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Educators' and Administrators' Perceptions, Challenges, and Changes Associated With School District Consolidation

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Educators' and Administrators' Perceptions, Challenges, and Changes Associated With
School District Consolidation

by
Candace L. Gillespie

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Candace L. Gillespie under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility in the Student Handbook of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Candace L. Gillespie
Name

March 29, 2020
Date

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Abstract

Educators' and Administrators' Perceptions, Challenges, and Changes Associated With School District Consolidation, Candace L. Gillespie, 2020: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords consolidation, school district, high schools, schools, district, reorganization, mergers, consolidate, perceptions

School district consolidation has been a trend throughout the United States as state departments of education are mandating that nearby school districts consolidate with other nearby districts. This trend is being mandated in an effort to decrease funds being spent by having many small districts. This includes funds being spent on salaries and schools, as schools consolidate due to districts consolidating. Schools, central offices, parent centers, and other buildings that are related to having multiple central offices close. Jobs are lost, policies change, and sometimes leadership changes. However, change is inevitable. With change comes different concepts, policies, and in some cases an influx of climate and culture changes and shocks. There is now a merging of two different climates, when schools consolidate. This can create a sense of newness, which interrupts, changes, and decreases the effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes as they may have been before the consolidation.

This dissertation provided information based on research about the perceptions of educators and administrators, along with the challenges and changes that come with district and school consolidations. Research focused on high schools in the Delta Consolidated High School, located in Mississippi. This was a qualitative research study. The perceptions of high school and central office administrators about the consolidation as well as teachers were provided in this dissertation study. The research methodology used to determine perceptions of district employees was the phenomenological methodology. State of Mississippi test data both preconsolidation and postconsolidation were reviewed, analyzed, and provided in the dissertation.

Teachers, school-level administrators, district-level administrators, community stakeholders, and state department personnel benefitted from reading this applied dissertation. It was hoped that the study findings would help improve the teaching and learning processes, communication patterns, and student achievement because the findings were from the perspectives of those directly part of the consolidation processes instead of those who were in charge of giving the directives for the consolidation to take place. Hearing from the ones who had to make adjustments due to the challenges and changes might cause the local school board, the Mississippi Department of Education and the state government to examine how consolidations were brought about connected to the mandates that were made.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

There was a problem with school district consolidations. Despite the positive outcomes that were expected with consolidations, there was discontentment in some consolidations. The problem had negatively affected the two high schools consolidated in the Delta Consolidated School District (pseudonym) because student achievement had not increased in either school. In one of the schools, student achievement had declined. This could be attributed to several factors such as communication issues between schools, leadership patterns, changes since consolidation, and perceptions of teachers, and leaders of the consolidation. It was believed that a study, which investigated the challenges, changes, and perceptions of the administrators and educators involved with the consolidation by conducting qualitative research, could provide insight. Administrator and educator perceptions could have an impact on the way a school thrives.

The populations that were interviewed and administered the questionnaire were teachers and administrators. The Consolidation Interview Questionnaire used was designed by Effiom (2014) for use during Effiom's dissertation study (see Appendix A). Effiom used the questionnaire when conducting interviews during his study. Permission was granted for the use of the instrument for this study. These Consolidation Interview Questions were given to the administrators and teachers during their convenience in their classrooms and offices. Their responses showed their perceptions of the consolidation and how it had worked for them in their positions, as well as populations that had been and were being affected including everyone in the district. Test data were used from the district. The study was a qualitative study. Qualitative data were collected and reviewed.

The research methodology used to determine the perceptions of district employees was the phenomenological methodology.

Preconsolidation and postconsolidation test data were collected and reviewed. The purpose of reviewing preconsolidation and postconsolidation data was to determine if there had been changes in student achievement data due to the consolidation and if student achievement had declined. Consequently, it was determined if the consolidation had not been the best thing for students academically based on the student achievement data. The expected outcomes were data showing that student achievement had declined in some ways since the consolidation.

Questionnaires and interview data were collected which provided insight about the perceptions of both teachers and administrators, as well as the challenges and changes faced due to consolidation by both high schools in the Delta Consolidated School District. There were data from questionnaires and interviews showing that teachers and employees had been negatively affected by policy changes as well as day-to-day changes that took place with the consolidation. These data were indicative of the consolidation not having been good for the administrators and educators based on how the changes and challenges impacted them.

These were two sets of data with two sets of implications for two audiences, the students and leaders. However, the reasoning was the same and it sought to answer if this consolidation was a good choice for this district based on this study. This was an applied dissertation that the district was using to help make improvements for the future. There was a new superintendent who wanted to make positive changes.

Background and justification. Consolidation has become part of school reform efforts in the United States. This is especially the case for rural schools, where there are

schools in communities. With reform efforts, the schools and districts are consolidated. There is resistance from the communities to the reform measures. The pressure comes from legislative actions, which has become a common trend. The movement is no longer led by educators attempting to do what is best for students. It is about good and bad schools. Forcing consolidation has become diligent. Consolidation is not about districts. It is about schools with budget cuts. It is hard to retain well-qualified educators. When schools close and other schools must increase their school size due to closings and consolidations, costs and the number of administrators also increase (Strange, 2013). When schools close, the closure expenses are often overlooked, such as moving property, the transition for teachers, students, and administrators, and maintaining vacant buildings (Jack & Sludden, 2013).

Many supporters of consolidation believed larger schools could provide more for students at a lower cost, as well for as specialty teaching. These supporters saw this as a positive step, which outweighed the negatives of school closings. In contrast, consolidation opponents viewed the measure as a corporate model that did not give little regard to the school as an educational system for students and teachers which was for teaching and learning. Community members argued that consolidations affect the community attachment and identity. A loss of community identity and belongingness can lead to relocation. Teachers in consolidated schools had increased workloads due to class size. Some teachers had been threatened with layoffs or transfers. Teachers felt consolidation negatively impacted student achievement. Students suffered a sense of loss in their communities, being bussed to another school (Barter, 2014).

In some cases, schools close because of low enrollment, school size, and fiscal concerns as a result of school and district consolidation. Closing schools because of low

performance is a relatively new trend. This is being done in an effort to improve academic achievement as part of school turn around initiatives. Federal assistance is available for schools and districts making reform efforts. The School Improvement Grant (SIG) program is one way. Schools are allowed to apply for appropriate grants for their schools in an effort to increase student performance. Schools close and students are sent to schools that are performing better. Thus, student achievement improves. It is thought that when the threat of school closure arises, schools will begin to improve their quality of education and achievement. Closures that involve poor academic performance and students transferring to schools that perform better happens more frequently than closures due to school consolidations (Sunderman & Coghlan, 2017).

Districts may also decide to close when there has been a decline in student enrollment as well as school buildings that are not utilized much or not in good condition. When this happens, oftentimes school buildings are repurposed or sold. In other cases, the closed school buildings end up being abandoned and eventually demolished. Closing schools has impacted the daily lives of students, their social networks, and academics. Students tend to have a strong bond with their home school and it becomes disrupted when the school closes. Students' peer social networks become disrupted and are never the same upon transferring to their new school (Sunderman & Coghlan, 2017).

Delta Consolidated School District was located in Mississippi. The main central office was located in Yellow town, Mississippi (pseudonym). The other central office was located in Orangetown, Mississippi (pseudonym). There were high schools in each of these cities which were the sites that were part of the research included in this dissertation. There were still two central offices because there was not enough space in either one for all administrators and central office staff. District A and District B

consolidated and thus, created the Delta Consolidated School District in 2014. The research problem was experienced at these two sites, the high schools. The high schools had been affected the most by the consolidation and had seen many challenges and changes. High schools had exit exams, which could keep students from graduating. The grading scale changed when the district consolidated, which affected Grade Point Averages. There were policy changes and other day-to-day changes that impact teenagers more than younger children. Before to the consolidation, the district was on a modified 10-point grading scale as follows:

A=	90-100	Excellent
B=	80-89	Above Average
C=	70-79	Average
D=	65-69	Below Average
*F=	64 or below	Failing
I=		Incomplete
WP=		Withdrew Passing
WF=		Withdrew Failing

The uniform policy allowed students to wear khaki bottoms with brown or black belts. The types of bottoms were not specified. Students were able to wear cargo pants and shorts. The types were left at the principal's discretion. Students had to carry clear or mesh backpacks (District A Student Handbook, 2012). This changed with consolidation. A note was added in the handbook about the uniform policy stating that the wearing of cargo pants was going to be phased out during the 2014-2015 school term throughout the entire Delta Consolidated School District. If parents had already purchased them, the students were granted permission to wear them only upon request for the current school

term only. Students also would be able to carry any type of backpacks now (Delta Consolidated Student Handbook, 2014).

Deficiencies in the evidence. There was a lack of evidence in the literature on this topic. There was also a lack of available research about high school consolidations. There was however, extensive information about school consolidations but it was not specifically about high schools. The gap in the literature was indicative that research was needed, and studies needed to be conducted on this topic to add to the body of literature on this subject matter.

Audience. High school administrators, faculty, staff, district administrators, community members, stakeholders, students, and parents were affected and might benefit from reading this dissertation. Administrators and teachers would perhaps benefit the most from reading this dissertation by learning about the perceptions, challenges of consolidation of others, especially when the process first started. With so many consolidations happening, maybe the local school boards, state departments of education, and state governments would consider consolidations from all angles the next time a consolidation was being discussed and the process would may be different. The goal was for the dissertation to be one that was useful and to help make positive changes for districts considering consolidation. If others read about how the challenges and changes that educators and administrators had gone through instead of just thinking consolidation was the best thing to do without careful consideration, maybe it could be reconsidered or there would be a chance to pay attention to what the educators had to say about it. Actively involving everyone in the processes was key. The goal was to improve the Delta Consolidated School District as well. The need to improve was not always known until it was seen in writing and until voices were heard. This was an indirect yet effective way.

The study was a means of sharing data in the world of research and in the researcher's work environment as well. The data were real data from employees.

Purpose of the Study

The study's purpose was to learn more about the lived experiences of individuals who were employed during the initial phases of the consolidation and who were still employed after the consolidation. The purpose was also to gain knowledge about their perceptions, challenges, and changes due to the consolidation. This came from the central office administrators. The focus was on the two high schools in the district. Learning about the challenges, changes, and perceptions of the consolidations from the perceptions of the high school administrators and teachers was part of the study's purpose as well. The goal was to determine how consolidating school districts, which leads to schools consolidating, caused challenges and changes and what those challenges and changes were as well as the perceptions of the teachers and administrators. The perceptions of teachers and administrations were researched using qualitative research methods. Student test data, which were archival data, were reviewed to determine how students were achieving preconsolidation and postconsolidation and to determine if there were changes in state test scores. Reviewing test data was part of learning about the challenges and changes that were part of school district consolidation.

The research site was Delta Consolidated School District. More specifically, the two high schools were the central focus: High School B in Yellowtown, Mississippi and High School A in Orangetown, Mississippi. Learning about how state test scores had or had not changed since consolidation was important as it was viewed as part of accountability and part of student achievement. It was important to know if there was a difference in how students were scoring as students. Students who must pass state tests to

graduate or graduation options that may be utilized were alternatives based on concordance tables, comprehensive test scores, or combinations of the ACT, CPAS2, and ASVAB to graduate when the state tests could not be passed. These tests affected graduation rates.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review consists of information from peer reviewed journal articles and textbooks about school and school district consolidation as well as the effects of both. Data are included such as rationales for consolidations and changes from previous consolidations and those involved—students, teachers, principals, achievement, finances, and communities. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings from reviewing the literature, including a rationale. The rationale led to the research questions.

Theoretical Perspective

The study was grounded in a phenomenological theoretical perspective. The phenomenological perspective derived from the interpretivist approach. Phenomenology presents that attempts to gain an understanding of social reality have to be grounded in people's experiences of their social realities. Individual immediate experiences must be revisited so that new meanings for them may develop. Researcher biases are avoided. Value is placed on the participants and the interpretations of the researchers. The dissertation study was an inductive approach. This approach sought to find the internal logic of the participants. Qualitative methods were used along with small samples. Multiple methods were used to gather data and establish different views of a phenomenon. The focus in this perspective was on meaning and human experience. This technique almost exclusively uses interviews as a means of data collection (Gray, 2013).

History of Consolidation

Rural school communities have historically played a major role in community life by aiding in conveying values, knowledge, support, and being the source for local civic and economic development (Howley, Howley, Hendrickson, Belcher, & Howley, 2012). School consolidation began during the early 19th century. Consolidations of public

school districts have affected districts despite the size since the late 1930s. Smaller rural districts, lacking community resources, have historically merged together. These consolidations resulted in fewer school districts. When school districts consolidate, many changes ensue, which affect all aspects of the newly formed district. Consolidations are made in some cases because of deteriorating finances in districts. Districts are consolidated to avoid financial threats (Cooley & Floyd, 2013). Restructuring and systemic reform as part of improving society included consolidating schools and school districts (Barter, 2014). In contrast, according to Strange (2013), the desire for consolidation emerged in the 1920s. During this time, improvements had been made to roads. Transportation was now motorized. These factors made it possible to bus children to and from larger demographic areas. The federal government encouraged consolidation in the 1960s by funding the Great Plains School Re-organization Project (Strange, 2013). This was a program used to persuade consolidation, while also in favor of consolidation. It was met with opposition. However, many schools and school districts closed in the 1960s in the Great Plains. The rural resistance increased. In the late 1980s, the state's consultant told the state of Nebraska that consolidation did not bring about many valuable gains (Strange, 2013).

One-room schools decreased from 200,000 in the early 1930s to nearly zero in 1972. The elimination of rural, one-room schools contributed to the decrease in school districts. These one-room schools, in most cases, were the only schools in school districts. Closing one-room schools consequently meant consolidating several school districts. After all the one-room schoolhouses were closed, the decline in the number of school districts decreased greatly. School district consolidations within the last 40 years continued mostly in rural regions (Fischel, 2010). Incentives were put in place by

state legislatures to encourage school consolidation. These states wanted them to be part of the urbanization of rural life. Attempts to keep rural schools open, as well as small rural districts active, were viewed as wanting to remain in the past and to not progress. Rural places are defined as locations that are further from metropolitan services and suppliers (Johnson & Howley, 2015). Urbanization and the decline in farming decreased the need for one-room schools. Rural births also decreased during the 19th century. These trends led to farm work becoming mechanized. Child labor was not needed as it had been. Children were no longer within walking distance of school. Children had long walks to get to school. This was a hindrance for many. By the late 19th century, this was not a factor. Road quality improved and children did not have problems being transported to consolidated schools (Fischel, 2010).

Rural communities can be very diverse. There are a variety of factors that make rural communities unique. These factors include how far the rural community is from the nearest metropolitan area, local attractions for tourists, and industries. Regional differences are a huge factor. Rural school districts have differences as well. They tend to be the victims of higher poverty levels than urban and metropolitan areas. The individuals who are knowledgeable and capable migrate to other areas in search of jobs when schools begin closing. This leaves the rural area in a brain drain. This also makes it harder for the area to grow in any way, especially in an attempt to reopen schools (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). In the United States, there are approximately 12.4 million children enrolled in rural public schools (Schafft, 2016). These schools are as a rule overlooked as far as helping with academic scholarships and policies. There are programs that specifically help with rural outreach and educational policy (Schafft, 2016). School-community partnerships can combine vocational and academic education in different

ways such as through service learning and local business alliances. Due to the collaborations, they can bring about mentoring, job shadows, apprenticeships, and school-to-work opportunities. These programs will connect students to their community, while preparing them for the future (Schafft, 2016).

Consolidation Versus Reorganization

While some school districts are consolidating, other larger ones are fragmenting theirs into smaller ones. It has been difficult for some to do so because of financial constraints. Others feared going through with fragmentations because of possible lawsuits when dealing with districts that were being broken up into economically and racially identifiable fragments. The goal of this type of fragmentation is to put the power into the hands of the school leaders, school leadership teams, teachers, support staff, students (high school), community members, and parents. This would allow more engagement and shared decision making. This type of leadership and school, in contrast, would provide a better education with a variety of ethnicities. Decision making would be innovative, responsive, and proactive as well as specialized, based on the concerns at hand locally. This would be better structured. These schools and reorganized districts are focused on driving student achievement by fostering autonomy (Diem & Browning, 2018).

Synthesis of Findings

When small communities lose their schools due to consolidation, there is a fear of losing the sense of belongingness and cultural identities, which has united them. Community survival is linked to school closures. Several studies have linked the survival of schools to the survival of the communities (Howley et al., 2012). In contrast, it was found that consolidated schools offer a prominent sense of identity in the community where consolidation takes place. There are more advantages for high school students,

such as more extracurricular course offerings. There are more course offerings. There is more time to deal with discipline issues. However, there is less parental involvement and less teacher connectivity (Self, 2001). Rural school district consolidation is an issue that has been a positive and a negative of educational reformers (Nitta, Holley, & Wrobel, 2010). In Texas, rural student populations are often overlooked when educational policy deliberations are held because less than one fourth of the state's population is made up of rural population (Cooley & Floyd, 2013).

American law plays a big part in the school district. Local governments are charged with overseeing public schools. The founding principles in which local school districts were built upon included the promotion of core values such as community building, school improvement efforts using expert management, school funding with stability, and citizen participation. During current times, these values are often undermined or overlooked (Shoked, 2017).

School size, as far as the number of pupils in a school is important in relation to student academic achievement. There is conflicting information about this, even in other countries. The question arose, how big should a school be to make certain that there are optimal learning outcomes? Based on a study conducted in Poland, it was found that schools that had classes with the smallest number of graduates had undesired levels of learning outcomes. Comprehensive high schools consisting of over 600 students were found to have the highest learning outcomes. They were found through some studies in the United States as well. The study in Poland was conducted over a 3-year period (Polcyn, 2017).

