55.6	55.6	55.6
Grade 12, 11, 9	1	11.1	11.1	66.7
Grades 11, 10	1	11.1	11.1	77.8
Grades 12, 11	1	11.1	11.1	88.9
Grade 12	1	11.1	11.1	100.0
Total	9	100.0	100.0	

Chart 13: Grade Level of Students to which Service is Provided at SCHS

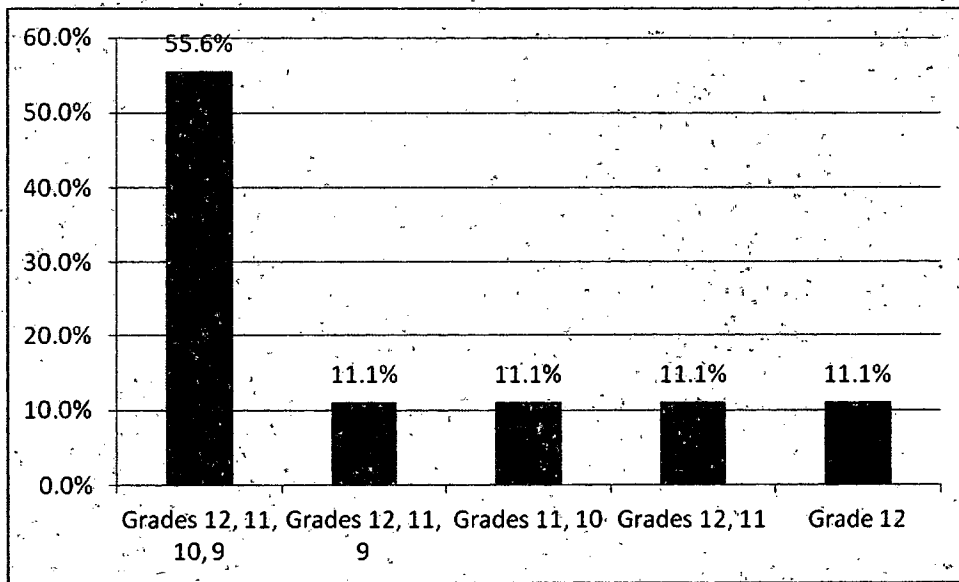


Table 24 provides an analysis of the educators' responses to Question 3 which inquires about the *previous* and *current* disciplinary actions of students at SCHS. Chart 14 provides a visual using a bar graph to display the educators' responses.

Table 24: Student Disciplinary Actions

(N = 8)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
About the same number of actions at both locations	3	33.3	37.5	37.5
More disciplinary actions at the current location than the previous location	3	33.3	37.5	75.0
Less disciplinary actions at the current location than the previous location	2	22.2	25.0	100.0
Total	8	88.9	100.0	
Missing: 99.00	1	11.1		
Total	9	100.0		

Chart 14: Student Disciplinary Actions.

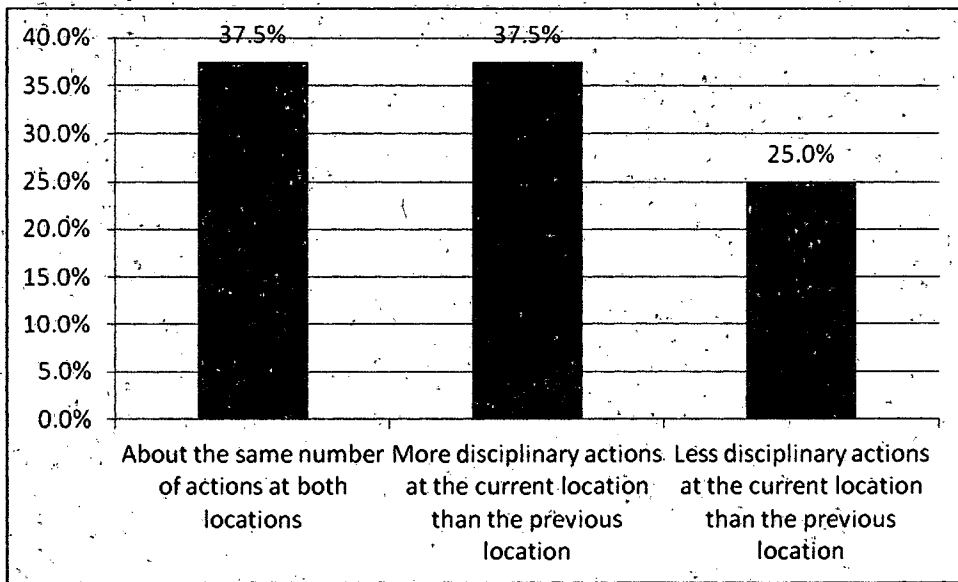
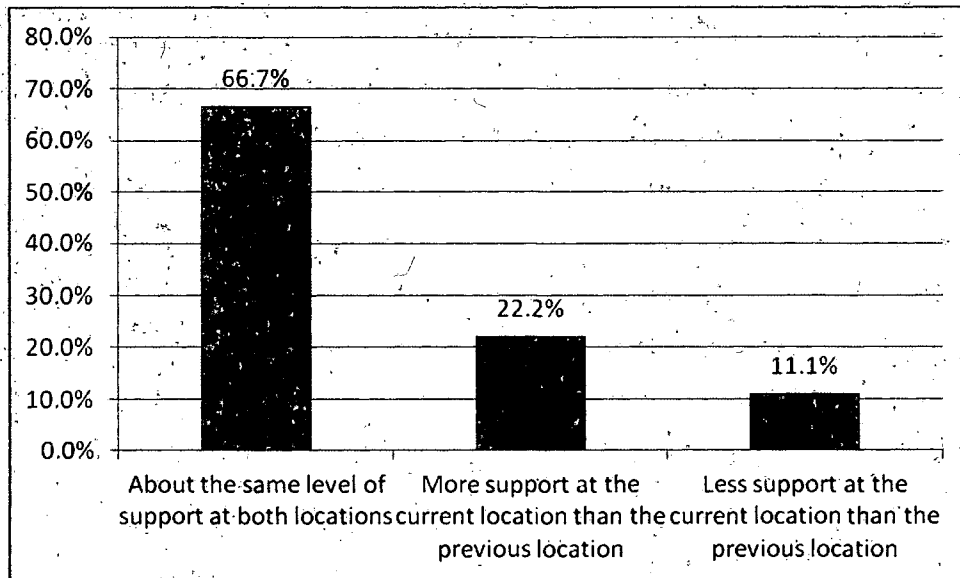


Table 25 provides an analysis of the educators' responses to Question 4 which addresses *previous* and *current* parental educational support of students at SCHS. Chart 15 presents this data as a bar graph.

Table 25: Level of Parental Educational Support

(N = 9)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
About the same level of support at both locations	6	66.7	66.7	66.7
More support at the current location than the previous location	2	22.2	22.2	88.9
Less support at the current location than the previous location	1	11.1	11.1	100.0
Total	9	100.0	100.0	

Chart 15: Level of Parental Educational Support



Educators' Survey: Summary of Findings on Part II

This research focused on the subjective views of educators about the impact of consolidation. The educators were to compare actions at the *previous* schools with those at the *current* school. Because the educators teach a combination of grades at the *current* school, the actions noted by educators may not pertain only to students in grades 11 and 12, those who experienced consolidation. Of the 9 educators (100%) at SCHS, 7 (77.8%) teach students in grade(s) 11 and/or 12 along with teaching students in grade(s) 9 and/or 10. Two educators (22.2%) teach exclusively students in grade(s) 11 and/or 12. The two hypotheses guiding this study and the summary of those findings are presented below. As a reminder, Hypothesis No. 2, (The location of SCHS affects the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school), was not included on the educators' survey. The researcher believed parents were more knowledgeable about the actual time

their child(ren) spent on the school bus than educators, therefore Hypothesis No. 2 was omitted.

Disciplinary Problems

Hypothesis No. 1: The consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools affects disciplinary problems amongst students.

