THE PERCEIVED EFFICACY BY EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS OF THE MOVE TO SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES FROM LARGER COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOLS

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by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of key stakeholders, including teachers, board members, administrators, community members and parents in a larger suburban, formerly comprehensive high school that adopted a schools-within-a-school reform model (SWAS). The research illuminated similarities and differences in perceptions about the challenges of implementation, which elements of SWAS were successful, which were not, and why.

Data were collected from teachers, administrators and other informants as needed. An instrument was developed to break down the large teacher group into smaller, more clearly defined subgroups. The iterative process of data collection included a series of interviews and some follow up conversations with a broad sampling of key stakeholders. An extensive document review was conducted, yielding critical information and grounds for further questioning of stakeholders.

The findings from the research were sorted into five broad themes or lessons learned. The first of these themes concerned establishing and maintaining a strong research base for the reform. Reformers need to first be researchers of their own systems. They must know what is working, what is not, and why
before considering a possible reform measure. Secondly, reformer leaders must identify, and then communicate and collaborate with important stakeholders, and rely on these informed sources to help guide the reform and support its implementation. The findings also indicated the importance of communication and making sure those responsible for implementing the reform are well informed. A fourth theme concerned the importance of maintaining flexibility in response to problems and difficulties that arise during implementation. Lastly, leadership needs to know and act on what matters most--which elements of the reform need to be preserved, which can be revised, and which can be discarded.
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CHAPTER 1

Background of the Study

Introduction

Since the advent of comprehensive high schools early in the 20th century, numerous reform efforts have come and gone, and come again under different guises, aimed at improving the format, content, or instructional delivery of high schools in America. An early reform attempt was prompted by the findings of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (Raubinger, Rowe, & Piper, 1969). The commission's findings, published in 1918, as The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education, highlighted the defining elements of educational programs as determined by the needs of the society, the character of the students, and the current "knowledge of educational theory and practice where available" (Weigand, 2000, p. 3). Numerous reform efforts followed, including major contributions by the Progressive Education Association, which was founded on the principles of John Dewey.
More recently, significant and wide ranging reform efforts have been initiated as a result of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. *Breaking Ranks*, a 1996 report by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Carnegie Foundation, made nine key recommendations for school reform that have guided efforts for the past ten years. These recommendations included language suggesting that the maximum secondary school size not exceed 600 students. The publication of *Breaking Ranks 2* (2004) reiterated and focused these positions into three groupings of recommendations. These expectations suggest that the most effective school improvements are created by personalization of the school environment and collaborative leadership efforts coupled with the effective use of data and finally, the joining of the two to develop personalized curriculum, instruction and assessment.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, also known as “No Child Left Behind,” has initiated a flurry of reform efforts, legislation and anxiety in the education community, particularly in larger urban and suburban schools. These larger schools have attempted a myriad of programs to reform, predating the ‘No Child’
Act from rewriting curriculum, to retraining teachers. One recurring reform practice has been to attempt to downsize these large comprehensive schools into more manageable bits. These attempts include the movement toward ‘smaller learning communities,’ house systems, schools-within-a-school (SWAS), mini-schools and career academies.

Credible research findings have strongly supported the move from large comprehensive high schools toward more personalization and smaller learning environments, especially as applied to urban settings such as New York, Philadelphia and Chicago (Fine & Sommerville, 1998; Raywid, 1996; Cotton, 2001). Significant gain has accompanied these efforts resulting in reduced dropout rates, decreased behavioral issues, improved scores on standardized assessments, greater sense of belonging, and improved attendance. Effective reforms of this nature also typically generate a reduction in the achievement gap between minorities and their white counterparts (Ready, Lee & Wellner, 2004); to varying degrees, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York evidenced this phenomenon. The lessons learned in these three major urban reform initiatives have flavored many of the similar initiatives that have followed.
Despite findings in support of the downsizing reform movement, numerous efforts by larger schools to adopt a school-within-a-school or SWAS model have been unsuccessful or have experienced negligible gains. Noteworthy contributions to the literature refute claims by smaller learning communities advocates, and cite these efforts as having mixed or moderate results (Cox, 2002; Robinson-Lewis, 1991). Some researchers have found that reform efforts aimed at reducing the size or effective size of schools in order to improve test scores, personalize the environment, reduce violence and drug issues and more, are not succeeding as expected. As noted above, these failures may be the result of political, cultural, economic or philosophical forces, or a combination of various factors (Cotton, 2001). More specific reasons have been identified for these failures including resistance to change from within the school and failure to create any meaningful difference between the old school and the new model in time schedule, autonomy of the new units, curriculum or instruction. Other causes for the failure of such reforms include shifting politics and new administrators, inadequate funding, and the lack of will to sustain and nurture the change (Gregory, 2001).
Interestingly, over the last century, due to budget concerns and economies of size issues, many small rural schools, seemingly ideal in population, culture, and academic results, have chosen or been forced to consolidate into larger, less personal, comprehensive high schools. “The school consolidation trend that began early in the 20th century continues presently with both schools and districts becoming fewer in number and larger in size” (Cotton, 1996 p. 1). Faced with the pressures of rising taxes to support employee health care, transportation, salaries, and newer technologies, small schools are opting to shoehorn the populations of two schools into one with as little modification as possible.