Community resistance to consolidation can emerge as local control is being lost and that tends to be a huge concern for residents. Consolidations can create a sense of

economic, social, and cultural void in rural places. With this comes a change in the school culture and climate because a small school and district have consolidated with another community that already has its own sense of identity, culture, values, and climate. The change brings longer bus rides, and larger class sizes than children are accustomed to, from attending rural schools. Community resistance is expected when consolidation is upon a community. However, superintendents have been documented supporting consolidation. It has been found from a National Superintendent Survey that 86% of the respondents were in favor of school district consolidation (Thurman & Hackman, 2015).

Rural schools need to be part of the community development efforts. These efforts can motivate the partnering between schools and community. When there is a partnership in rural communities, it is easier to stage negotiations about keeping the rural schools open because of the great benefits whenever consolidation talks arise, and a school or schools is/are about to close. Social capital, ecological perspective, and politics are important to educational reform. Successful rural schools have strong positive relationships with their communities. There are high expectations for academic excellence. The school-community bond is not the same in nonrural schools and cities. The leadership of the principal is within the context of the rural environment (Casto, 2016).

When school enrollment declines, consolidation decisions arise due to financial issues. If the budget allows, the small school or schools with low enrollment will usually remain open. If remaining open is not feasible, a decision has to be made about consolidating schools. Consolidation is a way to reduce costs, while increasing school size, and reducing school segregation, if that is the case. Some schools merge because

they are low performing schools. On the other hand, some schools merge because of the success of the principal (De Haan, Leuven, & Oosterbeek, 2016). Education is not to be equal opportunity. It is supposed to lead to equal opportunity later in life. Education is viewed as a means to an end and it is believed that children of higher socioeconomic status oftentimes receive a better education than students from lower socioeconomic classes (Williams, 2013).

Newly consolidated schools brought changes that students in the one-room schools had never foreseen. They were now in age-graded classrooms instead of all students in the same classroom, regardless of age. This concept was implemented in cities. Cities had sufficient numbers of students to be able to divide them up by age groups in classrooms in schools. This concept is pertinent to school district consolidation because coordination between classes is required, as coordination between schools is required (Fischel, 2010).

One of the premises behind the CPS closings and relocations was to have larger schools with more opportunities for students. Those in charge felt this would be more efficient, through centralized control. Schools being run with low-enrollment, they felt, were not beneficial financially. Closing them and relocating the students, reallocating the funds, reducing building maintenance, and lowering the pupil expenditures would be in favor of the district's funding/budget (Lee & Lubienski, 2016).

In contrast, in the Spring of 2013, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) announced that 54 of their primary schools would be closing for the 2013-2014 school year. About eight percent of these schools would be closing and relocating, however. This change was thought to bring about a savings of 43 million dollars a year. America's third largest school district is CPS. The district is located in a highly segregated urban area. The

population of school age children experienced a decline over a decade ago. This caused a decline in public school enrollment. The savings from school closings was supposed to be used for technical support, iPads for students, facility air conditioning systems, and increasing security on transportation (Lee & Lubienski, 2016).

Consequently, the number of school employees was reduced, which saved a lot of money, putting it back into the budget. This presents a chance for better learning opportunities for students as well as more professional development for educators to assist them in being better prepared to educate students. Because of the above state rationales, large urban school districts in the United States conducted large scale school closings and relocations. These happened in cities such as Milwaukee, Detroit, the District of Columbia, and Pittsburgh (Lee & Lubienski, 2016).

There has been an increase in enrollment in charter schools and a decrease in public schools. There were school buildings not being used. Even though in most cases, the goal of school closings is for financial reasons, and improving educational opportunities for students, the outcomes on the students, communities, and families are not always positive. Parents viewed school closures as a loss of community-based services. School closures mandated by the state in urban areas were met by resistance as well, even though it is a heterogeneous, segregated group (Lee & Lubienski, 2016).

Organizational Change

Implementing organizational change with public and private organizations usually fails 70% of the time. There are many complexities involved with organizational changes or transformations. The readiness to the change effort affects how the change takes place (Amis & Aïssaoui, 2013). The consolidation movement is not as it was historically. There is no purity to consolidation. Professional educators that sincerely believed it was a way

to improve the teaching and learning processes once led the consolidation efforts. They felt students would receive specialized instruction and elected school board members would be in control of governing the schools. To them, it was about the reallocation of funds and implementing positive changes (Strange, 2013). Gronberg, Jansen, Karakakplan, and Taylor (2015) also believed that consolidation is about increasing the funding.

With organizational change, there comes a change in school size. There are decisions that have to be made about which school will close if there is more than one school with low enrollment and/or low performance. Change comes with opposition because a school will inevitably close. A community will lose a building that has served as more than a school. It has been part of the community. Oftentimes the change causes people to move to nearby cities because of the closure. In contrast, sometimes people move to the community as people move out because they are seeking a quiet place to settle down and retire. Community dynamics change due to consolidation. Others move away and take their children to other schools (Howley et al., 2012). Supporters of consolidation argue that larger schools can offer strategies such as multi-grading, more choice, and a better curriculum. They also propose that there are financial advantages. The financial advantages outweigh the disadvantages of the school closings. In contrast, consolidation critics hold that the consolidation model is a corporate model and it is not practical for school and the teaching and learning processes. The critics feel that larger school districts are unable to develop the needed connections with the community and schools. Consolidations affect the community identity and the connection. There is mistrust among administrators, which leads to resistance among parents and teachers (Barter, 2014).

Supporters for district consolidations realized that there must be a substantial number of students in the schools, especially high schools, to be able to offer them an enriched curriculum that includes Advanced Placement, honors, foreign language, and vocational and technical education courses. Supporters argued that students would benefit from being able to participate in music groups, competitive sports teams, and co-curricular organizations (Barter, 2014). Rural schools in contrast unfortunately are not always advantageous enough to get AP classes for their students. The schools lack preparedness on behalf of the teachers and students as well as teaching constraints. There may also be other challenges present. Small, rural schools will be less likely to offer AP classes. Even if they are offered, their enrollment and success rates will be behind those of urban and affluent schools (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016).

Rural America consists of Native American reservation communities in the West, small predominantly White New England villages, African American communities along the Mississippi Delta, Midwestern farm towns consisting of continuously growing Latino population, and isolated villages nestled within the Appalachian and Rocky Mountains. Racial and ethnic diversity have been steadily increasing in rural areas. In 2010, 77.8% of the rural population consisted of White residents, followed by 8.2% of the population were African Americans, and Hispanics at 9.3%. Native Americans made up the majority of the remaining population. However, the proportion of White rural residents is decreasing, and the Hispanic population is increasing. Poverty is linked to geography and race in complicated ways: 15.4% of the nonmetropolitan population lived in poverty in 2007 in comparison to a national rate of 12.5%. Though some beachfront and ski towns are filled with retirees and second-home owners, are able to enjoy resources and opportunities most communities in Appalachia and the Delta never will (Tieken, 2014).

Rural America is a large, diverse expanse, consisting of the same class and race lines that divide urban America. Rural school qualities and the relationships shared by school and community, are important, to rural students and residents. It is of importance to urban and suburban families, as they rely on these rural communities. Rural schools are the essence of rural communities. Many urban researchers, community members, and parents worry about a broken community-school relationship as well as promoting meaningful community involvement in schools during a time such as this when everything is based on test scores and driven by state and federal mandates. Urban families have said they feel unwelcome and/or unwanted and urban teachers complain about the absence of parental involvement. Urban leaders tend to question the political stance for educational improvement, while urban students feel ignored most of the time. These stakeholders all want responsive schools and active, cohesive communities. They want a mutual community-school relationship, an education that changes government mandates and sanctions both, on the state-level (Tieken, 2014).

The school is one of the few public spaces available to rural communities. It serves as a gathering place for civic, religious, and recreational purposes. Communities often hold debates, plays, spelling bees, and recitations. These events offer entertainment and fellowship. However, the school can be a source of conflict as well. The location of the school can cause community battles. Long fights about school placement can extend over a period of years. It can sometimes cause school districts to fracture into smaller districts. Wealth often plays a role in these battles. Wealthy families sometimes offer to donate land for the school (Tieken, 2014).

School district consolidation discussions include issues about optimal school size, enhancements for students' school experiences, and loss of communities' identities.

School district consolidations can be voluntary or mandated. The State of Arkansas mandated the elimination of districts that consisted of less than 350 students, in 1948. The number of school districts was decreased from 2,451 to 421 in 1949. This was a mandated consolidation. Mandated consolidations are often met with harsh resistance. The majority of school district consolidations in the United States have been voluntary through the incentive programs (Thurman & Hackmann, 2015).

Changes and Challenges for Teachers, Students, and Principals

Students are challenged by consolidation due to the changes that come with it. This is especially true for the ones that are coming into a new school. They are apprehensive in most cases. They have to learn about a new culture, what they can and cannot wear without being disciplined, such as memorabilia from their old school. There is a concern about conflict between students from the different schools and communities. Discipline issues were a concern for principals (Thurman & Hackmann, 2015). Students from small schools miss being known personally. They miss the individualization and attention given to them. Some were the only ones in their school with the first name they have. They miss the close interactions and sense of belongingness. When they go to the consolidated schools, where class sizes are larger, and it is not as much time for the personal attention, the lack thereof is a void. At the new school, attention is focused on being successful on state tests due to the accountability measures and how teachers are held accountable when students do not perform well (Strange, 2013). Reducing the number of schools because of consolidation can bring about negative outcomes for students. Parents do not have as many choices in suitable schools for their children, according to their standards. When there are fewer schools, there is less competition

among schools and thus, less pressure to perform their best (De Haan, Leuven, & Oosterbeek, 2016).

Students that changed schools due to forced consolidation developed relationships easier than teachers who were forced to transfer their jobs. It has been argued that the students are usually eager to make new friends and adapt to their new environment. However, all students will not fit in and adapt to their new environment. For those that experience social challenges, they experienced the same difficulties with teacher relationships. Students were more positive about the challenges even though some experienced social adjustment issues (Nitta, Holley, & Urobel, 2010). Students who have long bus routes to and from school have less time to spend with their families. They are not able to attend after school tutoring programs due to the bus routes either. This brings on student disengagement oftentimes. Students do not have the same opportunities as students that live in the same community or a nearby community. They do not have extra teacher support and other activities to be part of or engage in such as school dances and program rehearsals. This is a disadvantage due to consolidation. All parents are not able to come and pick their children up from evening activities (Barter, 2014).

Teachers are considered the keepers of knowledge. In order to practice (teach), they must utilize the knowledge they possess. Teachers and students are active agents in the teaching and learning processes. They are both valuable. Even though both are valuable, due to consolidation, some teachers are threatened with layoffs. This is the case for teachers in elective areas. Some teachers are transferred to other schools, which require them to drive a far distance away from their homes or move to another community closer to their job (Nitta, Holley, & Urobel, 2010). The majority of time was spent on discipline issues in newly consolidated schools instead of leading and ensuring

that the transition would be a good one. Teachers do not collaborate as they should, in order to foster and develop collegial relationships (Thurman & Hackmann, 2015). School transitions are viewed as disruptions. Even though transitions are short term, the impacts can be long term. School transitions can also bring about a change in the school quality, which can also result in long term results (Beuchert, Humlum, Nielsen, & Smith, 2016). Guiding individuals through a change process is a tedious and challenging process. One must be understanding and an excellent leader to be able to lead a transition. Transitions such as starting a new school after one has closed endure three phases of change—ending, losing, and letting, the neutral zone, and the new beginning. Leaders must be able to effectively communicate. This includes communicating the purpose of the change, develop a vision along with goals and objectives for the organization, create a transition plan, and provide an explanation of how to assign roles during the transition (McDonald, 2017).

The teaching and learning process is one in which both students and teachers are learning. Teachers are learning about how consolidation affects students, while learning how they are affected while they are educating students as well. Teachers encounter challenges during the teaching and learning processes. School issues become more pronounced after consolidation. Some of these issues include an increased teacher workload and decrease in parental communications and involvement. There were issues that developed due to the consolidation. Some of them are as following: students being worn out from long bus routes to and from school, lack of student participation in extracurricular activities because of the bus routes, problems communicating with central office staff because of how large the district is, and administrators are not available on an as needed basis due to consolidation. The latter is a problem for both teachers and

administrators (Barter, 2014). On the other hand, teachers in larger school districts have more colleagues to confer with and obtain educational advice from. By being collegial and planning lessons with the large number of colleagues, this will lead to an improvement as an educator. This is a benefit of consolidation (Duncombe & Yinger, 2010).

Principals are responsible for setting the tone of the school. This includes developing or changing the culture and climate of the school. For a school that has been consolidated, this should happen during the first year of the school's development or opening. The principal has to make it a priority to focus on academic achievement, while setting goals and making them known. School consolidation can be a difficult task for principals because of the demands of forming a new organization, while consistently maintaining focus on students' academic achievement. Being a high school principal is becoming a harder job. It is even more complex when leading a newly consolidated school. Principals are charged with promoting the professional growth and learning of teachers. They are supposed to promote and uplift their teachers (Thurman & Hackmann, 2015).

Role of the Rural Leader

Rural principals face challenges associated with the school community such as economic and socioeconomic challenges. Stakeholders in rural communities need to be aware of these challenges faced by the rural principal as well as the unique situation they are in as leaders promoting effective leadership practices, policies, and programs throughout the educational learning community. Rural school community in relation to the information above is defined as one with less than 10,000 students. Those who desire a principalship in a rural district should be a fit for the district as well as have an

understanding of the local community and its culture. It is also helpful to have a connection with the community historically, politically, and socially. The rural leader is expected to be a role model on all levels, even spiritually. The rural leader must spend time developing school-community partnerships. The development of relationships outside of the school is thought to decrease attention and increase trust between the school and community (Jakubiec & Kooymans, 2013).

Rural principals have more roles than that of urban principals. They also are less equipped with administrative support staff and other administrators. Rural principals can benefit from professional development to assist them with their many roles and responsibilities as well as how to delegate and which jobs to delegate. Oftentimes, rural leaders are isolated and lack funding. Consequently, they are not able to attend professional development as they need to. These leaders are charged with finding money to do things they need to do such as professional development and programs for the students. Rural schools often have small staffs. Consequently, they have better relationships with their staff members than those in larger, urban schools. Males are more likely hired as principals than females. It was found that females are more likely to move to a city or a larger community (Jakubiec & Kooymans, 2013).

Accountability measures are an integral part of being a school leader. Rural leaders often have to face these tasks alone even though they are the same as the ones with support staff in urban settings. Rural community members tend to have a sense of pride, ownership, and attachment to these communities. They want to preserve their communities as it is, and they are very uneasy when it comes to change. It is intense being the agent of change in a rural school, when comparing it to that of an urban school.

The rural leader's identity is more personal and personalized (Jakubiec & Kooymans, 2013).

Community and City Input and Challenges

In New York, consolidation does not take place without citizens voting for it to become a reality for the schools. The consent of voters is required. Consolidation affects housing prices. Consolidation is more popular in rural areas of New York State in average households. It is not popular among homeowners that live in moderately valuable homes. In some cases, consolidation and the effects in the community as well as the school are about equity and attempting to treat everyone, whether they have average income or higher income, equal (Duncombe & Yinger, 2010).

Segregation and Consolidation

Oftentimes, schools are consolidating because of desegregation court mandates. In Florida, many school districts were court mandated to desegregate, despite the diversity that currently existed. It was not about the diversity. It was about the proportion of blacks and whites in the schools. Latinos were not even considered. When a public school merged with a magnet school, it was a first. It was something different. This was part of the "Back to the Basics" movement. Parental involvement is contractual in the movement. Parents of elementary and middle school students must transport them to and from school. Students could be dismissed when the parents did not meet the contractual agreements. The public school principal helped develop a community outreach program to inform parents about the consolidation. Leadership in diverse communities requires knowledge of the cultures, dispositions, and skills. An understanding of the social factors is needed as well (Karaxha, Agosto, Black, & Effiom, 2013). In contrast, the outcomes

for disadvantaged communities showed improvements 10 years postconsolidation. Social opportunities increased for students (Doris-Keller, Ohara-Miklavic, & Fairman, 2013).

Secessionist Movements

After mergers, there have been secessionist movements. With these movements, the community wants local control of the school district, as it is pulled apart from the state-controlled district. In some cases, the reasons are based on racial segregation issues, such as when there have been mergers to desegregate and determine which schools are the strongest schools. There is intense competition and debate over schools, communities, and politics. This happened in Memphis, Tennessee, after the Memphis City Schools and Shelby County Schools Merger. These Secessionist movements are likely to spread all over the United States, bringing more school choice. Since 2000, there have been 71 communities that have made an attempt at this movement, with 47 communities having been successful. This movement is spreading to diverse parts of the United States. However, it is concentrated in the Southern part of the United States (Hawley, Diem, & Frankenberg, 2018).

Public school accountability is part of recent educational reform efforts. This restricts educational goals. Rankings of public schools are based on students' performances on state assessments. Having accountability measures restricts educational goals. It also is a determining factor whether or not students have learned needed skills to become productive citizens and be appreciative of literature and the arts (Hawley, Diem, & Frankenberg, 2018).