Question 3 on the educators' survey measured the variables in Hypothesis No. 1. Based on the subjective view of educators, three recipients (37.5%) perceived that the same number of disciplinary actions occurred at both locations. However, 5 recipients (62.5%) perceived a change in disciplinary problems among students at SCHS: 3 recipients (37.5%) perceived more disciplinary actions at the *current* location than the *previous* location; and 2 recipients (25.0%) perceived less disciplinary actions occurred at the *current* location than the *previous* location. Therefore, according to the educators at SCHS who experienced the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools, disciplinary problems among students changed. Of those who perceived a change in disciplinary problems, they perceive slightly more disciplinary problems now than before consolidation. Theories and/or concepts which offer an explanation for these findings are provided in Chapter 5.

Parental Educational Support

Hypothesis No. 3: The location of SCHS affects parental educational support.

Question 4 on the educators' survey measured the variables in Hypothesis No. 3. Based on the responses, six educators (66.7%) perceived that the location of SCHS had no effect on parental educational support. However, 3 educators (33.3%) perceived that the consolidation of the two schools affected parental educational support; 2 educators

(22.2) thought that more support was provided at the *current* than the *previous* location, and 1 educator (11.1%) perceived less support was provided at the *current* location than the *previous* location. Therefore, according to the educators at SCHS who experienced the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools, the majority, two thirds (66.7%) perceived that there is no change in parental educational support. Theories and/or concepts which offer an explanation for these findings are provided in Chapter 5.

Statistical Analysis of the Educators' Data

The researcher used SPSS to generate cross-tabulation or contingency tables along with *Pearson's Chi-Square* to assess the probability of independence of the relationship of the categorical data from the educators' survey. Specifically, the researcher investigated a relationship between disciplinary actions of students and parental educational support. The questions measuring variables associated with the location of SCHS affecting the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, were not included on the educators' survey; therefore there is no statistical analysis of these variables. The researcher believed parents were more knowledgeable about the actual time their child(ren) spent on the school bus than educators. Furthermore, as noted in the parents/guardians' analysis section, the researcher feels the 'distance' and/or 'time' questions relates more to students' academic performance. Because academic data was not collected on the survey, this area is beyond the scope of this study. However, the effect of distance on academic performance was noted by referencing literature sources used for this case study.

Relationship between Disciplinary Actions of Students and Parental Educational Support

Survey Questions 3 and 4 measured the subjective perspective of the educators survey participants in regards to the disciplinary actions of students and parental educational support respectively. (The survey questions are provided below.) The results of the cross-tabulations of the categorical data indicate there is weak evidence of a relationship between disciplinary actions of students and parental educational support (*Pearson's Chi-square* = 3.200, $df = 4$, $p = .525$ or $\chi^2(4) = 3.20$, $p = .525$). Therefore the relationship appears to be independent. Parental support does not appear to have a significant effect on the disciplinary actions of students. This finding is pertinent to this case study and is not generalizable.

Question 3: In comparison, how would you evaluate disciplinary actions of students at the *previous* location compared to actions at the *current* location?

- a. About the same number of disciplinary actions at both locations
- b. More disciplinary actions at the *current* location than the *previous* location
- c. Less disciplinary actions at the *current* location than the *previous* location

Question 4: In comparison, how would you evaluate the level of parental support for student education at the *previous* location compared to its *current* location?

- a. About the same level of support at both locations
- b. More support at the *current* location than the *previous* location
- c. Less support at the *current* location than the *previous* location

Summary of Statistical Analysis of the Educators' Survey

The researcher utilized statistical test *Pearson's Chi Square* to assess the probability of independence of a relationship using the categorical data collected on the educators' survey. The case study results suggest independent relationships between

parental educational support and disciplinary actions of students. This finding is generalizable only to the educators and parents in this study.

Educators' Comments on the Survey

Questions 3 and 4 on the survey were used to measure the variables associated with the corresponding hypothesis. Additional space was provided after each question to allow educators to add relevant comments if desired. Comments provided on the surveys analyzed in this study are summarized in the following paragraphs. All comments are included; similar responses are combined.

Question 3 on the survey asked, In comparison, how would you evaluate disciplinary actions of students at the *previous* location compared to actions at the *current* location? Six surveys (66.7%) contained comments in the space provided. The comments expressed by the educators were: an increase in discipline problems was noticeable even with parental involvement; disciplinary problems were caused by the same students at the previous and current schools; "more respect demanded- more control"; students view of the future—they are less concerned about consequences; and students seem to have more respect for their facility (SCHS).

Question 4 on the survey asked, In comparison, how would you evaluate the level of parental support for student education at the *previous* location compared to its *current* location? Six surveys (66.7%) contained comments in the space provided. The comments expressed by educators were: parental involvement is low; an increase in parental concern about students, because "the course of study is more rigorous" and because it is more difficult to hide information; parental support is about the same; seeking efforts to get parents involved; and parents concerned about athletics more than education.

A general comment section was provided on the survey to allow educators to record additional thoughts. Two surveys contained comments. One educator thought the merging of the two schools was a brilliant idea and the other comment offered was things are about the same at the new school.

Theories and/or concepts which provide context for some of the comments are provided in Chapter 5. Also included in Chapter 5 are recommendations that may be useful in addressing some concerns expressed by educators as well as those noted by the parents/guardians of students at SCHS that may impact educators.

Conclusion

Statistical analysis of educators' responses is not warranted given the small number of educators who responded, but the statistical analyses performed and presented is offered for whatever heuristic value it may have for the reader. Using the statistical measures, the majority of responses from educators indicated relatively no change occurred in disciplinary problems among students, and parental educational support since the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High into SCHS. However, some responses from educators indicated changes had occurred at the *current* location.

Corroboration of Parents/Guardians and Educators Survey Data

Introduction

The third and final section in this chapter provides an analysis and comparison of the parents/guardians data to that of the educators' data. As previously stated, statistical analysis of educators' responses is not warranted given the small number of educators who responded, (N = 9) but the statistical analyses performed and presented is offered for whatever heuristic value it may have for the reader. These data have been corroborated

through data triangulation in the two specific areas, disciplinary problems and parental educational support. The two hypotheses associated with these areas are:

- Hypothesis No. 1: The consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools affects disciplinary problems amongst students.
- Hypothesis No. 3: The location of SCHS affects parental educational support.

Hypothesis No. 2, (The location of SCHS affects the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school), was not included on the educators' survey. The researcher believed parents were more knowledgeable about the actual time their child(ren) spent on the school bus than educators, therefore Hypothesis No. 2 was omitted.

The chart on the following page provides an overview of the questions on the two survey instruments and also provides the variables measured in each question.

Table 26: Parents/Guardians and Educators Corroboration of Data Overview

Parents/Guardians	Educators		
Question(s)	Question	Hypothesis	Variables
3	3	1	Consolidation and disciplinary problems
9 and 10	4	3	Location and parental educational support

The response rate used for analyzing both surveys was nearly equal. The parents/guardians rate is 26%. This percentage was based on the actual number of surveys distributed (284) and the number of surveys (74) included in the analysis. The response rate of the analysis of the educators' data is 27%. This percentage was based on

the actual number of surveys distributed (33), and the number of surveys (9) included in this analysis. Findings related to the corroboration of data are presented below.

Quantitative Findings

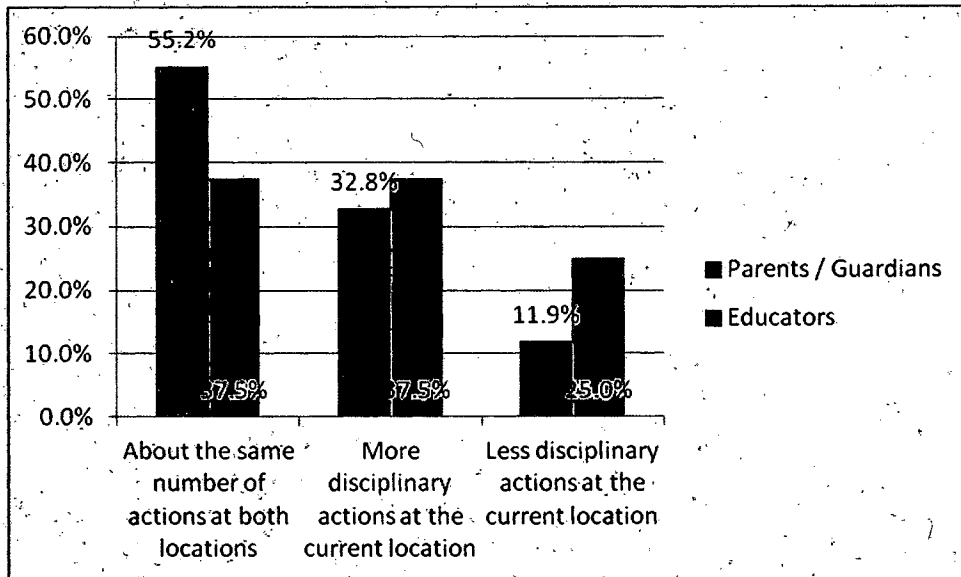
Questions 3 on the parent/guardians' survey and the educators' survey measured the variables in Hypothesis No. 1. Table 10 provided an analysis of the responses to Question 3 on the parents/guardians' survey which measured the *previous* and *current* disciplinary actions of students at SCHS. Table 24 provided an analysis of the responses to Question 3 on the educator's survey which also measured the *previous* and *current* disciplinary actions of students at SCHS.

Table 27 provides a summary of the responses and Chart 16 shows the data in bar graph format.

Table 27: Comparison of Parents/Guardians and Educators Data: Student Disciplinary Actions

Disciplinary Actions of Students	Parents/Guardians Frequency (N = 67)	Parents/Guardians Percent	Educators Frequency (N = 8)	Educators Percent
About the same number of actions at both locations	37	55.2	3	37.5
More disciplinary actions at the current location than the previous location	22	32.8	3	37.5
Less disciplinary actions at the current location than the previous location	8	11.9	2	25.0
Grand Total	67	100.0	8	100.0

Chart 16: Comparison of Parents/Guardians and Educators Data: Student Disciplinary Actions

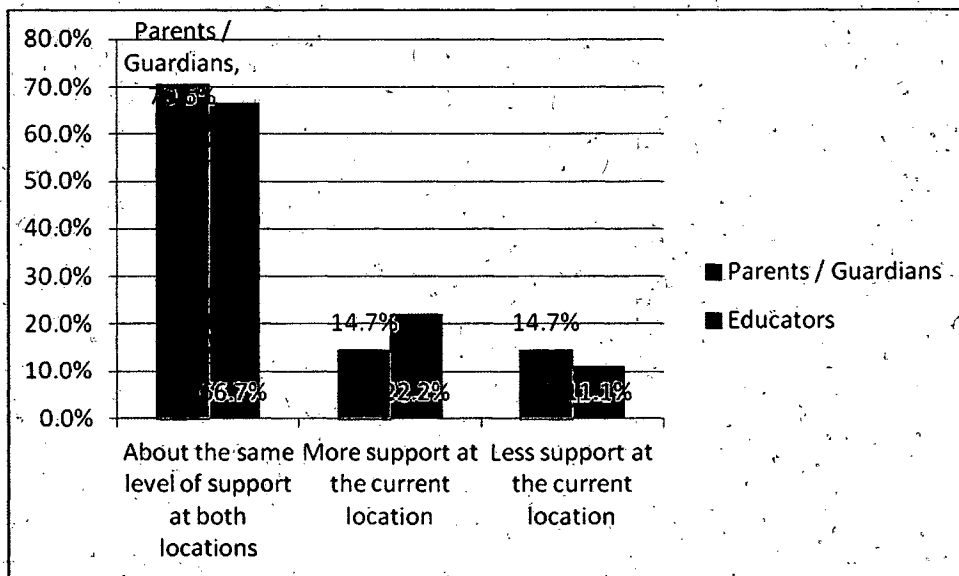


Parents/guardians were more likely than educators to say that student disciplinary actions were about the same in number at both school locations. Educators were more likely to say that there had been changes in the number of student disciplinary actions, both more and less.

Table 28: Comparison of Parents/Guardians and Educators Data: Level of Parental Educational Support

Parental Educational Support	Parents/Guardians Frequency (N = 68)	Parents/Guardians Percent	Educators Frequency (N=9)	Educators Percent
About the same level of support at both locations	48	70.6	6	66.7
More support at the current location than the previous location	10	14.7	2	22.2
Less support at the current location than the previous location	10	14.7	1	11.1
Grand Total	68	100.0	9	100.0

Chart 17: Comparison of Parents/Guardians and Educators Data: Level of Parental Educational Support



The majority of parents/guardians and educators said the level of parental educational support had not changed in both schools. More than 20% of the educators said there was more parental support at the consolidated school, but parents/guardians

who perceived a change (30%) in the level of parental educational support were split between thinking there was more support, or less support, at the consolidated school.

Corroboration of Parents/Guardians and Educators Survey

Summary of Findings

The subjective views of parents/guardians and educators about the impact of consolidation were compared to see whether any trends emerged from the data. The hypotheses and findings of the data triangulation are presented below.

Disciplinary Problems

Hypothesis No. 1: The consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools affects disciplinary problems amongst students.

The difference in response between parents and educators indicates a substantive change occurred that was perceived more by educators than parents.

Parental Educational Support

Hypothesis No. 3: The location of SCHS affects parental education support.

The difference in response between parents and educators indicates a substantive change in parental educational support was perceived by parents/guardians.

Conclusion

In Chapter 4, Findings, three hypotheses were investigated to address the research question, *How did the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools impact the students at Sumter Central High School (SCHS), and their families in the following three areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support.* This chapter discussed the data collected from the two surveys that were administered to those who

experienced consolidation: parents/guardians of students in grades 11 and 12 at SCHS, the new school, and educators at SCHS. The data was then compared and contrasted to determine the reliability of responses.

This study sought to understand the impact of consolidation from the subjective perspective of the families of students and educators who experienced consolidation in 2011. Therefore, the study was restricted to parents/guardians and educators in the Sumter County School district, specifically those who experienced the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools, in Sumter County, Alabama. Along with being located in a rural area, the majority of students attending the two high schools that merged are African Americans and are economically disadvantaged. These characteristics may isolate the impact of consolidation experienced in other geographical areas of study. Overall, the measured data indicated that consolidation did have an impact on those who experienced consolidation. The majority responses indicated that the areas studied remained about the same at the *current* location when compared to the *previous* location. However, responders also indicated a positive and negative impact in all areas as well.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

This chapter interprets and discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4. The findings present the perspectives of the parents/guardians of students and educators who experienced consolidation in 2011. The research question guiding this study was, *How did the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools impact the students at Sumter Central High School (SCHS), and their families in the following three areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support?* To begin the discussion, a table containing the hypotheses and the applicable theoretical perspectives and key concepts is provided. Below the table is a brief review of each theory and concept guiding this study. Next, each hypothesis is presented along with discussion of the application of the theoretical and conceptual framework integrating the results of this study with other empirical studies. Included at the end of each hypothesis discussion section are suggestions pertinent to the *current* area of study which may assist decision makers when considering future mergers, and recommendations for future studies. Finally, a summary and conclusion bring the chapter to a close.

Introduction

The data in all areas of this study revealed that the majority of respondents felt no change occurred when comparing the impact of consolidation of the two schools at the

current location with the *previous*. As expected, some felt differently for various reasons. Therefore, what follows in this chapter is discussion primarily related to the responses of those who indicated a change occurred at the *current* site, whether positive or negative. Not directly discussing the responses of the majority by no means dismisses the importance of these responses, but instead attests to the fact that consolidation for the majority was perceived as having no impact, positive or negative. As a result, the consolidation process was successful for the majority, including those who noted positive changes. Nevertheless, discussion in this chapter focuses on and examines the changes that occurred after consolidation while applying theoretical concepts to explain the changes.

Literature Review: Theories and Concepts Revisited along with Relevant Hypothesis

The theories and concepts listed in Table 29 are those used to facilitate discussion of the data analyses. The relevant hypothesis is listed and after the table, a brief definition of the theories and concepts is provided to assist in recalling the rationalization for their use. Full discussion of each was presented in Chapter 2.

Table 29: Hypotheses with Corresponding Theories and Concepts

Consolidation Study: Hypotheses with Corresponding Theories and Concepts	
Hypotheses	Applicable Theories and Concepts
<i>Hypothesis No. 1: The consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools affects disciplinary problems amongst students.</i>	Symbolic Interactionism Functional Analysis Rational Choice Theory Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Social and Human Capital
<i>Hypothesis No. 2: The location of SCHS affects the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school.</i>	Symbolic Interactionism Functional Analysis Rational Choice Theory Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Social and Human Capital
<i>Hypothesis No. 3: The location of SCHS affects parental education support.</i>	Symbolic Interactionism Functional Analysis Rational Choice Theory Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Social and Human Capital

Symbolic Interactionism is “a theoretical perspective in which society is viewed as being composed of symbols that people use to establish meaning, develop their views of the world and communicate with one another” (Henslin 2010, 23). Collectively, Herbert Blumer (2011, 244), Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead contributed to our understanding that response to stimuli is based on our interaction with a symbol (Henslin 2010, 23). Basically, what the symbol means to a person is how a person responds to (uses) that symbol (Blumer 2011, 244).