Those who support school choice believe that when individuals are able to choose the school that their child attends, that is creating competition among schools, which aids in improving the quality of all schools. School choice moves the focus from all students

in the district to individual students and their needs. This stance views education as an individual good instead of as an overall or combined good. The rationale behind local control of schools includes the election of community members as decision-makers about funding and what will be taught in public schools. This is happening in different communities, not just white communities. This movement has been popular in rural and homogeneous suburban areas/districts (Hawley, Diem, & Frankenberg, 2018).

Political and Administrative Issues

There are political struggles in the education sector. These struggles are defined by conflicts over quality, equity, choices, and effectiveness. The argument for consolidation centers around the values of effectiveness and quality. In some cases, consolidation was part of political processes to promote integration and more equality among students and educators. School consolidation processes often stir or cause political controversies. School administrators often favor consolidation. Topics involving power and race are still difficult for some school leaders to discuss or acknowledge. With that being said, it is hard for them to advocate for issues in which they are not comfortable discussing (Karaxha, Agosto, Black, & Effiom, 2013).

Diverse Leadership

In order to be a diverse leader, one must have knowledge of the cultures that he/she will be working with. This includes awareness of social and cultural differences, relationships, and power issues. Minority communities had no problems with trust and satisfaction. There was a sense of stability and political participation, especially among African-American communities (Karaxha, Agosto, Black, & Effiom, 2013).

Changes With Consolidation

It has been said that the increase of consolidation has been useful in national and

international economic growth. In contrast, some believe that this economic growth led to more national and international inequality. This type of inequality has led to more pollution, land misuse, and other forms of degradations. There is an extremely high correlation between positive development of children and high school capital. Social capital is important, as it is needed as part of children's adequate development in life. When schools consolidate, community disintegration increased along with education absenteeism because schools were no longer contributing to the community as they were being closed. Students that were educated in smaller districts complete more years of school. The detrimental effects of larger schools outweighed consolidated school districts. In smaller school environments, teachers are more likely to experience a greater sense of work satisfaction, increase in morale, and work commitment (Surface, 2011).

Resisting Mergers

People oppose consolidation for many reasons. Some of the reasons include not wanting to consolidate with historical rivals, feeling the school will not be good enough for their children, unable or unwilling to relocate to another town, unwilling to allow children to travel the distance required on school transportation twice every day to and from school, and community issues. Even though consolidations were mandated to improve and/or develop programs to enhance educational processes and programs, the above issues were on the forefront of the opponents' spoken issues (Surface, 2011).

During the announcement of the closings of schools and relocation of students in the CPS for the 2013-2014 school year, there was strong opposition to the decisions because there would now be inequitable access to the most desirable schools after neighborhood schools closed. Opposition came from parent and teacher organizations. Most of the schools being closed were minority schools that were part of the communities

that were considered disadvantaged. In urban areas, the population was not evenly distributed by socioeconomic status and demographics. When schools close, these children in these areas are unable to gain access to equitable educational opportunities. Classes in new schools may be overcrowded and not their first choice. Transportation fees will be out of pocket for the parents (Lee & Lubienski, 2016).

When opposing consolidation, in some cases, citizens form a de facto coalition with suburban school families. This is done to rise against the demands for higher property taxes, to gain control over controversial curriculums, while keeping schools open and separate. This is also done to obtain greater choice for students as they work toward their goals. The local school board, in some cases does not have as much power as they are supposed to or as they should. If they do, it is not utilized when it comes to personnel and the taxing of residents and educational inequalities. Even though there is usually controversy between suburban and rural residents, they come together to fight consolidations. They have tried to take teacher unions, in an effort to slow state take overs when consolidations were state mandated (Campbell, 2016).

High School A and B Consolidation

A 3-2 vote from the Delta Consolidated Board members called for the consolidation of the two high schools beginning in the 2018-2019 school year. The superintendent presented rationales and proposals for what had to be done and with the High School being closed in Yellowtown, Mississippi. The high school being merged was in Orangetown, Mississippi. The chosen proposal consisted of closing the middle school in Orangetown and the former high school in Yellowtown would be a Career and Technical Center. All vocational teachers and classes would be housed and taught there. This was shared with the public and the motion was made and voted on at the board

meeting on January 22, 2018. The Yellowtown community was in an outrage. They were allowed 3 minutes for five people to speak on matters on the agenda. Four people were from the town where the school was closing, Yellowtown, and one from the town where the newly formed high school would be, Orangetown (Delta Consolidated District Board Meeting Video & Agenda, 2018). Community stakeholders from the Yellowtown community spoke during the public comments section of the board meeting, expressing how they had obtained legal counsel to attempt to block the board's decision to close the high school and consolidate with the public school in Orangetown, by obtaining an injunction to block the merger, keeping the school open as a 7-12th Grade high school. This took place during the February 26, 2018 board meeting (Delta Consolidated School District Board Meeting Video & Agenda, 2018).

The newly formed high school had been named. It was named and announced in the February 26, 2018 board meeting. The mascot and school colors were chosen as well. The board approved the superintendent's recommendation of this new information per the students' having voted on it. The principal for the newly formed and merged high school had not been hired nor recommended (Delta Consolidated School District Board Meeting Video & Agenda, 2018).

In Ohio and Texas, the school boards must vote in favor of consolidation in order for it to occur. There is an effort on each school board involved during the consolidation effort (Brasington & Parent, 2017). School boards are involved with increasing accountability measures. This includes pushing school leaders to greater accountability measures to avoid negative consequences (Wilkins, 2015). Effective school boards focus their decision making on academic performance and instruction (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). The superintendent and the board must respect the differences and abilities of all

involved parties. This is indicative of leading as a team, demonstrating productivity and an understanding of roles and responsibilities (NSBA, 2015).

Schools Merge When Districts Consolidate

Two schools in Statloo County would close starting in the upcoming 2018-2019 school year. The closings were as a result of decreases in the areas of enrollment, certified teachers, and funding. The two schools to close were the High School in Yellowtown and the middle school in Orangetown. The school board members of the Delta Consolidated School District decided on the school closures on the board meeting in January 2018. They accepted the superintendent's proposal to save money and cut costs. The stakeholders of the town of Yellowtown were upset as they said this closure would erase an important part of their town's historic story. It was said that the first mayor's sister started a school in the mayor's home after settling, almost immediately. Education has always been key (Davis, 2018).

The district currently consisted of five schools. Under the newly introduced plan, the middle school's 5 and 6 Grades would go to the nearby elementary school, while the 7 and 8 Grades along with the closing high school's 228 students would matriculate to the high school in Orangetown. The pride of the Yellowtown community was very strong. It was said that the decision was disheartening, and the dynamics of the communities were so different. The town was founded by free slaves. It was said that the founders wanted a place where people of color could show the world how they are capable of being in control of themselves. The town has been run this way for 130 years (Davis, 2018).

The superintendent explained the rationale for the decision as well as multiple ways to look at the situation before coming to a school consolidation decision. The

financial issue at hand was explained to the people at the board meeting using visual aids. The school's fund balance was in the red at the end of the previous school term when he acquired the position as superintendent in the summer of 2017. There were many and a variety of repairs needed to structures in order to bring buildings up to par to remain in operation. There were not funds to do so and remain in compliance. There were also system repairs that were needed. These repairs totaled \$3.5 million. A facility study was done on each building to determine what needed to be done as well as which building was in the best shape. Walk-throughs had also been done to determine which building had the most space and has rooms that were not being used. Some buildings leaked when it rained. Some buildings had issues with their foundations. The district was facing a decrease in state funding according to the proposed state education funding formula. The district was expected to receive an estimated \$200,000 less than it had been receiving in expenditures per year (Davis, 2018).

The majority of the district's funding was allotted to personnel. Closing the proposed schools would save approximately \$175,000 in salaries. There were also unused classrooms at the high school in Orangetown. In fact, there were 15 unused classrooms. There was more space at the high school in Orangetown. The cost of the repairs to this school were also not as expensive as the cost to the high school that would close in Yellowtown. This was one of the rationales for choosing which high school would remain open. The high school in Orangetown had two cafeterias in contrast to the one cafeteria at the high school in Yellowtown (Davis, 2018).

The residents of the historic town of Yellowtown had come together fighting to keep their school open. The elementary school there would remain open. They were fighting for the high school to remain open. A petition circulated around the community,

advocating against the closing of the rural community's high school. An attorney was hired to pursue legal action because of the decision that was made by the superintendent and the school board. The name of the group of people who had come together was AJD United. The group, AJD United, communicated their frustration at the school board and how they failed to seek input from the community before the consolidation and closure decisions were made. They also vented about being frustrated about ever having to consolidate with the district in 2014. The merging of the two districts in 2014 was a state mandate (Davis, 2018)

Before the consolidation in 2014, the school district in the town of Yellowtown had been labeled as one of the state's most financially sound districts. It was the only one in the county that was successful. Since the consolidation, the residents in the north half of the district, which was the Orangetown area, had the majority on the district school board and outnumbered the Yellowtown board members, 3-2. No one from the middle ground community of Wikiville had run for school board member when the opportunity presented itself. Consequently, the person from Orangetown won the seat on the board. This was not looked upon favorably by the residents of the Yellowtown community (Davis, 2018).

Opposition and Court

Court day for the Delta Consolidated School District was on April 11, 2018. AJD United and the Delta Consolidated School District's school board trustees appeared in court to provide explanations for why the school had to close and consolidate with the high school in Orangetown. An injunction was served on the school board, to block the consolidation. The injunction argued that the decision to close the school and consolidate with the local high school was made illegally (Caxton, 2018).

The attorney for AJD United said in court documents that the superintendent's position should be vacated, as the superintendent did not have the proper licensure to be a superintendent. It was said that consequently, he did not have the authority to make decisions as such recommending the closing of the high school and the consolidating of those students with another school. The decision to do so was made in a closed session. The attorney's stance was that it violated the Open Meetings Act and due to a 1983 court order to improve racial integration, the board required Federal Court permission for the move (Caxton, 2018).

The district's budget was in the negative \$1 million a year ago. The district's budget was now in the negative \$75,000. The lawsuit was just to keep the high school open. There was nothing in it to provide assistance as far as a remedy for the financial status of the district. There was not anything suggesting how salaries could be paid, or how repairs could be paid, or how students could get the materials that were needed. It was all about the building being kept open (Caxton, 2018).

Waiting for an Answer

The Delta Consolidated School District and the residents of Yellowtown along with the AJD United group were waiting to see what would come of the efforts from the injunction, the petition, and court. The next court date was May 21, 2018. The decision from the ruling possibly would be given at that time or not. At one court session, the superintendent and board members were told to do no hiring or firing. However, the superintendent and board approved new hires as the upcoming school year began. The lawyer for the community group filled a contempt of court against the superintendent because coaches had been hired during the district's April 16th board meeting. The courts were informed of this being normal business for this time of the year as the school year

was coming to an end. Resignations were accepted as well as teachers and other staff were hired (Warren, 2018).

Online Petition Started

An online petition was even started by an AJD alumnus who lived out of state on a popular platform, Change.org. The petition was setup and linked to a Mississippi Senator who represented the area. The purpose of the petition was for people with an interest in the school closing to sign it. Some of the rationales behind the online petition included being unaware of knowing the school may possibly close, not being considered in the talks about consolidation of the schools and the closure, and the school that their school would be merged with struggled financially and academically. The legacy of the school was connected to the town's rich history and they wanted to preserve it. It would also bring economic hardship for citizens because the children of the town would have to attend school outside of their own community. They would have to ride the bus, or their parents would have to take them to school. The main concern was losing the legacy of the school (Jones, 2018).

Charter School Time

With the school closing and the upcoming school year approaching, the question was asked about starting a charter school in Yellowtown. This was an alternative education method for children in this town as parents had the right to choose alternative methods of education for their children, ensuring that they were receiving a quality education. Charter schools were operated as a school district. Yet they could be part of school districts. They could be either be for-profit or non-profit organizations. They were not managed by the government. They were part of the school choice initiative. During the 2016-2017 school year, 3.1 million students received services from 6,900 charter

schools. The legislation for charter schools in Mississippi passed in 1997. It was called the Mississippi Public Charter Schools Act. It classified charter schools as public schools that were run by an independent governing board. There was autonomy over decisions included finance, scheduling, personnel, and instruction. Tuition was not charged for students to attend (Holmes, 2018).

If an application for a charter school for the Delta Consolidated School District was completed, they would have to adhere to the guidelines of the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board. The application process was rigorous. It was also an online process. It was the right time to convert the high school that would be closed and even perhaps the elementary school that would remain opened into charter school (k-12). In 2017, the state of Mississippi received a grant in the amount of \$17 million dollars to expand charter schools. The grant's goals included the opening of 15 new charter schools within the next 5 years. The town of Yellowtown was known for being one of resilience and economic empowerment. It would be able to maintain its legacy, even with charter schooling (Holmes, 2018).

A group of people from the Yellowtown community, a different one, but some of the same people, submitted a 2018 Charter School Proposal, in an attempt to open a charter school for the 2019-2020 school year as a new operator. They were seeking to open their school in the Delta Consolidated School District area, servicing students in Grades 7-12^t, with a capacity of 250 students. The specialties or models of the school consisted of blended learning, career and technical education, college preparatory, and STEM curriculums. The individuals on the application team came from various backgrounds. The majority of them had education affiliated backgrounds. Some of the same people on the applicant team were also members of the proposed governing board

for the charter school. This was an attempt to replace the one that would close that fall in Yellowtown (Mississippi Charter School Board, 2018).

Role of the Superintendent

Superintendents have a multi-faceted role. They have a managerial responsibility which is necessary to maintain stability of the district being overseen. Managerial tasks of the superintendent are of extreme importance as part of their work as a leader as well as instructional and political work. Superintendents focus on the district's educational vision, goals, and progression towards them, professional development, and overseeing accountability measures and outcomes. Political aspects of the superintendents' job involve public relations, communication, and statesmanship skills. This includes the development and maintain of partnerships with stakeholders such as community members, teachers, parents, and board members (Hall & McHenry-Sorber, 2017).

Rural districts make up almost half of the districts in the United States. Rural superintendents are intimately connected to the local community or communities in which in which they serve. Rural superintendents are more likely to work with administrative teams than urban and suburban superintendents. Rural superintendents help navigate schools that are in need of direction; they aid in instilling purpose, values, and vision/goals for the future. The superintendent has high expectations, educational equality, and focuses on college and career readiness. They are more likely to work in small central offices within a close-knit community (Hall & McHenry-Sorber, 2017).

Summary

In conclusion, Chapter 2 consists of the review of literature. This chapter consists of a wealth of information about school consolidation and school district consolidation. School consolidation, to some, may seem to be a new trend. However, it is not new. This

started a long time ago during the time of the one room school houses. These one room school houses began to cease to exist as the focus shifted toward schools with more than one classroom where students could learn in multiple classrooms with students that were in the same age group. Students were able to learn from multiple teachers with multiple levels of expertise as well. The shift was toward urban schools and reducing the number of urban schools as people were moving to the city for better jobs and opportunity.

People in rural areas opposed the consolidations as they felt rural ways were the best for their children. The school was also the center of their community as the school was used for many purposes. It was not only for educational purposes for children. It was used for entertainment and often for religious purposes as well. The school in many cases, was often what kept the rural communities thriving.

Opposition came in many forms. In a town in Mississippi, a community group formed and obtained legal counsel. Their legal counsel sued the school board for closing the local high school and planning to send the students to the other high school in the district. There was a 3-2 vote to bring this to fruition. Legal counsel filed an injunction and the matter was held up by the courts while awaiting a ruling.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the lived experiences of the individuals who were employed during the initial phases of the school district consolidation and who were still employed. The purpose was also to gain knowledge about their perceptions, challenges, and the changes due to consolidation. This included gaining insight from district-level administrators, high school principals, and high school educators.

Research Questions

The research questions were based on areas of need and were thus, the reason why the study was being conducted:

Research Question 1. How does school district consolidation change the day-to-day operations in high schools?

Research Question 2. What data have been presented to show documentation of how consolidation has changed state test scores in both high schools?

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Research Question 4. How are teaching and learning processes challenging or different due to consolidation?

Research Design

The research design chosen was a qualitative research design. The phenomenological methodology was used. It was based on philosophy and was part of qualitative research methodologies. Phenomenologists learned about sensory details and how the participants felt about different experiences. However, when sharing them, they

relive them. Researchers must be careful and not become caught up in the stories. They must maintain focus on what is being told and stay present in the here and now (Finlay, 2012). It focuses on the essence of experiences and how things appear through experiences. Participants share their lived experiences about a phenomenon. Most studies have small sample sizes. However, all of them do not (Gill, 2014).

Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel (2010) conducted a phenomenological study of a rural school consolidation in Arkansas. The purpose of their study was to learn about the lived experiences of the students, teachers, and administrators, as they had been through the consolidation process. Data were examined preconsolidation and postconsolidation including the demographics at the schools. The researcher wanted to know about the perspectives about the consolidation from the students, teachers, and administrators. Answers were sought on what had changed, such as relationships, learning processes and opportunities, working conditions, and so forth. Eatough and Smith (2017) believed that phenomenology is viewed as an ongoing project, one that seeks to find a philosophical underpinning along with distinct living experiences.

The research approach chosen was best for this dissertation because the researcher was interested in learning about the lived experiences and perspectives of the educators and administrators of the consolidated districted. The researcher wanted to know about their initial perception (preconsolidation) and after the consolidation (postconsolidation). That was why the researcher interviewed individuals who had been employed both preconsolidation and postconsolidation to obtain accurate data.