Functional Analysis' central idea is that “...society is a whole unit, made up of interrelated parts that work together” (Henslin 2010, 25). Extended study on this theory by Robert Merton yielded three terms, two of which describes favorable actions, a third unfavorable. An organization that functions properly produces either a manifest (intended) or latent (an unintended) action. An action that hurts the system, or a

malfunctioning system, is a latent dysfunction. Intervention is necessary otherwise a malfunctioning system malfunctions indefinitely (Henslin 2010, 26).

Rational Choice Theory helps to explain some behavioral responses associated with social and economic choices. It simply means that people respond the best way according to their circumstances based on their definition of the situation (Guell 2010, 310). These responses can be positive or negative, but not necessarily the proper response.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a framework that presents the order of needs that people aim to satisfy (Gazzaniga, Heatherton, and Halpern 2010, 381-382). This need is a "state of deficiency, which can be either biological (e.g., water) or social (e.g., to be with other people)" (Gazzaniga, Heatherton, and Halpern 2010, 381). The framework is useful in describing the factors associated with a person's motivation. In this discussion, primarily the first two areas, physiological and safety—the basic survival needs—are referenced more than others.

Social and Human Capital is based on relationships. According to James S. Coleman, human capital is created when people acquire skills and knowledge that enable them to function in new ways (Coleman 2011, 295). Social capital is a byproduct of positive relations among people in which a cooperative response is achieved (Bourdieu 2005, 76; Coleman 2011, 295). For example, an educational system functioning properly will produce both human and social capital.

Demographics Applicable to the Area of Study: Sumter County

The American Psychological Association (APA) has acknowledged that, "[l]ow SES and its correlates, such as lower education, poverty, and poor health, ultimately

affect our society as a whole” and that “SES and race and ethnicity are intimately intertwined” (APA 2013). A review of the demographic data relevant to Sumter County, presented in part in chapters 3 and 4, reveal that the area reflects many of the characteristics noted by the APA. These characteristics contributed to the outcomes in the three areas studied—disciplinary actions, school location, and parental educational support. For this reason, the same theories and concepts are useful in explaining the outcomes associated with each of the three hypotheses. Discussion then within each section may appear somewhat redundant.

Discussion about Disciplinary Actions

Hypothesis No. 1: The consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools affects disciplinary problems amongst students.

After the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County High schools, parents/guardians and educators perceived changes in disciplinary actions. What we know from the literature review in regards to how consolidation impacts disciplinary actions is, “Truancy and more serious forms of misconduct are likely to become worse when small rural schools are consolidated. But barely” (Haller 1992, 154). With consolidation, a change was apparent in disciplinary actions. However, the minor change did not appear to cause a disruption in the educational system.

The researcher’s study on consolidation that occurred in 2011 confirms Haller’s findings. However, different criterion was used in the two studies which may explain the obscured findings. Haller’s study seemed to focus on particular types of misconduct whereas the researcher’s study did not specify types of actions. For the researcher’s study, objective data related to disciplinary actions was not obtainable (although attempts

were made). Therefore, the researcher only used subjective data obtained from parents/guardians and educators about all types of disciplinary actions. The results from this study revealed that disciplinary problems, serious and/or minor, among students did not remain constant. In fact, nearly 45% of parents/guardians stated changes in the actions among students. Likewise, nearly 63% of educators perceived a change in disciplinary problems among students. Of these responses, some parents/guardians and educators indicated a decrease, some an increase. Overall, the difference in response between parents and educators indicated a substantive change occurred that was perceived more by educators than parents. In the concluding section of this chapter a possible justification for this difference is mentioned.

Functional Analysis guides this discussion when considering the change in disciplinary actions at the new school. Overall, this theory helps in determining whether the new organization, the consolidated school, is functioning as intended when considering disciplinary actions among students. The three possible actions associated with functional analysis are manifest, latent and latent dysfunction. The manifest action could be considered an intended action if consolidation was intended to address the disciplinary actions. In this case, the majority of responses that indicated no change in disciplinary actions could be a manifest action. Alternatively, a decrease in disciplinary actions could also represent a latent action. An increase in disciplinary actions would be considered a latent dysfunction, a malfunction or disruption in the system.

A closer look at the data from this study revealed the following specific results: nearly 12% of parents/guardians and 25% of educators perceived that fewer disciplinary actions occurred at the *current* location than the *previous* location. This could be

considered a manifest or latent action depending on the intended consolidation outcome. It is an indication that the organizational parts are working together (Henslin 2010, 26). On the other hand, approximately 33% of the parents/guardians and nearly 38% of educators perceived that more disciplinary actions occurred at the *current* location than the *previous* location. This action is classified as a latent dysfunction because it is an unintended action where an undesirable consequence resulted. Intervention is necessary otherwise a malfunctioning system malfunctions indefinitely (Henslin 2010, 26).

Overall, Haller's finding of, "but barely" (1992, 154), indicating only a slight change in disciplinary actions resulted in his study, cannot be fully corroborated from this study for two reasons. One is because the types of disciplinary actions mentioned in Haller's (1992) study and the researcher's study are different. Haller's (1992) findings are based on objective data whereas the researcher's data is subjective. The second reason is the measure of increased disciplinary actions stated by parents/guardians and educators in this study is more than what is reasonably considered "barely." It is possible that a study of objective data at the research site would yield the same findings as Haller's (1992). Comments provided by parents/guardians and educators which may assist in understanding the reasons for the decrease in disciplinary actions (manifest and latent) are: students' maturity level this year contributed to better behavior along with being surrounded with positive people; and students seem to have more respect for their facility. SCHS was built specifically for the merging of the two schools and these students are first to occupy the new facility.

Comments provided by parents/guardians and educators which may assist in understanding the reasons for the increase in disciplinary actions (latent dysfunction) are:

bigger school, more students; disciplinary problems were caused by the same students at the *previous* and *current* schools; and students view of the future—they are less concerned about consequences.

Symbolic Interactionism also assists in understanding and interpreting the students' response to their new school (stimuli). By moving to a new location, acquiring a new school building and mascot, students and educators suffered a "loss." This "loss" may have resulted in behavioral responses which caused disciplinary problems because the symbol once used to defend their social identity ceased to exist. Also, territorial conflicts may have arisen when two legendary rival teams merged with both losing their unique identity. This meant a loss of symbols that once bonded *current* students and even extended to community members who once attended the *previous* schools. Students can no longer communicate using the terms Cougars (Livingston High), and Wildcats (Sumter County High), but instead must now use new terminology, Jaguars (SCHS). Solidarity among students and the community is misplaced.

What we know from the literature in regards to the loss of a school as noted by the Task Force points to the importance of the public school to the rural community. In previous studies, oftentimes the school served as the core of the community. In some communities, the school provided the only source of social activity (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 7). Competitive sports were also an attraction supported by community members, even those who did not have kids in school (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 5). One of the findings noted by the Task Force was that, "[a]fter a school closure, out migration, population decline, and neighborhood deterioration are set in motion, and

support for public education diminishes” (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 12). Consequently, losing a school decreases community morale and educational support.

Rational Choice Theory also assists in explaining an increase and decrease in disciplinary actions at the new school. As Guell (2010, 310) suggests, students’ disciplinary issues may be in response to the losses incurred as a result of the competitive sports they once enjoyed. Students may still possess rival spirits and respond based on previous behaviors (wins and losses). Now, although the students are on the same team, internal competitiveness from those who were once rivals could still induce disruptive behavioral responses. For students, the natural response for the two schools for decades was to compete against one another. The comment, “disciplinary problems resulted because the students from the two different schools did not know one another,” provided by a parent/guardians also assists in explaining those emotions that may still exist between the students. An attitude of this sort contributes to the breakdown of a system functioning well.

Also, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is useful in describing what may be perceived as disruptive behavior. In this study, the demographics at SCHS provided a ‘snapshot’ of the student body. Over 92% of the 382 students receive reduced or free lunch which categorized the SES of their parents as low, further classifying the students as disadvantaged (Alabama Department of Education Public Data Reports). Because the majority of the students live in poverty the basic survival needs, physiological and safety, two of the most essential needs which often contribute to the rationalization of actions, are threatened (Gazzaniga, Heatherton, and Halpern 2010, 381-382). Threats that impede these areas or zones are reasons for protective actions to occur. Additionally, because

these areas are constantly fought for and guarded, desire for the next level, belonging and love which includes acceptance and friendship, is often postponed. (Gazzaniga, Heatherton, and Halpern 2010, 381-382). One reason for the postponement is because the mind is constantly in survival/attack mode. Therefore, reasonable displays of actions are those that resort to protection, not those desiring to acquire friendship and maintain peaceful relationships.

Social and Human Capital helps to explain the relationships that exist, or should exist in an educational environment. The creation of human capital is lessened when disciplinary actions occur because they interrupt learning. Coleman noted that, human capital is created when people acquire skills and knowledge that enable them to function in new ways (2011, 295). Its counterpart, social capital, is produced as a result of positive relations among people in whom a cooperative response is achieved (Bourdieu 2005, 76; Coleman 2011, 295). Disciplinary actions are a latent dysfunction which decreases the production of both human and social capital. However a decrease in disciplinary actions in this study, is perceived as a manifest or latent action that could possibly result in an increase in social and human capital. The academic success of students at SCHS engaging in disciplinary actions may be threatened because learning is interrupted. Therefore, these students may not acquire the skills and knowledge needed that will enable them to function well in the new school environment.

Disciplinary Actions: Suggestions Offered

Haller proposes that "... modest changes in practice could offset the slight negative effects of a consolidation" (1992, 154). To assist in the process of consolidating the schools, one parent/guardian alluded to the fact that students should have been

allowed to meet with one another prior to merging. Another parent/guardian stated that, students need to be more involved with one another and pull together. Therefore, the following suggestion is based on these responses: Provide projects that involve students from both schools. (Prior to consolidation, the suggestion would have been to have students complete the projects before merging).

Allowing students at the two schools to jointly complete a project, such as building Habitat for Humanity homes, or planting and harvesting a community garden, prior to and after merging may have been useful in promoting harmony so that separate team spirit could have been channeled into a joint project. Psychologist Muzafer Sherif's study of competition and cooperation demonstrated that "shared goals requiring cooperation across group lines can reduce hostility between groups" (Gazzaniga, Heatherton, and Halpern 2010, 543). In Sherif's project, cooperation and harmony was achieved when two groups were presented with a superordinate goal in which neither group could achieve the goal without the help of the other. When both groups worked together, the goal was achieved and harmony resulted (Gazzaniga, Heatherton, and Halpern 2010, 543-544). Because competitiveness has been the normative behavior between Livingston and Sumter County high schools, a superordinate goal may have helped to channel differences into a worthy cause. As a result, efforts to ease the existing tension and then promote harmony even before the consolidation occurred would have been activated. This newfound relationship may have resulted in an overall decrease in disciplinary problems, and may have impacted other areas which would have assisted in stimulating the entire consolidation process.

Disciplinary Actions: Recommendations for Future Research

Two suggestions are offered for future research. The first is to determine the types of disciplinary issues that occur most frequently. Perform the analysis using objective data, pre and post consolidation so that the actions may be properly identified and addressed. Another suggestion is to compare the types of disciplinary problems by specific grade level. Knowing this information will assist school authorities in establishing intervention programs for the appropriate group. A comment made by a parent/guardian indicated that her child was more mature therefore he/she did not have as many disciplinary actions at the new school as in the past. Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect more disciplinary problems of certain types by grade (age) levels.

Disciplinary Actions: Conclusion

The suggestions and future research recommendations offered were primarily derived from the comments offered by parents/guardians and educators. It is especially important to remember that the perceived changes in disciplinary actions were noted more by educators than parents, who could provide greater insight as to the actual number of actions that occurred at the school. Rarely do teachers inform parents/guardians of every disciplinary action made by students.

Discussion about School Location

Hypothesis No. 2: The location of SCHS affects the amount of time students spend on the school bus traveling to and from school.

What we know from the literature review in regards to how the location of a school affects the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school is its effect on students' academic performance. A study completed by Lu and

Tweeten noted in the Report completed by Bard, Gardener, and Wieland revealed that lower achievement scores were related to the time students spent riding a bus (2005, 10). For a fourth grader, achievement scores were reduced by 2.6 points for every hour the student rode the bus; for high school students the reduction was .5 points (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 10). No additional resources were located that provided a direct correlation as straightforward as the one above. Because the issues related to the amount of time students spent on the school bus will be indirectly considered in the next hypothesis—parental educational support based on the location of the new school—the discussion in this section is limited to academic performance.

What this study reveals about how the location of SCHS affects the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school is that after consolidation, changes in the time students rode the bus were noted by parents/guardians. Some students now live further from the location of the *current* school than they did from the *previous* school. The modal group at the *previous* location traveled 0-5 miles; now at the *current* location this group travels 6-10 miles. Location changes reflected in the parents/guardians' comments helped in understanding how the students were impacted. Some comments were: the school is closer to home; location not a factor; child loves new location and new school; children riding the bus too long; and the school is further and not close enough as in the past to allow child to walk home after school, therefore he/she cannot participate in sports. These comments provide both positive and negative views regarding how the location of the *current* school impacts the student. Although none of the comments mentioned school performance, it is certainly implied. Additional studies are needed to determine how location affects academic performance. As a reminder, this

question was not included on the educators' questionnaire, thus there are no comments from educators to report.

Symbolic Interactionism assists in understanding and interpreting the students' response to their new school (stimuli) and how the location of the new school affects the students, parents/guardians and the community. It appears that parents/guardians living in different, or perhaps in the same communities were affected in different ways. One parent/guardian commented that, his/her child no longer has the convenience of staying after school and then walking home, but must now find alternate means to travel a greater distance. Typically, students who stay after school are those who participate in extracurricular activities. Not being able to continue staying after school may result in emotions that resemble those encountered when a loss is incurred. Also, a source of recreation and to some an opportunity to develop or enhance a skill in a particular sport that may have had a favorable impact on future educational decisions is lost. As a result, the school's location may impose restrictions that impact students' future opportunities thus affecting the social and human capital. To reiterate, when considering symbolic interactionism the behavior of a person is not based on any outside stimuli, "... but arises instead from how he interprets and handles these things in the action which he is constructing" (Blumer 2011, 244). Therefore, symbolic interactionism can be useful in understanding and interpreting the students' response to the new location. To some students, the new building along with the location may represent a loss.

Functional Analysis may also assist in understanding the impact of the location of the new school on families and students. Overall, this theory helps in determining whether the new organization, the consolidated school, is serving its purpose by

measuring the actions that transpire at the *current* location. Again, three possible actions associated with functional analysis are manifest, latent and latent dysfunction. The manifest action would be an intended action which could represent those who indicated no change. A decrease would represent a latent action or even a manifest action. Lastly, certain increases in the distance from school, not necessarily all distances, would be considered a latent dysfunction. A closer look at the data reveals that more students live a greater distance from the *current* school than they did from the *previous* school. Although the distance from the *previous* location to the *current* was known prior to the consolidation occurring, the effect on some students may not have been realized.

Therefore, a distance that produces a negative action, including a certain increase in time as noted in Lu and Tweeten's study provided in the Report (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 10), can be labeled as a latent dysfunction. Also, this study indicated that fewer students, 6 (8.1%) are in the category 'does not apply/did not ride the bus' than at the *previous* location which means that more students are riding the bus at the *current* location. This fact could be labeled as either a manifest (intended) or latent (unintended) action. Nevertheless, this may be an indication that the organizational parts are functioning as intended and/or are working together (Henslin 2010, 26). However, when considering the amount of time some students ride the bus, learning may still be impacted. Therefore, what may have been perceived as a latent or manifest action may have resulted in a latent dysfunction. In this case, intervention is necessary otherwise the malfunctioning system malfunctions indefinitely (Henslin 2010, 26).