The researcher chose the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA), which was part of a group of phenomenological approaches. It affirmed a topic to be studied as far as it is possible, but in its own terms. This approach consisted of an interpretative

component for the researcher and the participants, just as part of the name of the approach was Interpretative Phenomenology. It was interested in the detailed accounts of the participants' experiences. This was sought before looking for patterns and connecting these similarities to other cases (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

The IPA was first announced in the 1990s in the United Kingdom as a psychological approach. It was part of the psychology of experiences in the health and both clinical and counseling psychologies. It is now well known and used worldwide, especially by psychological researchers. It has also become well used in the research realm in education, organizational studies, health, sports science, and the humanities. This approach is appealing to many fields because of its assurance in understanding the phenomena that is of interest to the participants or individual's/individuals' perspective/perspectives as well as their value of subjective knowledge for psychological understanding. It includes their beliefs, thoughts, desires, feelings, and motivations. The IPA researchers are interested in understanding the lifeworld, which is the domain of immediate human experience, based on the perspective of the reflective-meaning making individual or individuals. All knowledge is grounded in the lifeworld. This includes subjective and objective knowledge (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Participants

There were 10 participants in the study. The 10 participants who were used were in the school districts both preconsolidation and postconsolidation. They were either a teacher, district administrator, or a school administrator. They fit the criteria being able to share their experiences leading up to the consolidation of the two districts and the challenges, changes, and lived experience postconsolidations based on their roles in the district. Individuals who met the criteria were sent or given a Letter to Potential

Participants (Appendix B), asking them to participate in the study. If they agreed to be part of the study, they were sent or given a General Informed Consent Form. It was reviewed with them to be certain they understood it. Both the letter and for the consent form were signed and returned to the researcher.

The sampling method used in the study was purposeful sampling. Purposeful research involved the identification and selection of individuals who had knowledge about and had experienced the phenomenon to be studied. They were willing to participate, able and available to communicate their lived experiences, and able to reflect. The results were thought to produce rich, informative data. Different sampling methods were chosen based on what was being studied, what understanding was sought, and the lived experiences that the participants were asked to share. The sampling process was consistent with the assumptions developed by the researcher (Paliknas, Horwitz, & Hoagwood, 2015).

Data Collection Tools

The data collection methods were interviewing, email questionnaires, and reviewing state test score documents. Interviews were conducted with current district employees—teachers, school administrators, and district-level administrators. Notes were taken during the interviews as well. The interviews were audio recorded. The state test scores were reviewed 2 years preconsolidation and 2 years postconsolidation. Email questionnaires consisted of the same interview questions by Effiom (2014).

Procedures

The participants came from three different settings, High School A, High School B, and District Office Annex. The researcher interviewed the participants at their work locations at their convenience. The participants completed a Demographic and

Biographical Data Survey (Appendix C), providing information about themselves to the researcher. For teachers, this was during their planning periods. The researcher obtained permissions from the principals to conduct the interviews on the dates the teachers wanted to be interviewed. An Institutional Review Board application and a Human Subjects Research Determination Form were completed and approved. Once they were approved, the study began. Approval was documented and available. The Institutional Review Board review and approval were documented and available.

Each interview was recorded. These interviews were transcribed. Even though there was an interview guide, the researcher did not have and did not ask only the questions on the guide. As the interview progressed, the researcher developed questions to ask that would generate a better discussion and better answers. There interviews were semistructured. State test scores were obtained from the Mississippi Department of Education Web Site and the District Test Coordinator for review.

Analysis

Analyzing the interview, by listening to the audio recording, helped the researcher determine areas of improvement. The recordings were transcribed. The audio recordings were used for accuracy and modifications were made if necessary after the interviewer had reviewed after reviewing the recordings. The notes from the audio recording were sent to the interviewees for accuracy. The researcher looked for themes among all of the interviewees. Coding was part of the analysis. It helped in determining themes or common patterns that developed from all of the interviews. Analysis helped the researcher see what might have been done wrong. Themes were color or number coded based on what had been found in common or a title was given to the themes. Some qualitative researchers keep field notes. Field notes consist of the thoughts, observations,

nonverbal cues, and anything else the researcher feels is important that takes place during the interviews, and the research process (Williams, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Research should be conducted according to the ethical codes and guidelines. The CITI Program training courses, when completed, provide researchers with certification to prepare them to conduct research. The Human Subjects Research course provides researchers with trainings to work with human subjects while conducting research. It involves the historical development of protections while working with human participants, current regulations, guidance data, and ethical issues (CITI Program Web Site, 2017).

Conducting research was worthwhile. There were not any unreasonable demands put on the participants. Informed consent was discussed prior to the research study beginning. The participants' anonymity was respected as well as their confidentiality. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time because participation was voluntary. Participants were not pressured to remain part of the study if they did not want to remain. Part of being an effective qualitative researcher included being able to anticipate possible problems and how to handle them in a manner that was in the best interest of the participants. It was important to protect participants from harm. The researcher needed to be observant for any signs of discomfort and ask if the participant wanted to continue. The researcher was still the researcher. The role did not change to that of a counselor or advisor (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014).

Trustworthiness

There are other words synonymous with trustworthiness in qualitative research. These words are authenticity, credibility, conformability, dependability, and

transferability. The goal of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to provide support to the claim that the findings are worthy of being paid attention to. There are other methods of trustworthiness and evaluation criteria. They have features in common. They all support the claim of trustworthiness, reporting that the content analysis is accurate (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Polkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014). Kvale (2007) stated that issues of reliability develop about the transcription and analysis of interviews. This becomes an issue when there are different transcribers and analyzers and their transcriptions and analyses are not the same and the issue of whether or not they will be the same. There is also the concern of whether the interviews will provide the same replies to the different interviewers when there are multiple interviewers. The researcher was the only transcriber and special attention was paid to maintaining trustworthiness.

Potential Researcher Bias and Role of Researcher

In qualitative research, more specifically in interviews, the role of the researcher is also as the participant. The researcher is the interviewer when conducting the interview. The researcher was the data collection instrument. Researchers are part of the instrument and the roles cannot be separated (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Kvale (2007) believed that the researcher's part in qualitative studies is key. Researchers often assume they are free of biases in their data collection processes. They often do not recognize when the data are saturated. The researcher needs to acknowledge his or her bias or biases. When biases are not acknowledged, they can invalidate the interview results. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), the better the researcher is, the better they can distinguish between their biases and their roles while conducting research. The cultural and research background of the researcher consists of biases, values, and ideals which will affect data saturation.

The researcher was aware of biases and shared them. The researcher was in these school districts and separated personal thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about the dissertation research topic. The research stayed aware but reported and dealt only with the data presented and analyzed without adding anything else or taking anything from the analysis.

Limitations

Some of the key employees who were part of the consolidation being put in place were no longer employed in the district. A couple of these employees included the last two superintendents. Some of the employees who were employed preconsolidation and postconsolidation had left the district as well. They would have been able to provide a wealth of information if they were still employed in addition to the individuals who had also moved to other locations.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to learn about the perceptions of educators and administrators toward school district consolidation as well as the changes and challenges that came from school district consolidation. It further examined state test scores to show changes in them as test scores from 2 years preconsolidation and 2 years postconsolidation that were examined. The participants, by sharing their lived experiences about what happened before, during, and after the consolidation, had a chance to express themselves by responding to the questionnaire, answering questions they may have never been asked, and sharing these lived experiences in this way as they were assigned a pseudonym and their anonymity was guaranteed. They were more likely to share their true lived experiences in more detail.

The study was grounded in the phenomenological approach which focused on the lived experiences of others. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research, which is powerful (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). During this study, email questionnaires and face-to-face interviews were used and conducted. However, the participants were able to provide their experiences, thoughts, and feelings when replying to the questions. The research questions which were related to the interview questions were as follows:

Research Question 1. How does school district consolidation change the day-to-day operations in high schools?

Research Question 2. What data have been presented to show documentation of how consolidation has changed state test scores in both high schools?

Research Question 3. What are the challenges of school district consolidation from educators' and administrators' points of view, based on data from the interviews?

Research Question 4. How are teaching and learning processes challenging or different due to consolidation?

The individuals who left the district participated via email questionnaire. Data were collected using purposeful sampling based on set criteria. The participants all answered questions via the first email the questionnaire created by Effiom (2014), which consisted of 14 open-ended questions. The Interview Follow-Up Questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions (Appendix D) created by the researcher. No one answered the follow-up questions when they were sent to them. Pseudonyms such as Participant 1 and so on, were used instead of their names. The sample size of the email questionnaire participants was six. Their ages ranged from 30-45 years. There were four female participants and one male participant. Three of the participants came from High School B, while the remaining three came from High School A. Both schools were predominantly Black organizations. School B did not have any Hispanic students, while School A did. School B had one Caucasian student, while School A did not.

One of the teachers from School A wore many hats. It can be said that the person was a major asset to their organization. The other three participants were well respected as well and vital to the communities in which they served. Students loved, respected, and obeyed them. The former organizations and what they stood for were the center of the communities in the past and recent times, until the school consolidation and school closings. Identities were lost as well as a sense of pride. All participants held at least a master's degree. Education was their passion and educating children was what brought them joy. Two of the participants had certifications in Special Education.

Each set of interview questions were coded. After coding took place, each reviewed to determine what the common overall themes were. The differences in

experience and time spent at the two schools was mentioned because it factored in with relationship building, belongingness, and a sense of pride and family. The type of coding used was analytic coding. Analytic coding explains further the actions or phrases that are part of processes (Cope, 2010). Coding was done to reduce, organize, and analyze data. It was also a method of identifying themes in qualitative data. Upon analyzing the data, there were several themes that emerged. These themes included state mandated, community rivalries/issues, losses, funding, resistant/resistance, no one benefitted, and board member mandated consolidation for school merger.

Participant 4 said, “Two small districts in Bolivar County were instructed by the Mississippi Department of Education to consolidate due to the decline in the size of both districts.”

Participant 2 said, “There was a consolidation of two local school districts due to limited funding and proximity.”

Participant 1 said, “The school district consolidated because of a lack of funding for both schools. Board members voted 3-2 to merge the two schools. The consolidation took about three years.”

As for the school consolidation, which resulted in the closing of one of the high schools and the consolidation of the two high schools, Participant 5 shared that the consolidation served as a method of greed and hatred. During the existence of both high schools, personal feelings (negative) were demonstrated toward individuals employed at the now closed school.

Another theme was community issues or rivalries. The two towns in which the schools were in, had historically been known as rivals. The sports rivalry was extensive. However, it was in the past always a safe, competitive one.

When asked about the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process and what they were, Participant 1 said, “I believe that centers on the community.”

Community affiliations and the media played integral roles in creating tensions and conflicts. This could be an affiliation with a church family, or even social club. When such parties push their agendas to social media, things can get very ugly, rumors began to spread, and reputations can get ruined.

Participant 4, another former employee shared, “The small town mentalities, differences, and rivalries did not benefit the consolidation. The communities, for the most part, did not accept the consolidation and it put a strain on the community relations.”

Research study Participant 5, stated that, “The most prominent conflicts and tension during the consolidation process were those losing identity to a town and merging with a failing school, when the problem did not exist before consolidating districts.”

Participant 1 had about 11 years of teaching experience. She was a former employee of the school that remained open. Participant 1 believed that the schools consolidated due to lack of funding for both schools to remain open. She said it took 2-3 years for the two high schools to merge. The interest of the MDE, A felt, was a proper education and equal funding for everyone. Participant 1 believed the state proposed the idea to the local school board and they moved on it. The consolidation of the schools took place on a 3-2 voting of school board members, 3 years after the school district consolidation. Participant 1 did not believe that anyone benefitted from the school closing and merger. There were students who lost teachers who were assets from both schools. There were new administrators and trust was a big thing. There was a lack of certified staff at the newly formed high school. When the school merger took place, a group of

people came together in the town where the school closed and sued the Superintendent and school board, bringing upon the district decision, and so the schools merged. She was a team player, doing what she was asked to do. The court upheld the decision for the consolidation, stating that it was a local district's decision to consolidate schools. Participant 1 remained professional, not speaking on issues, while steering clear of negativity. Board members were greatly affected because they approved the merger decision. They had been treated differently. Participant 1 believed that students just wanted to graduate and to be finished with school.

Since the school consolidation, the school board members had become the bad guys. They were resented by many. However, they had a job to do. They were elected to do a job and be firm despite how it was perceived. This was how reputations became ruined.

Participant 2 had about 16 years of teaching experience. Participant 2 left the district at the end of the 2017-2018 school year. Participant 2 had heard talks of the consolidation before the processes actually started toward a school consolidation. As far as the district consolidation, he said it was done due to funding and proximity. There was a decrease of enrollment in both school districts. Participant 2 thought the school board directed the consolidation taking place. The school consolidation happened quickly. There was a lot of resistance, which resulted in it not going well. Small town mentalities as well as the rivalry added to no one benefitting from the school consolidation. It was not accepted. This caused tension on community relations. It was a huge transition for everyone as well as it caused high teacher turnover rates.

Students chose new school colors, a mascot, and school name prior to consolidation of schools. A committee was developed on each campus consisting of

students to deal with the upcoming change and decision-making. After the consolidation of schools and the closing of one school decision was made, there were boycotts and demonstrations from both communities. Participant 2's ultimate goals through all the changes were to keep the focus on teaching and learning, educate students, and disregard the distractions. School consolidation can be destructive when not properly planned. He came from the school that remained opened. He was a straight-forward, hardworking person with a sound work ethic.

Participant 3 was a former employee of the school that closed. She was also no longer employed in the district. Participant 3 had been employed in the district longer than any of the research participants and had the most educator experience. The district was once like home to Participant 3 and her colleagues were like family. She felt that no one benefitted from the school consolidations because both communities were harmed—one lost a school, which was the center of the community as well the community's biggest employer. Teachers and students left the closing school which caused enrollment to decline at the newly opened consolidated school. This also caused a lack of certified teachers.

According to Participant 3, there had been several superintendents since the school district consolidation, as well as two principals since the high school consolidation this school year. Many staff were new and did not know the students. There was conflict between the communities that got worse. One town went to court to attempt to stop the consolidation. However, it did not work. There were student-led protests as well. Teachers and parents were encouraged to do what was best for them and their children. There were feelings such as a loss of pride and betrayal involved in the conflict.

Participant 3 felt that all personal feelings should be left aside when it came to the consolidations and everything should be about the children.

Research study Participant 4, in contrast to Participant 5, said the consolidation was a short process that was done in a few months. A superintendent search was conducted as well. Participant 4 was a former employee of the school that remained opened. She was no longer employed in the district. It was a state mandate to consolidate, according to Participant 4, being town rivals did not make the consolidation any better. The consolidation was not accepted. However, the consolidation could have been beneficial. There were tensions before, during, and after the consolidation. Participant 4 did not have a role or any responsibilities in the consolidation process. The consolidation put a strain on the relationship between the communities as it became similar to a bigger tug-of-war from both ends of the district. The consolidation could have been beneficial to both communities.

Participant 5 had about 10 years in the field of education. She was a passionate educator that came from the school that closed. When she believed in something, it was believed in wholeheartedly. Participant 5 left the school district after learning about the school closing. The school employees/colleagues were more like family, as described by her. Participant 5 felt that the consolidation was done out of greed and hatred. The consolidation process, as described by Participant 5, began in 1998. It was believed and expressed by her that the school closure and consolidation was done to destroy the town in which the school was in. Several stakeholders benefitted from the school closure, while some were also harmed. This included businesses and churches. Students withdrew from the newly formed school. This caused a loss in funds for the district. The district

lacks teachers, which caused a lack in longevity. Students function better with consistency.

According to Participant 5, before the consolidation, there was a period of bullying. The now closed school was the center of negative attention. Students were frustrated because of this and could not perform their best. There were unexpected visits, which were disguised as showing how to make the school better. There were walkthroughs and talks with students, seeking problems, as a way to close the school. Educators thought they would be able to work at this school until retirement age. Many became ill because of everything happening. The pressure was too much. The issue with the consolidation was a loss to the town's identity and the merging with a failing school. The students were impacted the most—they had to learn to trust new adults, change schools, and develop new relationship. Teachers, did however, have to find new jobs, and a sense of identity. Parents had to develop new relationships, which meant learning to trust all over again. As a teacher, Participant 5 motivated and encouraged everyone to be open-minded. As it became later in the process, it was harder for her to continue being that motivator and encourager. She attended board meetings to remain updated, as well as court proceedings. The biggest source of conflict was about the loss of identity to another community.

Individuals who were employed prior to the consolidation and were still employed were interviewed. The first person interviewed is Participant 6. Participant 6 was an instructor in the district. She had been employed for about 9 years as a high school teacher. She was in favor of the school consolidation. Her only issue about it was the timing. They were two small districts that had survived, standing alone for a long time. The consolidation was in the interests of the MDE and the local school district. Jobs

being lost was a downfall due to the reduction in force. The central office was the first thing to consolidate. Students from both high schools lost their previous and former high schools—their cultures, norm, pride, and who they were. Everything began anew. Harm was done to both communities because there was a sense of loss to them. One community leaned on the courts to try and keep the school open and it did not work. To no avail, the consolidation happened. The notification about the schools' consolidation and High School B closing came within days of the first day of school.

Participant 6 was unsure about the leadership of the district when no answers could be provided about plans for the next year during the summer of the 2018-2019 school year. She later found out the superintendent could not discuss anything about the next year's plans with anyone because he was under a court order. She said she tried to be certain she was there for all of the students and their parents, especially the ones coming from the new school. She wanted to build a good relationship with them as she does with all of her students and parents. She was about being effective and having good rapport. Reaching students and being a good teacher was her passion. She was also one who was always prepared for the school year, to be an effective teacher. She could not prepare the summer before school started the year of the consolidation as she did not know what she would be teaching.

She felt the consolidation was done for financial reasons. She said she can see how it was beneficial and how it could be more beneficial in the future as far as being able to provide more resources to students. Participant 6's biggest concern during the process was miscommunication and the unknown. She remembered people from the Yellowtown community being in opposition to the consolidation when it first happened. She was in favor of the consolidation. She did not see any way to get around it.

Participant 6 talked about the rivalry between the communities. Coding of participants' transcripts were done. Common themes emerged. These were rivalry, losses, and funding. These were common as they were the same ones that emerged from the emailed questionnaire. Two others emerged—preparedness and effective.

Participant 7 was interviewed. Her personal opinions of the consolidation was not shared or discussed. She stuck strictly to the interview questions and was very professional and succinct during the interview process. She was all about being an advocate for children and making sure that children were being treated fairly. She had a role in the school consolidation process. She assisted with the election of the mascot, school colors, and the naming of the new school. She learned about the consolidation information during school board meetings as it was presented to the public. Participant 7 said resistance was expected from both communities as they dealt with the consolidation of the two high schools. The initial district consolidation took place during the 2014-2015 school year. She realized how important it was to not take part in conversations with community members about the consolidation. It was important to maintain professionalism at all times. From Participant 7's interview, the themes emerged of professionalism, quality, and support for children.

Participant 8 was interviewed. Participant 8 has been a district-level administrator for many years. She had extensive educational experience. She said the district consolidation took place during the onset of the 2014-2015 school year. It was done to save funds. The consolidation of the schools happened the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year due to the decrease in enrollment and financial reasons of both schools. She helped as asked during the consolidation process and helped afterwards in whatever capacities asked. During the consolidation process, there was a lot of speculation about

what was happening and how it would be. When it happened, there was resistance from stakeholders. Students got along with each other, blending well. As an administrator, she worked overseeing the quality of services being provided to all students.

Participant 8's focus was all about what was best for children—their education, well-being, and them overall. She believed in factual information and not listening to or being part of rumors and negativity. She spoke about how the injunction was put in place and the consolidation was attempted to be blocked. Themes that emerged from Participant 8's interview included professionalism, loyalty, support for children, and being a team player.

Participant 9 was a former teacher from the former High School B. He said the school district consolidation took place because of financial and enrollment problems. In the beginning, Participant 9 said, the consolidation was only about streamlining administrative staff. The MDE initiated the district consolidation process. Right before the school consolidation, High School B administration attempted to make repairs to the school, in an effort to eliminate the closing and consolidation, putting the school in a better position. However, the plan did not work.

When it was clear that the schools would be consolidated, he thought it was going to be beneficial for everyone until stakeholders from one of the communities, in his opinion, were unethical about the decision to close High School B and consolidate the two high schools. Some communities lost schools. He, like another interviewee, also mentioned a community that was against the consolidation. He was employed at the newly consolidated high school as he wanted the children to have some familiarity or normalcy at the newly formed school. He did not get involved in political aspects or issues that can

be part of school districts and that were part of the consolidation efforts. He remained within his realm as a classroom teacher.

The culture was very different at the new school. The administration was new and many teachers as well. Things were somewhat trial and error. The newly formed high school's administration did not seem to care about the employees. They were too busy doing other things such as rebranding instead of focusing on the building of relationships.

Participant 10 was a former High School A teacher. She said the districts consolidated because of the MDE as they were seeking to eliminate the number of school districts in the State of Mississippi. The two districts were about 5 minutes away from each other which was another benefit. She felt that the most prominent tensions and conflicts were those brought on by the High School B community trying to keep their high school open. She mentioned the phrase serious opposition. They were in contrast to the students of the High School A community as she said how the students in the High School A community welcomed the merger of the two schools. The communities, according to Participant 10, did not benefit from the consolidation, because two schools closed. There were concerns about how the students would get along, who the new principal would be, if the consolidation would actually take place for the upcoming year, and many other questions. It was found out there that the consolidation would actually happen; there was not much time to prepare for the school year and the consolidation of two high schools and a portion of a middle school was a lot to do in a short period of time. Themes that emerged were opposition and welcomed.

Results of Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, In what ways, does school district consolidation change the day-to-day operations in high schools?

According to the results from the interview questions, central office administrators had more high school teachers to oversee and supervise. As far as teachers in the classroom, there were no changes in the schools because it was a State of Mississippi Department of Education decision, due to neighboring district's size and the decline of both districts. There was less contact with central office staff as in the past. There was not as much as a hands-on approach from central office as before.

Results of Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, What data have been presented to show documentation of how consolidation has changed state test scores in both high schools?

Interview transcripts and email questionnaires were presented to show how consolidation had changed state test scores in both high schools. Preconsolidation and Postconsolidation Test Data were reviewed in both high schools from the state scores for 2 years preconsolidation and 2 years postconsolidation (see Appendix E). In reviewing the test data, there were not any dramatic changes in the test data. High School A's school level was an F and D, respectively 2 years prior to district consolidation. High School B's school level was a D for both years. The first year of consolidation, High School A was an F and High School B remained a D. High School A remained an F for the next 2 years. High School B remained a D and then obtained an F respectively. High School B's school level did decrease the second year of school consolidation. There was nothing factually indicated in the data to attribute the change in the school level to the school district consolidation. Only a few previous employees of the school were interviewed and emailed. No former students were emailed to learn about their perceptions about the school district consolidation, state testing, teaching and learning, or anything that involved achievement and how they fared on being proficient on state tests.

The graduation rates for both high schools increased. For High School A, the graduation rate increased overall by 21.9% and 3.9% for High School B. The district graduation level increased after consolidation in comparison to the graduation levels of the districts preconsolidation. The Consolidated districts' graduation level increased in comparison to High School A's district by 28.4% and 6% for High School B. The Consolidated School District's level remained a D for the 2 years postconsolidation.

Some of the school test data reported for the 2012-2013 school year were different than the formats for the subsequent years. For that year, neither high school met growth status for all students in the areas of English or Mathematics. The levels of proficiency for High School B tests were greater than High School A. For 2013-2014, High School A led in the overall growth status being higher. They also led in proficiency in Math and U. S. History tests. During the 2014-2015 year, High School A led in the growth status being higher but not in state test score proficiency levels being higher. High School B led test score proficiency levels in all testing areas. During the 2015-2016 testing cycle, High School B's growth status for all students was higher than High School A. High School A's proficiency levels were higher in Math and ELA and High School B's were higher in Science and U. S. History. For 2016-2017 testing, High School A led with growth for all students as well as the highest proficiency for U. S. History, while High School B led the way with higher proficiencies in ELA, Science, and Math.

Results of Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, What are the challenges of school district consolidation from educators' and administrators' points of view, based on data from the interview?

Based on the interview data, some of the challenges of school district consolidation from educators' and administrators' points of view included central office being busier and there being fewer central office administrators. This was due to the merging of central offices. There was a push and pull from both ends of the district. During the first year of the school consolidation, there were new school administrators. There were concerns because the superintendent of the newly consolidated school district was an employee from one former school districts. It was said that many individuals became ill after the school consolidation was announced, which meant the closing of High School B.

The majority of the challenges discussed in the interviews and emails derived from the consolidation of the schools as a result of the consolidation of the school districts. This was what caused teachers to leave, students to transfer to other school districts, as well as stress on the teachers. One of the participants, who was a former employee did say that High School B was once a place to work that brought joy. It was a place where she planned to work until she retired. The closing of the high school, High School B, was what brought duress, animosity, and thus, teachers left their jobs and went elsewhere. Educational leaders left their jobs.

Results of Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, How are teaching and learning processes challenging or different due to consolidation?

Based on the results from Research Question 4, one teacher who was currently at the consolidated high school and was at High School B, reported that she was teaching a different grade level and different courses. Upon returning to work, the first year of consolidation, teachers did not know what they would be teaching. She was teaching

different students, which meant there were different and new parents with whom to develop relationships. She had more students. This was all unknown until school started due to how the school merger took place.

The teaching and learning processes could be frustration-filled when not supported by the new administration. There was a lack of certified teachers in the newly consolidated high school. Many teachers left and went to other districts, leaving behind vacancies that were filled by uncertified teachers. This changed the dynamics of teaching and learning processes. This was so because they were not being taught by highly qualified teachers. School consolidation being last minute did not allow proper planning for teachers who plan for the entire school year over the summer when they know what they were teaching. High School B received much negative attention prior to the school merger. The school and the employees, according to one of the interviewees, were constantly under scrutiny, even bullied, as one reported. Another former High School B teacher reported how he did the best he could to focus on his test scores in an effort to avoid the closing of High School B.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The study was designed to learn about the perceptions of educators and administrators concerning the school district consolidation, as well as the challenges and changes in relation to the school district consolidation. Two small school districts in the Mississippi Delta consolidated due to a state mandate to consolidate. The school districts were close in proximity. Upon consolidation, the central offices merged. There were jobs lost due to downsizing because there could not be two people in multiple positions. There was a main central office and a central office annex for several years, however.

The school districts consolidated at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. Years later, at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, the two high schools in the district consolidated, with one high school and the middle school closing. The enrollment data at both high schools were low. The middle school enrollment was not very high as well as the school level had been a failing level for years. Many teachers from High School B left when High School B closed, and that school consolidated with High School A, becoming a newly formed consolidated high school.

The history of school consolidations goes back to the early 19th century. Public school district consolidations have affected school districts despite their sizes since the latter part of the 1930s. Smaller, rural school districts that lacked community resources merged together. Due to the consolidations, there were fewer school districts. When districts consolidate, there are many changes, which affect all aspects of the newly formed district. Consolidations take place in some cases, because of deteriorating finances in districts. Districts are sometimes consolidated to avoid financial threats (Cooley & Floyd, 2013).

In the 1960s, the federal government encouraged consolidation by funding the Great Plains School Re-organization Project. This program was used to persuade consolidation, while also in favor of consolidation. It was met with opposition. However, many schools and school districts closed in the 1960s in the Great Plains. The rural resistance increased. In the late 1980s, the state's consultant told the state of Nebraska that consolidation did not bring about many valuable gains (Strange, 2013).

School district consolidations within the last 40 years had been mostly in rural regions (Fischel, 2010). State legislatures put incentives in place, encouraging school consolidation. These states wanted them to be part of the urbanization of rural life. Attempts to keep rural schools open and small and active were viewed as wanting to remain in the past and not to progress.

When small communities lose their schools due to consolidation, there is a fear of losing their sense of belongingness and cultural identities, which united them. Community survival is linked to school closures. Several studies have linked the survival of schools to the survival of the communities (Howley et al., 2012). In contrast, it was found that consolidated schools offered a pronounced sense of identity in the community where consolidation takes place. There were more advantages for high school students such as more extracurricular course offerings. There were more course offerings. There was also more time to deal with discipline issues. However, there was less parental involvement and less teacher connectivity (Self, 2001). Rural school district consolidation was an issue that has been a positive and a negative of educational reformers (Nitta, Holley, & Wrobel, 2010).

The study is grounded in the Phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is based on lived experiences (Gray, 2013). In phenomenological research, one is able to

learn about the meaning of events and experiences (Gray, 2013). The focus was placed on learning about the lived experiences of the participants as well as their perceptions. Focus was on the essence of their experiences. The idea was to conduct interviews with individuals with firsthand knowledge about particular events. In this case, it was the school district consolidation. Data from the interviews were grouped for meaning to determine what themes emerged.

State test scores for both high schools—High School A and High School B were part of the study. They were reviewed and analyzed to determine if there were any changes in preconsolidation and postconsolidation. This would determine if the school district consolidation had a change on the way students performed on state, end-of-year assessments. Data were retrieved from the Mississippi Department of Education website.

Teachers and administrators were interviewed or completed an email questionnaire. Purposeful sampling was used based on the set criteria. The participants consisted of current and former employees who were employed both preconsolidation and postconsolidation and left the district. There were 10 participants in the study. Two central office administrators participated. The other eight participants were educators from the two former high schools. Some were still current employees in the district, at the central office and at the consolidated high school. The participants' real names were not used. They were assigned pseudonyms based on where they worked. Interview and questionnaire data were coded to identify themes. The following themes were found: community rivalries/issues, state mandated, losses, funding, resistant/resistance, no one benefitted, and board member mandated consolidated for school merger.

Meanings and Understanding of the Study

The school district consolidation was done because of a state department of

education mandate, to consolidate the two neighboring school districts. This later brought on the consolidation of the two high schools in the district. The consolidation of the two high schools had been a long time coming. However, two historically rival high schools consolidated. At the time of the study, it was the second year of the consolidation after a court injunction and a stay kept school from opening on time. Nonetheless, the schools consolidated and everything was moving forward.

It was found that the closing of High School B was a major loss for the community as the school was the center of the community for many reasons. Jobs were lost, but the town's identity was lost as well. Some participants felt it was done for spite instead of for need. The consolidation of the schools and thus, the closing of the school, directly impacted the community. The community that lost its school did not want to merge with a failing school, as was stated by a participant. It was thought that issues arose after school district consolidation, that had not existed before. Then to make matters worse, students had to move to a new school.

The participants felt no one benefitted from the consolidation. Everyone lost something, whether it was identity, mascot, teachers, school, job, etc. Everything was new. Everyone had to start anew. There were new teachers, leaders, culture, rules, and the list continues. Many students withdrew and transferred to other local high schools due to the school consolidation. The school consolidation affected everyone in different ways. Everyone had to develop new relationships. Many faculty and staff members were new and did not know the students. Relationships had to be developed with the new students and parents.

Timing and consistency have been huge factors in this consolidation. There have been three superintendents since the school district consolidation in 2014. There have

been three principals at the new high school since the beginning of the 2018-2019. Consistency is key. The timing of learning about the certainty of the consolidation was a huge factor in successful planning for everyone. This was last minute due to the stay issued by the courts. However, there was a lack of consideration by a court of law. Plans for the upcoming year could not be discussed because of court proceedings and one teacher was trying to plan and could not. That made it difficult. When teachers plan for the year the summer before and they were unable to because they did not know what they were teaching that was difficult. Study results also showed the districts consolidated because of financial reasons. One participant expressed how she could see how it could be more beneficial and resourceful to students.

Implications of the Study

Based on the results of the study, student achievement, which in this study was reviewed according to end-of-the-year state tests, neither increased nor decreased due to the district consolidation. There was no evidence to present to prove that test scores increased or decreased due to the school district consolidation. There were fluctuations in test scores, however among both High Schools A and B. The graduation rate for High School A increased steadily since the consolidation. That cannot be attributed to the school district consolidation either. The school levels for High School A ranged from a D-F between the years of 2012-2013 through 2016-2017. The school levels for High School A remained a D from 2012-2013 through 2016-2017. The district level for the High School A district ranged from D-F and the district level for High School B ranged from C-D for the school years 2012-2017. High School B had two principals during this time while High School A had five principals. There were two superintendents in the consolidated school district between 2014-2017.

When the high schools consolidated at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, the year began with an almost new staff. The majority of the teachers from High School B left and sought employment elsewhere. Some of High School A's staff left as well, leaving vacancies for educators at the newly consolidated high school. The administrators at the newly consolidated high school were also new to the district. Everything was new.

Research Question Results

Results from the interview and email questionnaire showed that most of the interviewees answered most of the questions alike. There were some who answered totally different, which made sense because their roles were different. School administrators answered different from teachers and district administrators. Individuals from the school that closed answered with more passion and emotions, based on their lived experiences. The results in relation to the research questions included Research Question 1, which showed that day-to-day operations did change. Central office staff were not as visible as they had been. Research Question 2's data were presented from test scores, email questionnaires, and interview transcripts. Growth statutes alternated between high schools. Research Question 3's results showed that central office was busier and there were fewer central office visits due to it being more schools in the districts. There were also new administrators at the newly consolidated high school. With the closing of high school B came more stress, animosity, and unrest. Results for Research Question 4 showed that teachers were teaching different courses than before. Teachers always knew what they would be teaching in the summer. It had never been this way. The teaching and learning processes were frustrating when there was not any administrative support.

The study was of importance because it incorporated the school district and the school consolidations as the schools did not consolidate for 4 years after the districts consolidated. Most of the research was about school consolidations versus school district consolidations. Since this one consisted of information about both, it added to the body of research, sharing the perceptions of educators that were part of both consolidations. These individuals shared their perceptions about what changed postconsolidation. They shared their lived experiences, which were parts of them sharing their perceptions. The researcher also contributed a study that included Mississippi end-of-year, high school state test data. High schools were focused on in the study. High school educators were interviewed along with district administrators.

The researcher's contributions also included school district consolidations changes to the day-to-day normal routines of the school. This was something that provided insight for state and local superintendents as well as state and local school boards when considering school district and school consolidations because it may influence decision making. When consolidations are considered, sometimes the day-to-day operations or logistics are not thought out and it may be thought they will not be affected at all or much. Those in the decision-making seats must consider how the consolidations will affect student achievement. In this study, the researcher reviewed student achievement by way of state report cards and school reports. Data from the participants were received via email questionnaires and interview transcripts. This study provided a different perspective, a qualitative point of view. The study consisted of current information as well. This study was important to the field of education because school districts and school consolidations were happening more frequently. Learning about the lived experiences of educators preconsolidation and postconsolidation is

important. They are with the children every day, all day. The students are the consumers. Everything that is done is for and about them. Their sharing about the processes before and after each consolidation provides insights to the educational field as others prepare to undergo consolidations.

Educators who have undergone a consolidation also benefit from this study because sometimes people do not recognize the behaviors or issues they have within their schools or districts until they read about those of others. This research extended knowledge in the area of school and school district consolidation.