Rational Choice Theory can also be useful in explaining the actions that transpired as a result of the consolidation regarding the location of the *current* school. As

noted above, more students are riding the bus at the *current* location. This could be the result of current economic factors. Since the *current* school is closer for some students, the parents of these students may insist that their child(ren) now ride the bus. One possible reason is because the length of time on the bus has been reduced, it's better than before—whereas before consolidation the length of time on the bus was longer. It is also possible that the *current* location, on the periphery of each town, is out of the way for parents to go to drop off their students, whereas the previous schools were located in town.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is useful in describing behavior associated with making choices about whether or not to ride the bus. This decision can easily be made determining the monetary hardship the families are enduring. As stated in the study, over 90 percent of students live in poverty, therefore financial resources are limited. It is reasonable to conclude that financial resources would normally be used primarily for food, clothing and shelter, the essential needs that comprise the first two areas of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs chart. Poverty could result in students riding the bus regardless of where the school is located.

Social and Human Capital is helpful in understanding the relationships that exist, or should exist in an educational environment. As stated earlier, creation of human capital is lessened when disciplinary actions interrupt learning. Likewise, the location of a school could also impact learning as well as contribute to the amount of idle time for students. Not being able to participate in structured after school activities leaves students vulnerable to partake in undesirable actions. Also, an area that is not easily accessible can discourage parents from attending necessary school meetings and can hinder community

members' attendance as well. Support from community members by their attendance at school functions could lessen thereby reducing much needed revenue. This reduction in revenue could spill over into reducing spending to fund non-educational items such as trophies and other memorabilia for school competitions. This action would be a latent dysfunction evident by a decrease in the production of both human and social capital. However, an increase in parental involvement, or other issues associated with the location of the new school, is perceived as a manifest or latent action that could possibly result in an increase in social and human capital.

School Location: Suggestion

One suggestion is offered to address the concerns associated with the school location and the amount of time students ride the bus: review the school district service area. Because of the importance of education to the nation, policy makers may need to consider redrawing the educational districts so that students will not travel lengthy distances on school buses that are known to negatively impact their academic performance. Although the suggestion is extreme, no other solutions appear to be feasible for those traveling more than one hour each way on the school bus. If this option is considered, care should be taken to properly merge these students into the new school district. The suggestion is admittedly an incomplete strategy.

School Location: Future Research

Future research should focus on two areas. One is additional studies focusing on the academic performance of students residing in areas less than one hour from school and those residing further. Additional research focusing on the mode of transportation for those students who do not ride the school bus is also needed. Gathering information about

this group may lead to findings associated with those students who participate in extracurricular activities that may also be related to academic performance: should the number of extracurricular activities for students have stricter limitations?

School Location: Conclusion

This section provided a look at how the location of SCHS affected the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school. The location resulted in more students living farther from the location of the *current* school. Theories and concepts used were those which the researcher felt were most applicable to the analyzed results and comments offered by parents/guardians.

Discussion about Parental Educational Support

Hypothesis No. 3: The location of SCHS affects parental education support.

What we know from the literature review in regards to how the location of a school affects parental education support is addressed in terms of academic achievement. In Sui-Chu and Willms' study, "... student-parent discussion in the home was the most powerful indicator of student academic achievement" (Feuerstein 2001, 30). Another resource, the Educational Research Service (ERS) which focused on communication, revealed that "[s]tudents do best when parents and teachers understand each other's expectations and stay in touch with one another" (2006, 5). This three-ring communication—teacher, parent/guardian and student—requires discussing issues that arise at home or school, especially those which may impact learning to include disciplinary actions (Figures 11 and 12, created by the researcher, demonstrate communication occurring and not occurring). A comment made by a parent/guardian indicated that no communication from the school was received.

Figure 11: Three-Ring Communication: Teacher, Parent/Guardian and Student Communicating

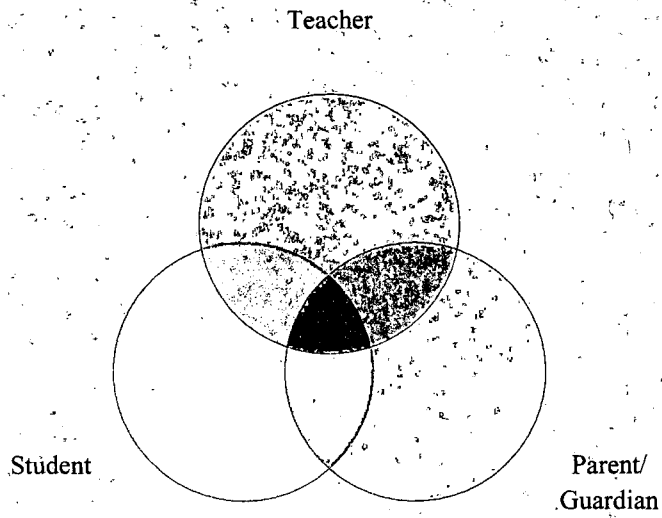
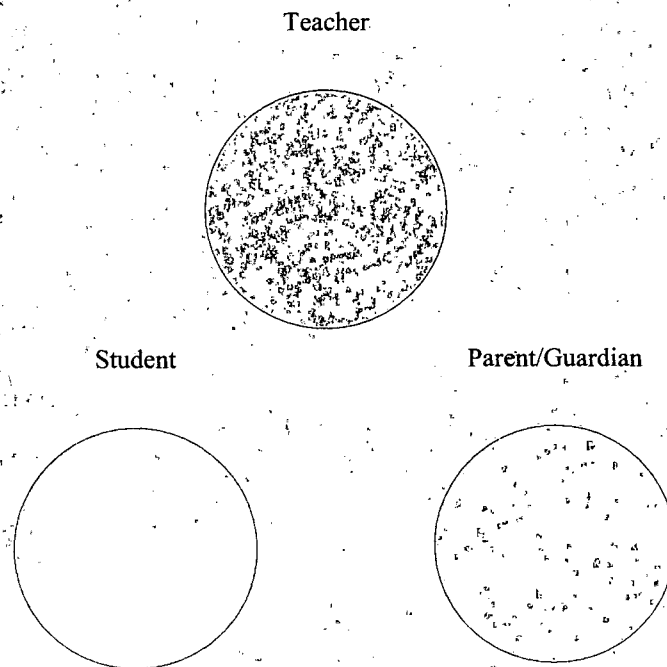


Figure 12: Three-Ring Communication: Teacher, Parent/Guardian and Student Not Communicating



Whenever communication is not taking place, the academic success of the student may be in jeopardy because no reinforcement is taking place in the home and/or school.

According to Hill and Taylor (2004) one of the biggest challenges schools are facing is diversity. Diversity issues can also negatively impact parental educational support (Hill and Taylor 2004, 162). Common diversity issues are “[d]emographic characteristics such as social economic status [SES], ethnicity, cultural background and other parental characteristics ...” (Hill and Taylor 2004, 162). In this research, poverty (SES) was the one specific barrier studied. Not having enough income to provide essential needs constrains parents, oftentimes forcing choices that should not be considered.

The ERS noted that children benefit from parents’ involvement and that parents, regardless of their background, are interested in their children’s academic success (2006, 1). Parents from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to be involved in the educational process of their children than those from lower SES backgrounds and vice-versa. On a positive note, Blodgett emphasized that the character development of children reared in rural areas with lower SES was more profound than those raised in the city (1893, 71-72).

Another important fact to consider is that teachers who are “different culturally from their students” may not understand the reasons for parent absences (Hill and Taylor 2004, 162). This misunderstanding may compound problems for the students. An understanding of different cultures assists in interpreting students and parents/guardians actions (Chantler 2005, 242). Overall, cultural awareness assists in the three-ring communication process that is needed in order for education to transpire.

What this study revealed about how the location of SCHS affects parental educational support is that nearly 30% of parents/guardians indicated a change in the support provided to their child(ren). Approximately 15% indicated more support was provided and the same indicated less support was provided at the *current* location. Also, nearly 25% stated the physical location of the *current* school, SCHS, affected their involvement in their child(ren) education. A combination of responses made by parents/guardians relating to location and the reasons that contributed to their lack of involvement were: the school is a further distance, gas, (one respondent was specific by indicating gas is now a barrier), one vehicle and/or no transportation; and job interference. These comments align with findings in previous studies. For example, Hill and Taylor acknowledged that poverty's adverse effects on parents are associated with lower parental involvement in school (2004, 162). The authors noted that lack of involvement may be due to a variety of issues including, "nonflexible work schedules, lack of resources, transportation problems, and stress due to residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods" (Hill and Taylor 2004, 162). The amount of time students ride the bus is an indication of the distance of the *current* school from the students' residences. This distance, or the location of the school, could also assist in understanding the transportation problems that may contribute to the lack of parental involvement. Also, disciplinary problems can occur or worsen because of barriers that prevent family involvement.