The findings supported the research questions based on the data discussed about the interviews and the email questionnaires. The findings did not provide evidence to prove that the test score changes and the increase in the graduation rate for High School B were related to the school district consolidation. Former students were not interviewed to learn about their lived experiences about the consolidations. This could be considered a limitation and an area that may be addressed differently in the future. In the future, perhaps former students or current students who were attending preconsolidation and postconsolidation could be participants in studies to provide their lived experiences and also their test data could be part of the study. It would be beneficial to use their test data preconsolidation of the schools and postconsolidation of the schools instead of using preconsolidation and postconsolidation of the school districts. The phenomenological approach was used. That was the best approach to use when wanting to learn about the lived experiences of the participants. There were no unusual or unexpected findings in the study. The outcome data were what were expected from the study.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, due to the school district consolidation of the two small, local

districts in the Mississippi Delta, the initial consolidation measures included consolidating the central office, which meant there were some job losses due to the reduction in force. There was the main central office and a central office annex because neither building was large enough to accommodate all of the employees. This happened at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year due to a state of Mississippi department of Education mandate for the districts to consolidate. For 4 years, the two high schools remained. At the beginning of Semester II of the 2017-2018 school year, the consolidation proposal of the two high schools was presented during a board meeting. The proposal was accepted with a 3-2 vote. With facilities studies and so forth done, High School B closed along with the middle school. Those three schools consolidated, and the newly formed Consolidated High School thus evolved, consisting of students in Grades 7-12 instead of students in Grades 9-12.

The Consolidated High School was met with opposition because of the school closing of High School B. There was not as much opposition to the district consolidation and it was not anything that could be done to stop it once the process started because it was state mandated. There was an injunction put in place as a group of citizens in the Yellowtown community obtained a lawyer to try to stop the consolidation and closing of High School B. There were a few court proceedings and then a stay was ordered. There could be nothing done in relation to the upcoming school year. Finally, the court ruled that the consolidation was in the hands of the local school district and board and the consolidation could take place. This was in August and planning had to be done quickly to start school the next week.

The research methodology used for the study was Phenomenology. It was a qualitative study. Purposeful sampling was used. The participants had to meet a set

criterion for the study. They had to have been employees before and after the consolidation. This was so because they needed to have had preconsolidation and postconsolidation knowledge. Data were gathered by conducting interviews and emailed questionnaires. There were 10 research study participants. There were changes in the school based on the school district consolidation and then the school consolidation. Some of the day-to-day changes included central office staff not being as visible in the school as they had been before the consolidation, teaching different classes, having new students, and new administrators both building and central office.

Student test data changed. There were fluctuations in the data for both high schools. There were increases and decreases at both schools. The changes could not be attributed to the school district consolidation. The researcher believes that the changes did take place after the school district consolidation. For a future study, it would be good to conduct further research to see how students are performing at the newly consolidated high school the first 2 years after the existence of the high school and compare it to the data from this study.

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Appendix A
Consolidation Interview Questions

Consolidation Interview Questions
(Effiom, 2014)

1. Tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?
2. Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share it with me.
3. Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly, are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?
4. Are there any ongoing implications or challenges of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time? Institutional Roles and Responsibilities
5. Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation?
6. Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? As a teacher? As a district administrator? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?
7. What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?
8. How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?
9. Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?
10. If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the

consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

1. How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?
2. What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?
3. Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.
4. Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

**Participant 1 (High School A. Previous Teacher)
Consolidation Interview Questions**

- Tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

The school district consolidated because of a lack of funding for both schools. Board members voted 3-2 to merge the two schools. The consolidation took about 3 years.

- Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me.

I believe the interest was by the state as a way for the schools to ensure a proper education for all students. With a proper education comes funding. I believe that the state pitched the idea to the school board members along with the Superintendent and they began to move accordingly.

- Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation?

Similarly, are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

At this point, I don't believe that anyone truly benefited from this because there were a lot of people who left. I stress this because many teachers who students actually trusted on both ends of the merger are no longer there, leaving students to start all over again with trusting the adults. I believe that the students are somewhat lost as far as guidance because many of the instructors and facilitators have no working relationship with the students. On the contrary, if there are some the chances are slim to none. I personally feel that the students just want to graduate and be done. It's pretty much routine. As far as the administrators, I feel that this is still a trial and error thing. Just like the students, the administrators also have new faces. They not only have to learn their students but also their teachers. Trust is a big issue for everyone.

- Are there any ongoing implications or challenges of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time? Institutional Roles and Responsibilities

The ongoing challenges that I feel is most noticeable would be the lack of certified staff members along with the lack of educational classes.

- Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation?

Before the consolidation there was a lot of rumors that surfaced in regard to combining the two high schools. No information was given at the time. During the consolidation, the school board merged and that is when things began to perspire, considering the fact that there was one superintendent and an unequal number of board members from the 2

different communities. After the consolidation, changes were made and court proceeding began to take an effect.

- Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? As a teacher? As a district administrator? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?

As a teacher, I did not do anything. I chose not to because the situation was very sticky and I only knew what was told to me. I chose to remain silent because it was not my place to speak on it nor act on it. I just wanted to be a team player.

- What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?

Originally, I was chosen to be on a team where students were polled according to their interest in classes in which they would like to take. Other than that, attending the regularly scheduled board meetings to stay informed was enough for me.

- How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

I would say that I was more of a team member as opposed to a leader. I only did what was asked of me, nothing more nothing less.

- Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?

No.

- If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred? As far as issues are concerned, I know that many of them existed. They were obvious, but it was not in my power for me to change any of this, let alone speak on this.

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

- How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?

I try to remain professional at all times. I don't speak on things that I am not aware of and I don't say things that I would not want repeated. I also try to always stay away from the negativity. At the end of the day I am a team player and try to always seek positivity in all situations.

- What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?

I believe that centers on the community. Community affiliations and the media plays an integral role in creating tension and conflicts. This could be an affiliation with a church, family, or even social club. When such parties push their agenda to social media, things can get very ugly, rumors began to spread and reputations can get ruined.

- Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.

I believe there were because the governing body who is held responsible for ensuring that the policies and procedures are being carried out, are now the bad guys. Because they have a job to do, they began to experience resentment from others as well as hatred and unfair treatment. Because of this, they have to remain firm because of the job they were elected to do. I believe that the consolidation effects them more than anyone else because they are held to higher standards.

- Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

Yes. I did not know that if there was a court order in place even though it was a “school matter”, that everything has to halt until further notice. I found that quite alarming because it means that everyone including the overseeing stakeholders must cease all ongoing plans, policies, and procedures.

Effiom, C. B. (2014). *Principal Experiences in a School Consolidation*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from University of Southern Florida Scholar Commons.

**Participant 2 (High School A. Previous Teacher)
Consolidation Interview Questions**

- Tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

There was a consolidation of two local school districts due to limited funding and proximity. The districts consolidated in name first, then after several years, onto one campus.

- Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me.

I am unaware exactly how the consolidation took place, but I am of the assumption that it was the school board that directed the transition.

- Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly, are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

I am almost certain there were mixed feeling for all parties because of the suddenness of the change. There will always be resistance to change. I am not sure of the ramifications for those involved because this change happened after I left.

- Are there any ongoing implications or challenges of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time?

From newspaper articles and dialogue with former colleagues, I would have to assume that things have not gone as smoothly as initially hoped. There was quite a bit of transition and turnover.

Institutional Roles and Responsibilities

- Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation? Before the consolidation, there were talks of the possibility of a consolidation but the specifics as it relates to timing were never discussed.

During the stages of the consolidation, a new school name, new colors, and locations were discussed with the student body. A committee was elected to represent each school's student body. After the consolidation, there were boycotts and other demonstrations by members of both school district communities.

- Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? As a teacher? As a district administrator? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?

As a teacher, my responsibility was to ensure to the students that teaching learning were the focal points and that any other distractions should be disregarded.

- What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?

I was a member of the district wide committee responsible for facilitating changes within the two school districts.

My responsibilities, along with two other school district colleagues, were to guide the student body committee members as they made decisions in the best interest of the overall student population.

- How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

From prior reading and dialogue with other administrators, I had ideas of the requirements for implementing school district transition.

- Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?

N/A

- If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

In my position, my focus was on the teaching and learning process, ensuring students were made aware of pertinent information, but continuing to remain scholars in the classroom.

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

- How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation? My role was to direct all concerns back to the superintendent and local school board. Anything concerning budgets, personnel, and facility maintenance was the responsibility of the school level administrator.
- What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?

The major concerns were location, school naming, and staffing.

- Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.

Whenever change in methodology is required, resistance is the likely outcome. There were mixed feelings, and I am certain that they still exist.

- Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

If not properly planned, school consolidations can be the destruction of surrounding communities and create unnecessary tension for all stakeholders involved.

Effiom, C. B. (2014). *Principal Experiences in a School Consolidation*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from University of Southern Florida Scholar Commons.

**Participant 3 (High School B. Previous Leader)
Consolidation Interview Questions**

- Tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

Orangetown Public Schools and Yellowtown Public School was ordered by the legislature to consolidate for the 2014-2015 school year. The consolidation was talked about for years, but it was passed and implemented for 2014-2015 school year. The central office was consolidated for the first 4 years and in 2018-2019 the superintendent and school board consolidated the high schools.

- Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me. The state legislature felt they could save money by consolidating smaller school districts, but so many other factors go into play.

Consolidations of the high schools in my opinion was a personal agenda by members of the school board who had a majority of power.

- Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly, are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

I do not think anyone of the communities have benefited by the consolidation. I think both communities were harmed by the consolidation, one community lost their high school which was the center of activity for the town and one of the biggest employers in the community. Many certified teachers left the closing school and enrollment went down because of students transferring.

- Are there any ongoing implications or challenges of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time? Institutional Roles and Responsibilities
Since the consolidation of the districts, there has been several different superintendents.

The newly consolidated high school has had 2 different principals this school year. I feel that people are having a hard time finding exactly what is needed to be done in their new roles and because many of the staff do not know the students.

- Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation? Before the consolidation was announced there were rumors and people from one town were fighting against the consolidation of the district. Once the consolidation of the high schools was announced the fight began between the communities became more intense. One community went to court to halt the consolidation. The higher court eventually ruled in favor of the consolidation. During the consolidation, teachers and students left the district. Students from the school that closed protested, but it did not stop the consolidation. The school has been functioning but not at a high level because the lack of certified teachers.

- Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? As a teacher? As a district administrator? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?

As a leader before the consolidation, I talked to my staff about what was to come and let them know that they there will be decisions that would have to be made. After I was non-renewed as principal, I begin to search for a new job and tried to keep the morale of the students and teachers up. The morale of the closed high school was very low. The students had the attitude of they didn't care anymore because they were taking everything away from them.

- What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?

None

- How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

N/A

- Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did you not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?

N/A

- If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

N/A

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

- How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?

As one of the educational leaders of the high school that closed, I tried to remain positive throughout our last days at the school. I told teachers to think about what was best for them in their decision making. I assured parents that to try to trust the process but speak up for their child. I discussed future plans with the other school principal because she was non-renewed also.

- What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?

Feelings of betrayal and loss of pride.

- Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.

- Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

When people decide to consolidate schools, they should know that personal feelings should be left out and all decisions should be made to benefit children.

Effiom, C. B. (2014). *Principal Experiences in a School Consolidation*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from University of Southern Florida Scholar Commons.

**Participant 4 (High School A. Previous Leader)
Consolidation Interview Questions**

- Tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

Two small school districts in Bolivar County were instructed by the Mississippi Department of Education to consolidate due to the decline in size of both districts. MDE conducted a search for a superintendent. That actual process of consolidation was a short process which was done within a few months.

- Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me.

To the best of my knowledge, Mississippi Department of Education required the consolidation. In my opinion, the consolidation would have benefited both districts.

- Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly, are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

The small town mentalities/differences/rivalries did not benefit the consolidation. The communities, for the most part, did not accept the consolidation and it put a strain on the community relations.

- Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation?

Immediately, during, and after before the consolidation, there was tension. The process was difficult because the new superintendent was from one of the “old” districts and many felt that there a sense of biasness. There was constant pull and push from both ends of the district.

- Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? As a teacher? As a district administrator? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?

At the time of consolidation, I served as a Reading Specialist. My role did not change but I had the opportunity to network with the Reading Specialist from the other end of the district. I saw that our roles were different; however, I continued what I was doing, and she continued her routine as our qualifications were different.

- What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?

I had no responsibilities in the course of implementing the school consolidation process.

- How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

At the time of consolidation, I was not in a core leadership role.

- Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?

I am not aware of any.

- If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

- How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?
- What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?
- Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.
- Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

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**Participant 5 (High School B. Previous Teacher)
Consolidation Interview Questions**

- Tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

Response- The consolidation served as a method of greed and hatred. During the existence of both high schools, personal feelings (negative) were demonstrated toward the schools in Yellowtown, MS. Some would classify the time frame within 3-5 years, but this process has been ongoing and planned since the year of 1998.

- Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me.

Response-The interest to seek the consolidation was of those who had no interest of students and personally wanted to destroy the town of Yellowtown.

- Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly, are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

Response- Yes, I am aware of some stakeholder who have benefited from the consolidation. There were also several stakeholders who were harmed. Many churches were divided and businesses were deeply destroyed by the actions of the consolidation.

- Are there any ongoing implications or challenges of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time?

Institutional Roles and Responsibilities

Response-With the decrease within the student population, the district will be at risk of losing funds. This will cause more individuals to be placed in positions for a short-term. This factor is an indication that longevity will cease to exist. Students (this generation) functions better with consistency.

- Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation?

Response-The period before the consolidation was filled with unexpected visits, which were camouflaged as methods of bettering the school. Individuals would walk through and visit with the students in hopes of finding issues to shut the school down with. The period during the consolidation was a period filled with bullying. The schools in Yellowtown were made the center of negative attention. This caused students to become frustrated. It was very hard for them to perform when those who were elected to be in charge were presenting false conclusions to them. Educators were frustrated, because most had deemed High School B as being worthy of being a place to work until

retirement. After the consolidation, many individuals have become ill. The impact has worn on the internal organs of many. Most days, some work to only provide, while working there was a joy before the consolidation.

- Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? As a teacher? As a district administrator? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?

Response-As a teacher, it was my intent to keep everyone motivated, and to also encourage everyone to have an open mind. After a while, it became very complicated for me, as an individual who is very passionate about education in the town, to maintain motivated.

- What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?

Response- I attended most board meetings, court sessions, and town hall meetings to be updated on all of the rulings and decisions made from both the school board and court.

- How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

Response-I have always been an individual who would ask questions, rather than one would assume.

- Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?

Response-I was made aware of most information that was discussed even when I was not available. The presentation of the consolidation from the beginning was a blindside. The impression was given that the consolidating of districts would save money. The end result only indicated that it increased salaries for individuals who were not mentally qualified.

- If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

Response-This type of action was rendered in hopes to keep people from knowing that the voting delegates had no clue of what they were doing.

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

- How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?

Response-My relationships have been very clear and cut-throat. I do fake and hold casual conversations with those who have made very bad decisions for the communities. I do however still speak with parents when I see them and motivate the children to do their best. I am not ashamed to acknowledge that I miss them. We became family.

- What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?

Response-The most prominent conflicts and tension during the school consolidation process were those losing identity to a town and merging with a failing school when the problem did not exist before consolidating districts.

- Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.

Response-There were very differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation. Students were impacted, because most were comfortable where they were. They had begun to build and foster relationship with both students and faculty members. High School B. had a very open relationship and problems were easy to be resolved. Even when given nothing, the school found a way to make a way. Teachers were impacted, because most of the educators within the school had families or were from the community. They were aware of the need to train the students' minds. Sharing lifelike occurrences indicated that mistakes could happen, but that one would have to keep working to attain the desired goal. Many parents felt comfortable with children being educated in the school. They may have had jobs away from the town, but they knew their child/children would be taken care of. With the moving of so many students to different schools, the town has lost a lot of action. It seemed to be a part of the plan which was spoken of a long time ago.

- Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

Response-I did not know that people could be so heartless. I know now that some elected officials have also had their hands in this process, which makes it hard to trust decision makers.

Effiom, C. B. (2014). *Principal Experiences in a School Consolidation*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from University of Southern Florida Scholar Commons.

Participant 6
Interview Transcript of
Newly Consolidated High School Teacher (High School A. Previous Teacher)

Me (M): Okay, Good Morning

Participant Six: Yeah, Good Morning.

M: I appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to help me with my dissertation, my research study. We have done the informed consent part. You looked over it previously some months ago. So, if you are ready, we'll go ahead and get started. Okay, this is the school consolidation interview. So, we will just start with the questions or there may be some that I ask you that are not on the paper and you can just add wherever you like or if you have questions for me, you can ask or whatever.

So tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen and how long did the district consolidation process take?

Participant Six: Combined, it was contentious. Like it was a lawyer and a photographer that came from the state because they were re-drawing voting districts. So, I remember that, even... I don't know how long it took. How long it took from there. Even from the time I found out about it, until we actually combined. Ahhh...I'm not...I don't remember for sure. Even then people...the concerns were that the schools would combine.

M: umm hmm...

Participant Six: I don't remember that much about that except that there was a lot of kind of in-fighting at the time.

M: Umm hmm...

Participant Six: and then, the central offices merged. Ummm...it didn't affect me. I mean, really, nothing about my daily life change at the point.

M: Umm hmm...

Participant Six: It didn't really affect me until the schools combined.

M: Okay. Do you know whose interest it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me.

Participant Six: (laughs), Ahhh... I think that it made financial sense. So, from the state perspective, it certainly saves money if you have one superintendent, instead of two, if you're operating one central office instead of two...Ahhhh one maintenance staff, instead of two. So, I get that the interest was probably financial. I can see how you know, I hope this year, we would be, if we are able to offer more opportunities to students and you know that hasn't happened...yet. But I can see how it can be in the interests of students if

we pool our resources, we ought to be able to offer more to our students. I just actually hadn't see that yet. But it's my understanding that it's financial.

M: Okay, are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefitted?

Participant Six: Well, I mean, some people lost their jobs and others chose to leave.

M: Umm hmmm...

Participant Six: I can say that those people did not benefit. As far as who benefitted, I don't know that anyone won the lottery, when the districts combined or when the schools combined.

M: Right!

Participant Six: I mean, no, I can't think of anyone who specially benefitted. Again, I can see how it could be beneficial for teachers, like for me to teach fewer preps across the day, for example, it would be a huge benefit. That again, hasn't happened, yet.

M: umm hmm...

Participant Six: Again, I can see how it will benefit students to have those resources. But the immediate impact was that people chose to leave the district because of uncertainty about the future because they were really attached to one of the two high school's or the other.

M: Ummm hmmm

Participant Six: Hmmm, then of course we don't have as many administrators so cutbacks are nonsense.

M: Are there any consolidation challenges that you are aware of at this time?

Participant Six: Oh yeah, yes, I hear about it...not every day. It's died down a little bit, but students talk in my classes. I still hear the kind of whisper arguments sometimes...the Yellowtown versus Orangetown arguments. Many students have adjusted really well and accepted it. But I definitely still hear the Yellowtown versus Orangetown or at High School B, we used to be able to or before the consolidation, we used to be able to da-da-da. So, it is definitely still front of mind.

M: hmm

Participant Six: Especially students that came from High School B.

M: Umm hmm...

Participant Six: I hear it from students that came from High School A too. I'm sure it's adults talking too. I just don't hear those conversations.

M: Umm hmm...

Participant Six: Yeah...

M: So, when the district consolidation happened, what were the changes and if any, challenges for you?

Participant Six: The other sort of PD, where we were meeting with teachers from other schools, no, nothing about my day changed. I'm struggling to pick up anything from day-to-day that changed. I guess on thing is that we had less contact with central office staff. For my first three years here, I'd seen the superintendent in our building almost every day. Ahhh, and then, I mean, I still see our superintendent pretty often, not nearly as hands on, not nearly, which I think it better though. It is not nearly the hands-on-approach from central office level of administration as it was before. But other than that, I can't really think of anything for me as a classroom teacher that changed.

M: Okay, okay...Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during, and after the consolidation.

Participant Six: Umm, you mean of the districts?

M: Yes, of districts.

Participant Six: Um, I don't really remember. I just wasn't that involved with it. Again, I did attend a meeting where they were attempting to draw voting district lines and community members didn't want to talk about voting district lines. They wanted to argue with the fact of consolidation. I do remember our administration and superintendent speaking to us—the faculty, urging us to contact the justice department and other people. I remember a lot of effort to stop it. I also remember feeling like it couldn't be stopped.

M: Umm hmm.

Participant Six: (laughs). So regardless to which side you were on...

M: It was inevitable...

Participant Six: (laughs)...Yeah, it was about accepting the inevitable and to make sure the transition was as smooth as it could be.

M: Umm hmm...

Participant Six: It probably, it probably was. It would have gone better if more people would have brought in. It would have gone smoother. It would've been a smoother transition if people would've simply accepted that it eventually (laughs) was gonna happen. And then, I mean, again, it really didn't affect me that much. I remember the first in service.

M: Umm hmmm.

Participant Six: Before the first day of school, there was a lot of talk about unity and you know I think...I don't think teachers were the most resistant.

M: Umm hmm!!

Participant Six: I think teachers saw that it really wasn't going to affect us all that much. There was so...I guess grumbling, among teachers that had gotten used to an old system.

M: umm hmm.

Participant Six: But for the most part, for us, the transition, was pretty smooth on the ground.

M: Umm hmm... Do you, from what you just said feel like it was more of grumbling from more of dealing with emotional attachments, almost?

Participant Six: Yeah... And I think too, teachers anticipated that eventually the schools would combine and that is the thing that most people were most upset about. I mean I was in Orangetown and not Yellowtown so I didn't know what happened on that end.

M: Yeah...

Participant Six: I think it was worse and I think that community had a lot more pride in their school and the administrators. I don't even know who their superintendent was prior to the consolidation. So, I don't know. I was always on this end of the district.

M: What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing a school consolidation process?

Participant Six: I did have some and I definitely did this when I found out schools were combining. I encouraged students to stay calm and trying to shut down conspiracy theories, and that teachers they like were returning. Like I was coming back...that some things were changing but to try and show continuity through the old district and the newly consolidated district. And the same was true when the schools combined. A lot was new, but not everything was new.

M: Umm hmm...

Participant Six: So, trying to point that out for High School A's students, to show that's a face they've seen before.

M: RIGHT!!

Participant Six: As for High School B's students, to try to welcome them and let them know it's new for everyone and not to make them feel excluded, even though it's the

building where they didn't go to school last year. Even though that was less true because it didn't affect some students and teachers as much. But I do remember some students were panicked and thought the schools would be coming immediately. They were worried that sports programs would shut down and things like that so, I tried to be reasonable.

M: Umm hmm, right!

Participant Six: and make sure students weren't freaking out about it. They didn't need to be freaking out about it.

M: Right, because I think a lot of people felt like on this end, nothing was lost because of the structure but there were losses.

Participant Six: Right!

M: The identity was lost—the new school name, mascot, and so forth. The school was stripped of everything that had been known. Adults can manage that better than students because that is all they have ever known.

Participant Six: That's true but walls of a building are not a school.

M: That's right!

Participant Six If something happened to our school today, we would still be Delta High School.

M: UMMM HMM!!

Participant Six: Yeah, I mean almost everything was new this year—my colleagues, that I'd never worked with before. It's true to a certain extent every year. But it was really true this year.

M: Right!!

Participant Six: Students...in my class this year....I taught juniors last year. I teach seniors this year. But most of the students in my class this year, actually went to High School B. last year.

M: Umm hmm...

Participant Six: So that's new...Administration is new. Not the superintendent, but the administration that I actually have to contact with is new. So yeah, it was also as new for us as it was for the kids coming from High School B.

M: Right!

Participant Six: They have familiar faces too, not a lot, but some.

M: Sometimes the new colors just catch me off guard and I just can imagine how the children feel you know?

Participant Six: It's new. It's new.

M: Yeah. Are you aware or were you told about some aspects of the school consolidation process that you did not attend to? I'm sure you were not informed of anything?!

Participant Six: Oh no, we weren't. We were blindsided. We learned the day before school was set to start. So we didn't know. Then it was pushed back two more days. But we literally didn't know when school was going to start. Schedules were changing until January. But Annie's schedule was changed in January and that was a special case, I guess. I got a new course in October. I usually use the summer to prepare for the next year. But I didn't know what courses I'd be teaching I learned about ACT Prep the weekday before school started. I got the Learning Strategies class in October. So it's things like that and I'm a careful planner. I work really hard on that end of it. So for someone like me, who takes a lot of pride in planning, that was really stressful.

M: Hmmm Hmm...

Participant Six: Like, Mr. En has until the hour planned until state tests. I don't blame any one person for that. It's just kind of how it shook out. But other things, day-to-day stuff, other things, like one of the painters said they were painting the classrooms and I shouldn't put my stuff on the walls. My classroom is another thing I put a lot of work into.

M: Um hmm....

Participant Six: and I just didn't know and that was something that turned out not to be true. It's just the kinda uncertainty and miscommunication. Things had been planned and weren't executed. Just a lot in a really short time frame that I think they had to make it, make it happen.

M: Um hm.

M: How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?

Participant Six: I mean I tried to be....I don't think my fundamental approach hasn't changed since last year. I made a conscious effort to be...to welcome students and parents from Yellowtown. Ummm, I think I've always had strong relations with my colleagues and administrators, hit or miss. Ummm, but for the most part, I do what I'm supposed to do. I think I'm pretty easy to work with and sometimes I do what you're supposed to do too.

M: Umm hmmm... RIGHT!

Participant Six: And so that's made it easier, that we are all in this situation together and I think that students didn't understand. But I think teachers did understand and we had common ground at the beginning and we understood we were all in this situation that none of us wanted to be in and I was in favor of the consolidation. The execution of it was just a situation that I didn't. We definitely have common ground there. It has been harder to build relationships with colleagues because we're so spread out. I don't teach common groups of students like I have in the past and that makes it harder to build relationships I think from a staff a perspective. I don't spend much time talking to adults though. Most of my time is spent talking to students.

M: Right!

Participant Six: For the most part, I think staff morale is low but I don't think it's because of our relationship with each other. I think it's cause for the most part, staff is on the same page.

M: Umm Hmm...

Participant Six: I think every adult here cares about students and yeah that's all you can do and that's plenty to build on actually.

M: Ummm hmmm...

Participant Six: You said community parents.

M: Especially the parent community in each of the schools involved in the consolidation and said in the beginning. How do you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders, especially the parent communities in each of the 2 schools involved in the consolidation? What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?

Participant Six: One of them was in court. The big one was in court. I think that...I know that this turned out to be, not necessary. But I think some teachers...I know some adults were concerned that others would come in sort of try to take their place. You know that...there are so few certified teachers.

M: Ummm hmm...

Participant Six: I honestly don't think that's why so many teachers left. That has turned out to be a kind of non-issue. I know students were concerned about the same things with the sports programs and it's the loss of identity especially associated with sports.

M: Right!

Participant Six: Has been a huge conflict...tensions between the two communities which I don't fully understand because I'm not from here. I could probably live here 60 years and not fully understand it. It's sometimes a healthy rivalry.

M: Umm hmm...

Participant Six: And sometimes it's a destructive rivalry.

M: Umm hmm...

Participant Six: Students constantly compare, boys from Orangetown, as if all boys aren't the same and girls from Yellowtown..... Again, painting each other in these huge broad strokes. I definitely think that ahhhh...yeah....it's always been rivalry. It's always been tension between these two communities and how they're all in one building but it hasn't been as bad...student-wise. Ummmm...I remember a couple of incidences/physical fights. I remember a couple of incidences/arguments that didn't turn to fights. But that's kinda died down.

M: Okay

Participant Six: I think people want to represent their communities and want to stand up for their own communities and that's cause some tension. Ummm. A lot of people didn't want to consolidate in the first place. So that caused a lot of conflict within the district.

M: Right.

Participant Six: Within the communities, within the court...there are students who didn't return to school.

M: Umm hmm... Okay, were there different implications of the school consolidation, especially for different stakeholders, impacted by the school consolidation?

Participant Six: Oh, absolutely, yeah, definitely. I mean, ahhh, I'll speak from my own experience, knowing we would be in...knowing I would be in this building, based in this building, whether we consolidated or not.

M: Right!

Participant Six: Knowing we would be in this building if the consolidation happened made me feel a lot more comfortable ...a lot more at ease and I'd be happy to teach in another building. But all my stuff is here. I know you can't pick this up on the recording. But if you look around, it's a lot of stuff.

M: Right, and it is.

Participant Six: And teachers who had to move their things over to this building, that was really stressful on teachers who had already set up their classrooms in their buildings. I know from my perspective, that was a big thing.

M: Ummm hmmm.

Participant Six: Students, I kinda think that high school B students wrongly assumed that high school A students felt kind of victorious in that you know

M: ummm hmmm...

Participant Six: But I don't. To a certain extent, that's true, but I don't know. I think that was probably overstated. The administrators that I worked with last year aren't here this year.

M: Right.

Participant Six: I don't know if I consider that a loss or not. I do personally but district-wise, I'm not sure. I think there was some talk that the consolidation would boost Orangetown's economy. As far as I know that hasn't really happened. As far as I know, that's not really affected the towns at large except that Orangetown is where people come for the ball games and things like that. I don't really know about that. I can't speak to that.

M: Me either... Is there anything you know now about the school consolidation that you didn't know when you experienced the consolidation?

Participant Six: Really, I mean certainly things that's in hindsight...it could've been done better. All of us, we could've done better. There was just no....just was really unfortunate with the timing, to throw together an entire school year with little to no warning at all.

M: umm hmmm...

Participant Six: I have had.... Mr. Plome and I have had a one-on-one conversation about his plans for the future and I feel like...I felt throughout the process, I trusted him. I felt confident that he had a plan.

M: Okay!

Participant Six at least he had a vision.

M: Okay!

Participant Six: Planning was constrained by the court.

M: Right

Participant Six: Even when ...even when they were withdrawn from making moves about school, I felt Mr. Plome had a plan for what he thought would be the best case-scenario for the school and I trusted him. I trust he had a plan.

M: Right!

Participant Six: and there were times in the process leading with the consolidation when I doubted...I mean I know now, because we've had these conversations. But I doubted if there was any kind of leadership that would make sure things were okay 'cause he couldn't talk about it.

M: I understand.

Participant Six: So it was a lot of speculating...speculating among ignorant people...that's how it felt...and there's like 12 options of how it could go.

M: Right!

Participant Six: But we didn't know. Nobody knew and we didn't have any contact with people who did know.

M: Okay, and those that did, couldn't discuss it.

Participant Six: Any of the questions I asked, you know I asked that I just be at the table when thinking about how Chinese would go next year and Mr. En, who's obviously a huge stakeholder, be at the table, for Chinese next year, because we both had opinions. We both had experience. Ummmm...even just a request, even just can we have a conversation before you make decisions was just pretty much shot down. He was strictly following to the best of his ability what the judge had told him. It was frustrating to hear from the ignorant masses, who had no idea what the plan was. Now the late winter/spring is when we plan for the next year. No one could plan last year. I couldn't, you couldn't. To actually start putting students in a master schedule, you didn't know who's gonna work here next year, you know. You didn't know the what kind of licenses people may have to step in and fill my job. You don't know who's AP Certified.

M: You're right, not everyone is AP Certified. Thank you ma'am. Thank you so much for your time. We'll be doing a follow-up in the future.

Participant Six: Okay

M: Thank you!

Effiom, C. B. (2014). *Principal Experiences in a School Consolidation*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from University of Southern Florida Scholar Commons.

Participant 7
Interview Transcript of District Office Administrator

Me (M): Good Morning! How are you? Thanks so much for taking time to be part of my study. I really appreciate it.

Participant Seven: Good morning & you are welcome!

M: Tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

Participant Seven: Okay, the school district consolidation took place during the 2014-2015 school year. The consolidation consisted of two Public School Districts to form the Delta Public Consolidated School District. The districts were consolidated to save on funds. The consolidation occurred at the onset of the new school year, 2014-2015.

The consolidation of the schools, High School B, Orange Middle School, and High School A took place during the 2018- 2019 school year. The three schools were combined to form Delta High School. The schools were consolidated due to drops in enrollment and financial reasons.

M: Okay. Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me.

Participant Seven: If my memory serves me correctly it was a recommendation of the Mississippi Department of Education. Many districts across the Delta were consolidated during this time for the district consolidation. The school consolidation was proposed due to matters pertaining to the finances.

M: Understood. Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly, are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

Participant Seven: A benefit of the consolidation was the merging of the two districts to combat the drop in enrollment in both districts. Members from the Yellowtown and Orangetown communities had legitimate concerns about the consolidation process and how both communities would be impacted.

M: Are there any ongoing implications or challenges of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time? Institutional Roles and Responsibilities

Participant Seven: More work is needed to unite the communities involved.

M: Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation?

Participant Seven: Before the consolidation, there was a lot of speculation among stakeholders of what was going on and what the process would look like. During the consolidation there was resistance from some stakeholders. After the consolidation the students appeared to merge well together and get along. There was a change in many staff members.

M: Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? As a teacher? As a district administrator? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?

Participant Seven: As an administrator with the consolidation of the schools I have worked to ensure the quality of services provided to the students would not be impacted by the consolidation of the schools.

M: What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?

Participant Seven: I worked with overseeing the students of all schools involved along with teachers from both high schools to organize the election processes in determining the new school's name, colors, and mascot.

M: How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

Participant Seven: By remaining professional and being a support for all students.

M: Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?

Participant Seven: No I attended the board meetings and obtained information on the consolidation process as it was presented to the public.

M: If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

Participant Seven: With the closing of schools in either community resistance would be expected and anticipated. Transparency was key and addressing various stakeholder concerns as they arose.

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

M: How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?

Participant Seven: I found it important to not engage in community talk regarding the consolidation. Maintain a standard level of professionalism and direct any questions or concerns to the proper individuals so they could be addressed adequately.

M: What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process? What schools were closed and how the decisions were made. Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.

Participant Seven: The students overall had concerns but appeared to be more open to the process. The parents had various concerns on how this would affect their children and community. The community fought to keep the school in their community open.

M: Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

Participant Seven: This is a process that should be very transparent.

Effiom, C. B. (2014). *Principal Experiences in a School Consolidation*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from University of Southern Florida Scholar Commons.

Participant 8
Interview Transcript of District Office Administrator

Me (M): Good afternoon, How are you? Thank you for taking time to participate in this interview for my dissertation. I appreciate you.

Participant Eight: I am doing well. You are welcome. It is not a problem.

M: Okay, well, let's get started. You know the interview questions are about the consolidation of the school districts.

Participant Eight: Yes and remember I reviewed them prior to today.

M: Yes ma'am.

M: Tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

Participant Eight: The two districts, that we are speaking of, consolidated because they were close in proximity, being neighboring school districts. They were both small school districts that had survived a long time being independent. The Mississippi State Department of Education called for the two school districts to consolidate, just as other school districts both near and far have been consolidating. It was state mandated. From my views, it was state mandated to save money, as well as reduce the number of school districts. The process did not take that long once it was underway.