Another comment related to lack of involvement was that better parking existed at the *previous* location. Adequate parking for easy access is important to this parent/guardian. When working parents/guardians visit the school, time is of the essence,

therefore parking becomes a priority and could ultimately become the deciding factor as to whether or not a visit to the school is warranted.

Nearly 33 percent of educators perceived that the consolidation of the two schools affected parental educational support. Approximately 22% thought more support was provided at the *current* location and about 11% perceived less support was provided. Educators' comments regarding parents/guardians involvement at the *current* school were: parental involvement is low; an increase in parental concern about students, because "the course of study is more rigorous" and because it is more difficult to hide information; parental support is about the same; seeking efforts to get parents involved; and parents concerned about athletics more than education.

Symbolic Interactionism assists in explaining the amount of support provided by parents. Some parents may focus on the school as being a place where education is obtained, therefore will provide support for their child's(ren's) education despite barriers. In this study, several parents/guardians comments alluded to the type and amount of support provided: always supportive; (at both schools) the same involvement was given—no more no less; enjoy new facility; attendance/support increased; more involved and felt welcomed; supportive of PTA; and more support provided because of child's grade status (senior). By transferring to a new location, some parents/guardians may have constructed biases based on what they perceive as barriers. Comments made by parents/guardians which helped to explain this perception were: having to travel further; and not involved due to work.

Functional Analysis helps in understanding how the new school functions. Because an increase and decrease in parental support are perceived, all three actions are

noted; manifest, latent and latent dysfunction. One parent indicated that the closer location means more involvement in school activities. This outcome would be a manifest or latent action. As noted by Merton, “functions to refer to the beneficial consequences of people’s actions: Functions help keep a group (society, social system) in balance” (Henslin 2010, 26). This balance, contributes to social and human capital.

Rational Choice Theory provides reasoning for the increase and decrease in parental educational support. This theory helps to explain actions that may be common in areas having high percentage of poverty along with a low percentage of college graduates. The lack of parental involvement could be based on perceived misunderstandings. Not understanding the importance of education may be one reason to disengage. Two particular comments made by parents/guardians were: teachers are more concerned and teachers are less concerned. Teachers’ actions can influence parents/guardians choice of whether to be more or less involved in their child(ren’s) education (ERS 2006, 6). One parent reasoned that education is child’s decision, while another parent commented; concern for student’s grade (is the reason for involvement). Two different views are apparent, yet both are rational choices according to the parents/guardians’ circumstances and/or outlook.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is used to help explain the behavior associated with a lack of involvement especially from parents in poverty-stricken areas and areas with a low percentage of college graduates. When faced with choices, these parents often choose what is rational to them. The *Center for American Progress* noted that there are families who “... still have to make tough choices between a meal and paying for other basic necessities.... Nearly 40 percent said they had to choose between paying for rent or a

mortgage and food. More than a third reported having to choose between their medical bills and food” (Shepard, Setren, and Cooper 2011, 1). One comment made by a parent/guardian in this study stated, gas is now a barrier. This comment was in response to how the location of the *current* school, SCHS, affects parental education support.

Social and Human Capital assists in understanding the impact to society that an increase and decrease in parental educational support means to the community. Because SCHS consists of a student body where the majority lives in poverty, the effects of poverty are not just limited to the present, but depending on the severity, can have lifelong consequences and wider impact. Again, drawing from the resource *Center for American Progress*, the authors noted that the cost of hunger, which those who live in poverty frequently encounter, was determined to have detrimental effects on a community (Shepard, Setren, and Cooper 2011, 11).

These and related adverse outcomes are linked to an increased likelihood of school failure, including dropping out of school. These outcomes lead to a greater likelihood of limited employability, lessened workforce productivity, poorer judgment and job performance, and \$260,000 lower lifetime earnings. Therefore since food insecurity impedes learning and school performance and ultimately lowers productivity and earning potential, hunger exacts a significant monetary cost.

Once social capital declines, it is very difficult to rebuild (Bourdieu 2005, 76; Robinson and Green 2011, 78).

Parental Educational Support: Suggestions Offered

One way to promote parent involvement is to formulate a group that mirrors one that was established in Georgia. In a website article dated September 26, 2012 in the newspaper valdostadailytimes.com, the Associated Press provided information about the 2013 Parent Advisory Council (2012). This group’s primary purpose is to focus on ways

to increase parental involvement in schools. By soliciting feedback from other parents, a program of this sort should help to identify barriers as well as solutions while involving the parent in the educational process of their child(ren). Collectively engaging in cultural awareness provides a means to understand the needs, limitations and possible solutions for a particular group.

Another suggestion is to review the parking at the *current* school to ensure adequate parking is available for parents/guardians. The school should create an inviting atmosphere by making sure parental access to the facility is safe and expedient.

Parental Educational Support: Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should continue to focus on determining the relationship between the location of schools and parental educational support. The role of transportation in education seems profound. In previous years, the transportation industry impacted the population in rural areas and contributed to the consolidation of schools (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 1). Today, the lack of or cost of personal transportation for parents/guardians has an impact on the outcome of schooling for poverty groups.

Parental Educational Support: Conclusion

This section provided a look at how the location of SCHS affected parental educational support. Nearly 30% of parents/guardians indicated a change in the support provided at the current location. Additionally, nearly 25% stated the physical location affected their involvement in their child(ren)'s education. One suggestion offered was presented in a literature source based on previous consolidation feedback. The second suggestion was based on the comment of a parent/guardian. The recommendation for future research was to understand more fully the role of transportation in education.

Researcher Reflections

The researcher's purpose for completing this project was to understand how consolidation impacts a rural community. Another purpose that emerged early in the research process was to provide policy makers with information that can be used when making consolidation decisions. The researcher believes this contribution will help to strengthen public policy for families in rural areas, particular those living in high poverty areas.

The researcher is intimately familiar with barriers that impede learning. Her formative years were spent in poverty. Also, her educational progress was interrupted by a boycott resulting in some students having to repeat a semester of high school. Therefore, the negative effects of poverty on children are understood as well as the impact that disruptions and other barriers not named, in education may cause.

There were two surprising outcomes in this study. One was the distance some students traveled on the school bus and how this time is directly related to academic achievement. Knowing this fact alone should result in more efficient districting and school bus transporting decisions. The second was that the comments offered by parents/guardians and educators were reasonable—so reasonable that they were offered as suggestions to help improve the consolidation process. This fact reiterates the importance of involving community members in consolidation decisions (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2005, 5).

Summary and Conclusion

This quantitative case study explored how the consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools impacted the students at Sumter Central High School

(SCHS), and their families in the following three areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school, and parental educational support. The theoretical framework proposed that the impact was linked to demographic characteristics, primarily poverty. The literature used did not directly state a cause, but did provide evidence supporting parental educational support. The other two areas, disciplinary actions and the location of the school were indirectly supported. According to the parents/guardians and educators whose responses were analyzed in this study, changes did occur after consolidation. Various reasons were given for how consolidation impacted the families and students. The conclusion of this study is although consolidation did not impact the majority, it had both a positive and negative effect on some. The comments provided by those who experienced consolidation suggested ways to facilitate improvement.

Chapter 5 concludes this research study. The findings addressed three areas that were affected: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students ride the school bus to school, and parental educational support. The researcher does not make any specific policy proposals regarding consolidation. Instead, suggestions were provided for smoother transition and recommendations were made based on the need for future studies in specific areas. These are made to assist stakeholders in addressing the current needs of families and students and to provide insight for policy makers considering consolidation. As noted by Howley, Johnson, and Petrie "Econometric studies of district consolidation tend *not* to include the value of important educational contingencies such as extracurricular participation rates, parental involvement, and community support. These

are what economists consider “externalities”—they don’t count in the analysis” (2011, 1).

Yet, this study demonstrates that they do count.