M: Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share it with me.

Participant Eight: It was in the interests of the State Department of Education, initially. However, it turned out to be in the interests of both school districts in the long run. The downfall is that there were job losses due to there being some reduction in force when it came to faculty members. The first thing to consolidate was the central office staff. There was not a need for two of everything. However, there were still two central office buildings in operation. Neither building was big enough for everyone employed as central office staff, to have office space. It came down to saving money, as there were not that many students enrolled to have that many central office staff members employed.

M: Okay. Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly, are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

Participant Eight: I am not aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from the consolidation. However, I would say the students, which are our consumers, have benefited. The students from both schools, High Schools A & B, both loss what were their former high schools. I am not speaking of the building, the structure itself. I am speaking of what it stood for—the mascot, the colors, the pride, the symbolism, culture,

and norms that made their schools what they were. They lost it all when High School B closed and when High School A's name changed and it became a consolidated high school. Everything became anew. The trophies came down, the mascot on the gym floor changed, the colors in the gym changed, everything changed. It was a new place with new concepts, ideas, and ready for new memories to be created. Even though there was a sense of loss, there was also a sense of "newness". There was an air of "we are the first to EVER do this here". There was a sense of "watch us make totally new memories".

I believe there was a sense of harm done to both communities because there was a sense of loss to both communities. One community had a huge loss because their school was completely shut down. This was as if damage had been done to the community because they fought as a community to keep their high school open. To no avail, they didn't win, and the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled in favor of the School District saying that school consolidations are local school district decisions. No one won because everyone loss something that was part of their norms, school and community cultures, and the school is the center of small communities.

M: I agree, yes, I wholeheartedly agree. Are there any ongoing implications or challenges of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time?

Participant Eight: There will always be challenges. Nothing is perfect nor easy.

M: That is true.

Institutional Roles and Responsibilities

M: Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation?

Participant Eight: Even before a consolidation had been decided upon, there was talk about a consolidation. The word was out, all about that one of the schools was closing and there would be a merger. It was common sense that this would eventually happen due to the enrollment of both of the schools, as well as how close both of the schools were together as far as in distance. But the talk consisted of too many specifics. Eventually, the ideas or vision for the closing of the school in Yellowtown was presented at a Board meeting, along with other consolidation options as well as the rationale for them. The School Board supported the Superintendent with a 3-2 vote, which would allow high school B to close, creating a merger with high school A, in Orangetown, MS. The school would now enroll students in 7th-12th grades. This would also allow students from the former Orangetown Middle School in grades 7th -8th to enroll in High School A. The 5th-6th grade students that attended there would now attend elementary school in a neighboring town. After all of the logistics were worked out, the students voted on the name of the school, mascot, and school colors, using real voting machines. This was the beginning of the changes. School had to be painted, mascot changed in building, new football uniforms, etc.

The bad part of the downhill part is that we didn't find out early on about the consolidation due to the process being help up in court by a group from Yellowtown that was trying to stop the school consolidation as they hired a lawyer for the case and an injunction was imposed on Orangetown School District. Orangetown School District had to halt all scheduling procedures as well as hiring and firings as well. This meant openings for new teachers could not be filled. They were at a stay. After the stay was removed. Scheduling was able to be reviewed and personnel as well as where everyone would be placed for the school year. Parents and community members from Yellowtown really opposed. Many students withdrew from school at High School A. Parents and students protested. Some went to a 20 day school at a local church. Some home schooled. But many transferred to neighboring school districts.

M: Okay, a lot of things—changes took place. It seems as if it was a struggle for normalcy and direction.

Participant Eight: It was, yes. It was a huge struggle for district office as well.

M: Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? As a teacher? As a district administrator? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?

Participant Eight: As a district administrator, I did whatever I was asked to do and I helped out however I could help out to make this transition for us all as smooth as possible. No one wants to see schools close down. Schools have history. History can't be repeated. However, life is full of changes, inevitable changes. We can either gravitate toward them or be an opposing force, against them. It's our choice. Even though, as I said, history can't be repeated. New memories can be made. These children can make new memories, new memories for their time to share with their children, grands, and great-grands.

I still provide assistance on both district and school levels, as it's my job. I provide assistance where and when needed where and when it's not my job, but whenever my help is sought because that is just that type of person I am. Children, their education, their lives, and well-being, are important to me.

M: Yes ma'am, I can resonate with that.

Participant Eight: Thank you.

M: What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?

Participant Eight: Again, I just did what I was asked to do. I had no specific responsibilities.

M: Okay, How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

Participant Eight: When you have been a leader and are a leader still, but in a different capacity, leadership doesn't disappear nor go away from you. It's something that remains within whether it involves a school consolidation, a district consolidation or a newly opened/formed school. Leadership traits or characteristics are always found within you.

M: I do understand. It becomes almost as if its innate.

Participant Eight: That's right.

M: I gotcha! Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did you not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?

Participant Eight: I only like to speak on what I know or what I have directly been told that's factual. I do not speak on what I have heard. I don't spew negativity nor rumors.

M: Absolutely! If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

Participant Eight: If there were issues that didn't get my time during the period of consolidation but have since come to my attention, they happened that way because that's how it was supposed to have happened. There are some things we do not understand at all. There are so many things that happen that were are not meant to understand. I believe everything happens as it does for a reason.

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

M: How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?

Participant Eight: As far as navigating the various relationships and policies of school consolidation, it was not hard to do as an administrator because, an experienced one, I know which lines to cross and not cross. I believe in staying in my own lane and doing what I am supposed to do. I ah, also believe in without hesitation doing what is asked of me to do. I help out whenever I am needed.

I believe in fostering relationships. It is especially important to foster relationships with parents, as they have trusted us with their children. It is important to have ah, positive dialogues and relationships with parents and the communities, the stakeholders.

M: Indeed. What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?

Participant Eight: Ahhh...I would say the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process was playing the waiting game, waiting to see if the high schools were going to consolidate or if two separate high schools would remain. That was a process that was nerve wrecking as relates to personnel and the placing of school personnel. When there was a stay enforced, it was not good for our hiring practices, nor for those that were part of the reductions in force. It created chaos. I do not think anyone cared about the results on anyone. It was chaotic for teachers as they did not know how to plan. Students had no idea where they would attend school either. There was conflict on the south end of the district. People are people and no one is better than the next. Judging the next is morally wrong, especially when it involves children.

M: Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.

Participant Eight: I am sure there were as everyone feels different. Some fought against the consolidation, while others did not. Some were okay with schools consolidating and felt the change was inevitable, while others protested, some were part of the group that fought and filed the injunction, and some were part of a group that picketed saying they wanted the change for their community and fellow peers. These stakeholders included community members, current teachers from High School B (the school that closed), and students from High School A (the school that remained open, the consolidating high school).

M: Okay. Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

Participant Eight: There is not anything that I know now that I did not know then about the consolidation.

M: Okay, I understand. Thank you again for your time.

Participant Eight: You are welcome.

Effiom, C. B. (2014). *Principal Experiences in a School Consolidation*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from University of Southern Florida Scholar Commons.

Participant 9
Interview Transcript for
Newly Consolidated High School Teacher (High School B Previous Teacher)
(Effiom, 2014)

Me (M): Good afternoon! Thank you for taking time to conduct this interview today.

Participant Nine: Good afternoon and you are welcome.

M: I noticed that you have written your answers to the interview questions down, which is fine. If you would like to add anything to any of the questions that I will be asking, please feel free to do so.

Participant Nine: Thank you and I will do so.

M: Okay, we can get started. Tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

Participant Nine: The school district consolidation actually took place in 2014. Ultimately, the districts' consolidation were due to enrollment and financial issues. Initially, the districts' consolidation centered around streamlining administrative staff.

M: Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me.

Participant Nine: I believe it was a Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) initiated process.

M: Okay. Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly, are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

Participant Nine: The initial consolidation seemed to be a win-win situation until stakeholders from one community were, in my opinion, considered more so unethically, in the decision, to close some schools over others. Some communities lost schools, which is detrimental to school communities.

M: Yes, sir. Okay, next question. Are there any ongoing implications or challenges of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time?

Participant Nine: I don't have an answer for this question.

M: Okay.

Institutional Roles and Responsibilities

M: Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation?

Participant Nine: Prior to the district consolidation, I believe administrators in High School B tried to make as many structural improvements as they could to deplete resources to put the high school facility in a better position to withstand what was to come.

M: Ok, Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? As a teacher? As a district administrator? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?

Participant Nine: As a teacher, I worked to improve test scores and culture within my school in hopes of warding off school consolidation.

M: Understandable. What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?

Participant Nine: After school consolidation became inevitable, I decided to stay on and work to ensure that all students who would remain would have a sense of normalcy, by seeing familiar faces.

M: That was great. Students really needed that. How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

Participant Nine: I'm just a classroom teacher who doesn't get involved with politics. With that being said, I do not have any answers for the next two questions.

M: Okay, yes sir.

- Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?
- If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

M: Okay. How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?

Participant Nine: Wow, the cultures were very different. The new leadership was new to both groups of educators. A lot of folk, including me, were feeling their way through. Many newcomers and administrators were insensitive to what was transpiring. It was like a funeral without a body, and leadership did not give a darn, in my opinion. They were too busy rebranding and not repairing relationships.

M: Yes sir, I hear where you are coming from.

Participant Nine: What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process? Each community was devalued by the other and leadership was not forthcoming about this.

M: Okay. Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.

Participant Nine: I do not have any answers for the next two questions. I have provided answers for all that I will answer.

M: Okay, Mr. R., again, I appreciate your assistance. Thank you again for participating in my study on today. Have a nice day.

Participant Nine: You are welcome and you too.

- Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

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Participant 10
Consolidation Interview Questions
High School A Previous Teacher
 (Effiom, 2014)

- Tell me about the school district consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

The two school districts consolidated due to a mandate from the State Department of Education. The process did not take long.

- Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me.

It was the interests of the State Department of Education because they have been seeking to reduce the number of school districts in the state. The local districts benefited from it by pooling together resources. The two districts were about five minutes away from each other, which meant they could benefit from consolidating the districts.

- Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly, are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

The stakeholders that I can say benefitted are the districts. The ones that did not benefit, ultimately, are the communities that lost schools due to the district consolidation. Schools are the centers of the communities and when schools are lost, jobs are lost and a sense of ownership and oneness.

- Are there any ongoing implications or challenges of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time?

I am not aware of any of the above at this time.

Institutional Roles and Responsibilities

- Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation?

Before the consolidation, there were rumors, a lot of rumors about the districts consolidating. The same is true about the schools consolidating. There were rumors of the schools consolidating before it actually came to light that it was about to happen. During the district consolidation, there was a lot of wondering about who the next superintendent would be. During the school consolidation, there was a lot of speculation about how the children would get along, who the principal of the newly formed high school would be, when would school start, would it start, would the consolidation actually happen after the court proceedings started from the High School B. community, and the list goes on. After

the consolidation, there was a short period of time to get ready for school to start and prepare. It was then time to start building a new culture, climate, and working in a totally new organization.

- Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? As a teacher? As a district administrator? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?

Immediately before the consolidation, I didn't do anything because there were court proceedings and even though we knew there was supposed to be a school merger, I just did nothing but waited for the conclusion. I wanted to be sure before reacting when I knew the High School B. community was fighting against the merger. After the merger, I remained the teacher that I always have been.

- What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?

I didn't do anything during the course of the consolidation process except my teaching job.

- How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

N/A

- Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did you not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?

N/A

- If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

N/A

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

- How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation? I have always had great, positive relationships with parents and community members. I had positive relationships with parents from the High School B. community as well. It was not difficult to foster positive relationships.

- What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?

The most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process was the opposition due to school closings.

- Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.

The communities involved, especially the one that High School B was in, was in serious opposition of the school consolidation, which meant the high school in the community had to close. The students in the High School B community protested as well. The students in the High School A community welcomed the consolidation.

- Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

No comments to be shared.

Effiom, C. B. (2014). *Principal Experiences in a School Consolidation*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from University of Southern Florida Scholar Commons.

Appendix B

Letter to Potential Participants

Letter to Potential Participants

Candace L. Gillespie
829 West S. Street
Yellowtown, MS 38762

December 2, 2017

Dear _____:

I hope this letter finds you doing well. I am writing to ask if you would be a participant in my research study for my dissertation. I am a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University. I am working toward an Educational Doctorate degree in Organizational Leadership. I am in my third of four dissertation classes. I am conducting my research on our two high schools in the North Bolivar Consolidated School District. I will not start the study until I have received IRB approval. I have already received North Bolivar Consolidated School District approval to conduct this study. The title of my dissertation is *Educators' and Administrators' Perceptions, Challenges, and Changes Associated with School District Consolidation*.

It is my goal to gain an understanding about your lived experiences both pre- and post-consolidation in each district. I am interested in learning about the consolidation's challenges, changes, and your perceptions in your current roles in the North Bolivar Consolidated School District. This will be an applied dissertation that I will share with the district, in an effort to make improvements, enhance processes, and ultimately student achievement for all students, district-wide.

The data collection method for this study will be interviews. I will come and interview you at your location, at your convenience. The interview will be recorded. I will not transcribe it. However, I will review it to take further notes after the interview as part of an analysis. I will send or bring you a copy of the notes for review and to make modifications if needed. No one will have access to the recordings or the transcriptions unless the IRB board or my dissertation committee or dissertation chair requests access to them. The contents of your interview will be kept confidential. I will not use your name. I will use non-identifying information. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, even though interviewing is the only method of data collection from employees.

Please let me know if you will be participating in my study. I look forward to hearing from you soon. You may reach me at the number provided above or at 662.398.2439. I can be reached via email at candgill@nova.edu as well. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,
Candace L. Gillespie

Appendix C

Demographic and Biographical Data Survey

Demographic and Biographical Data Survey

This will be done at the beginning of the first interview with each participant.

Date: _____ Name
(Pseudonym) _____

Job Title: _____

Years of Administrative Experience: _____

Highest Degree Attained: ____ Master's ____ Specialist ____ Doctorate ____

Other (Please Specify) _____

Age: ____ 25-35 ____ 36-45 ____ 46-55 ____ 56-65 ____ 66 and over

Gender: ____ M ____ F

Ethnicity: ____ White ____ Black or African American ____ Hispanic or Latino

American Indian or Alaska Native ____ Asian ____ Other

School of Employment: _____

Appendix D

Interview Follow-Up Questionnaire

Interview Follow-Up Form

Pseudonym: _____

Date: _____

I am following up on the interview questions that you answered for my research study, *Educators' and Administrators' Perceptions, Challenges, and Changes Associated with School District Consolidation*, which is being conducted as part of completing my Doctorate Degree at Nova Southeastern University. I am making sure that you do not have anything further to add. The purpose of the follow-up is to provide you with another opportunity to include more data as part of what you have already contributed to the study. Sometimes over time, participants think of more they could have included that was not asked in the questions. This follow up is an opportunity to do so. Thank you for your assistance in advance.

1. Is there anything else that you would like to include as it relates to the consolidation of the two school districts? This includes how you perceived it initially (pre) and after the consolidation (post). You may also include the changes that took place in your building and in reference to your position both pre and post consolidation.

2. If there is anything else that you would like to share about the consolidation of these two school districts and the eventual merger of the two high schools, please do so.

Appendix E

Preconsolidation and Postconsolidation Test Data

Preconsolidation and Postconsolidation Test Data

Actual School District Consolidation Pre- and Post-Consolidation Test Data
(End-of-Year Test Data)

	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Grad Rate	HS A: 55.3% High School B: 77.7%	HS A: 60.4% High School B: 60.1%	HS A: 77% High School B: 76.4%	HS A: 81.9% High School B: 76.9%	HS A: 77.2% High School B: 81.6%
School Level	HS A: F High School B: D	HS A: D High School B: D	HS A: F High School B: D	HS A: F High School B: D	HS A: F High School B: F
District Level	HS A District Level: F High School B's District Level: C	HS A: Level: D High School B: C	D	D	D
District Level Grad Rate	HS A: District Level Graduation Rate: 55.3% High School B's District Level Graduation	HS A: District Level Graduation Rate: 60.1% High School B's District Level Graduation Rate: 57.8%	76.7%	88%	83.7%

	Rate: 77.7%				
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Subject Area Preconsolidation and Postconsolidation Scores

		Math (proficiency) 100 pts.	Science (proficiency) 50 pts.	U. S. Hist (proficiency) 50 pts.	ELA Proficiency 100 pts.
2012-2013 Growth All Students Growth Status for HS A: Not Met	HS A:	58.5	52.6	72.9	51
	HS B:	82.6	81	76.6	66.7
2013-2014 Growth All Students 58.1—ELA 62.5—MATH (High School A)	HS A:	75	83	77	58
	HS B:	58	94	67	66
2014-2015 Growth All Students	HS A:	20.5	22.2	16.2	31.0
	HS B:	40.1	53.3	33.3	40.9
57.0—ELA 57.7--MATH (High School A) 40.9—ELA 40.1—MATH					
2015-2016	HS A:	28.6	13.5	19.7	28.6

Growth All Students 17.6—ELA 39.3--Math (High School A) 48—ELA 49.3—MATH (High School B)					
	HS B:	21.1	44.7	22.6	22.1
2016-2017 Growth All Students 70.3—ELA 63.6—MATH (High School A) 48.4—ELA 39.5—MATH (High School B)	HS A:	2.9	17.6	45.7	20.0
	HS B:	22.3	60.3	44.7	25