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APPENDIX A:

**Institutional Review Board Oversight Screening Form
for Graduate Student Research**

Appendix A



Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-02877-2012

INVESTIGATOR: Verne Foster Harvey

PROJECT TITLE: A Case Study Examining the Social and Educational Impact of Public School Consolidation on Families and their Students Attending Sumter Central High in Rural South Alabama: After Year One

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is exempt from Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category (ies) 2. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal:

- If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

Barbara Gray

Barbara H. Gray, IRB Administrator

10/22/12

Date:

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

Revised: 08.02.2012

APPENDIX B:

Letter of Consent to Parents/Guardians

Appendix B

Date: February 1, 2013

Dear Parent/Guardian:

You are being asked to participate in a survey research project entitled "*A Study Examining the Social and Educational Impact of Public School Consolidation on Students and Families of Sumter Central High in Rural South Alabama: After Year One,*" which is being conducted by researcher, Verna Foster Harvey, a graduate student at Valdosta State University. This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to *Verna Foster Harvey* at (229) 548-1208 or vfharvey@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Sincerely,

Verna Foster Harvey, Researcher

Enclosure

APPENDIX C:

Letter of Consent to Educators

Appendix C

Date: February 1, 2013

Dear Educator:

You are being asked to participate in a survey research project entitled "*A Study Examining the Social and Educational Impact of Public School Consolidation on Students and Families of Sumter Central High in Rural South Alabama: After Year One,*" which is being conducted by researcher, Verna Foster Harvey, a graduate student at Valdosta State University. This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to *Verna Foster Harvey* at (229) 548-1208 or vfharvey@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Sincerely,

Verna Foster Harvey, Researcher

Enclosure

APPENDIX D:

**Questionnaire for Parents and/or Guardians
of Students at Sumter Central High School**

Appendix D

Questionnaire for Parents and/or Guardians of Students at Sumter Central High School

This questionnaire is to be completed by a parent or guardian of student(s) in grades 11 and 12 currently attending Sumter Central High School (SCHS). The person who is most knowledgeable about the student's education should complete the form. Please answer each question based on your own knowledge and expectations. The questions are divided into four different categories: previous high school, disciplinary actions of students, school location, and parental educational support. ***Please complete a separate form for each student in your household attending SCHS in grades 11 and 12 only.***

Previous High School

1. Which school did the student previously attend? Please circle your response.
 - a. Livingston High
 - b. Sumter County High
 - c. Other: Please specify below. _____
2. Please circle the current grade level of the student for which you are completing this form. a. 12th b. 11th c. Other: Please specify. _____

Disciplinary Actions of Students

A disciplinary action is any infraction occurring during a school-sponsored activity where students, who were under the authority of school personnel, participated in an action that resulted in a parent, guardian, or another person in authority being notified.

3. In comparison, how would you evaluate the disciplinary actions of your child at the ***previous*** location compared to his/her actions at the ***current*** location?
 - a. About the same number of disciplinary actions at both locations
 - b. More disciplinary actions at the ***current*** location than the ***previous*** location
 - c. Less disciplinary actions at the ***current*** location than the ***previous*** location

Please state the reason(s) for the answer you provided. _____

School Location

In this section, the location of SCHS, the new school is addressed.

4. What was the distance in miles from your home to the physical location of the *previous* school that your child attended? _____
5. What is the distance in miles from your home to the physical location of SCHS?

The questions below relate to the amount of time students spend traveling from their home to and from school each day using the transportation provided by the school system. Please circle the best answer.

6. How long would you estimate the student rode the school bus from home to school when attending school at the *previous* location?
 - a. Less than 30 minutes
 - b. More than 30 minutes, but less than 1 hours
 - c. More than 1 hour
 - d. Do not know
 - e. Does not apply/(Did not ride the bus)
7. How long would you estimate the student in your household rides the school bus from home to school when attending school at its *current* location?.
 - a. Less than 30 minutes
 - b. More than 30 minutes, but less than 1 hours
 - c. More than 1 hour
 - d. Do not know
 - e. Does not apply/(Did not ride the bus)
8. How long what would you consider is an acceptable time for **any** student to ride a bus to school each day?
 - a. Less than 30 minutes
 - b. More than 30 minutes, but less than 1 hour
 - c. More than 1 hour
 - d. Do not know
 - e. Other: Please specify _____

Parental Educational Support

Parental educational support is the personal involvement of parents/guardians in the academic life of their child. This involvement includes attending school related events such as Open House, parent-teacher conferences, PTA/PTO, etc... Parental educational support **does not** include pageants, pep rallies, graduation, sporting events and extra-curricular activities.

9. In comparison, how would you evaluate your level of parental support for your child's education at the *previous* location compared to its *current* location?
- a. About the same level of support at both locations
 - b. More support at the *current* location than the *previous* location
 - c. Less support at the *current* location than the *previous* location

Please state the reason(s) for the answer you provided. _____

10. Does the physical location of SCHS affect your involvement in your child's education?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please state the reason(s) for the answer you provided. _____

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please use the space below if you would like to provide any additional information that relates to one or all three high schools: Livingston, Sumter County, and Sumter Central. When writing, be certain to state the name of the school in which you are referencing. You may use the back of this sheet and attach an additional sheet if needed.

APPENDIX E:

**Questionnaire for Educators
at Sumter Central High School**

Appendix E

**Questionnaire for Educators
at Sumter Central High School**

This questionnaire is to be completed by an educator currently employed at Sumter Central High School (SCHS). For the purpose of this study, an educator is anyone providing educational service, such as a counselor, nurse, speech therapist, etc..., to a student. Please answer each question based on your own knowledge. The questions are divided into three different categories: previous school information, disciplinary actions of students, and parental educational support.

Previous School Information

1. Please circle or provide the name of the school where you *previously* taught prior to working at SCHS.
 - a. Livingston High
 - b. Sumter County High
 - c. Other: Please specify: _____

2. Please circle the grade level(s) of students to whom you provide service to and/or instruct at SCHS. 12th 11th 10th 9th

Disciplinary Actions of Students

A disciplinary action is any infraction occurring during a school sponsored activity where students, who were under the authority of school personnel, participated in an action that resulted in a parent, guardian, or another person in authority being notified.

3. In comparison, how would you evaluate disciplinary actions of students at the *previous* location compared to actions at the *current* location?
 - a. About the same number of disciplinary actions at both locations
 - b. More disciplinary actions at the *current* location than the *previous* location
 - c. Less disciplinary actions at the *current* location than the *previous* location

Please state the reason(s) for the answer you provided. _____

Parental Educational Support

Parental educational support is the personal involvement of parents/guardians in the academic life of their child. This involvement includes attending school related events such as Open House, parent-teacher conferences, PTA/PTO, etc... Parental educational support **does not** include pageants, pep rallies, graduation, sporting events and extra-curricular activities.

- 4. In comparison, how would you evaluate the level of parental support for student education at the *previous* location compared to its *current* location?
 - a. About the same level of support at both locations
 - b. More support at the *current* location than the *previous* location
 - c. Less support at the *current* location than the *previous* location

Please state the reason(s) for the answer you provided. _____

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please use the space below to provide any additional information that relates to one or all three high schools: Livingston, Sumter County, and Sumter Central. When writing, be certain to state the name of the school in which you are referencing. You may attach an additional sheet if needed.

APPENDIX F:

List of Staff at Sumter Central High School

Appendix F

List of Staff at Sumter Central High School

- *2 Administrators (principal and assistant principal)
- *1 Secretary
- *1 Receptionist
- **2.0 Counselors
- 2 Junior ROTC
- 1 Band/Art Teacher
- 1 Advance Placement English Teacher
- 2 Librarians (1 certified)
- 1 School Nurse
- 1 In-school Suspension (non-certified)
- 5 Special Education Teachers (certified)
- 1 AgriScience (Vocation teacher on campus)
- 1 Family and Consumer Science (vocation teacher on campus)
- 2 Technology (vocational teachers on campus/including one part-time person)
- 2 Physical Education Teachers
- 5 Facilitators for online classes (non-certified teachers)
- 5 Mathematics Teachers
- 4 English/Language Teachers
- 4 History Teachers
- 4 Science Teachers

1 Reading Intervention teacher

48. Total

*Personnel who did not participate in the survey.

**One counselor, Glory McAboy, distributed the surveys, therefore she did not participate in the survey.