However, there may be actual advantages to large schools that should not be overlooked. Large schools (exceeding 1000 students) claim to offer more and varied curricular choices, a wider range of activities, clubs and sports, a more diverse faculty, and some degree of cost-effectiveness. While this claim is not fully substantiated in the literature, there is evidence that the curriculum of these larger schools offers more academic opportunities to students. Walberg and Walberg (1994) noted that smaller schools are less likely to offer a wide variety of specialized curricular choices.
According to the United States Department of Education (April, 2005), large comprehensive high schools are more likely to offer Advanced Placement (AP) classes and dual enrollment (collegiate coursework while in high school) than their smaller counterparts. Some researchers have also found higher scores in specific course offerings in larger schools, than in small schools (Forbes, Fortune, & Packard, 1993).

These advantages are, at least in some cases, nullified by higher dropout rates (Cotton, 1996), low performance on standardized testing and overall academic achievement, elevated drug and alcohol behavior and violence incidents (Fine, 1994), lack of personalized attention, and underserved populations within these large institutions (Sizer, 1999).

Clearly, researchers have developed substantial credibility in support of claims on both sides of the downsizing reforms argument. It would seem therefore, given the careful management of variables, that the notion of creating a smaller school or group of schools within large comprehensive institutions would represent an improved solution to the issues of size in schools.
Purpose of the Study

Smaller learning communities reform, in particular, the schools-within-a-school movement has been the subject of many studies, dissertations, and scholarly works (Plath, 1965; Muncy & McQuillan, 1991; Robinson-Lewis, 1991; Raywid, 1996; Oxley, 2001; Raywid & Schmerler, 2003; Copland & Boatright, 2004). In addition, a preponderance of the major studies has focused on the urban experience in small schools reform (Meier, 1995; Oxley, 1990; Wasley, Fine, King, Powell, Holland, Gladden & Mosak, 2001).

Regardless of findings in favor or critical of these efforts, there appears to be a gap in the literature regarding stakeholder perceptions from within larger suburban schools and their communities which have adopted this type of reform measure. It may be of critical importance to develop a clear, detailed picture of these perceptions, to better manage such reform efforts, or avoid them in the future.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of key stakeholders in a larger suburban, formerly comprehensive high school that adopted a schools-within-a-school model (SWAS). Through a
naturalistic case study, I explored the participants’ perceptions about the challenges of implementing the SWAS model, including identification of those elements that appeared to go smoothly, those that did not, and why. The participants involved in this research included teachers, administrators, school board members, community members, and parents in the selected school and community.

The key question was: From the perspective of the stakeholders, what was the perceived efficacy of the schools-within-a-school model as implemented in a formerly comprehensive suburban high school? The following questions were also considered:

- Why did the school choose the SWAS model?
- Which characteristic elements of a SWAS design were present in the school’s efforts?
- What was the stakeholder perception of level of success or failure regarding these elements?
- Did the school’s approach to SWAS result in unique benefits, shortcomings, or unintended consequences?
Significance of the Study

The findings from this study indicated a tendency among stakeholders to accept or reject various aspects of the SWAS reform based on the depth of communication received, their sense of fit of the reform to the school, and in the degree to which they were involved in the decision-making. From these understandings, conclusions were drawn that may be useful to other larger suburban secondary schools that are considering adoption and implementation of SWAS.

Researchers should find the study interesting as it adds to our knowledge about smaller learning communities, the difficulties inherent in implementing such reforms, and, in particular, the role of stakeholder perception in the success or failure of such reform efforts. This study may also provide a point of triangulation for others researching similar cases of schools involved in SWAS reform efforts.

Policymakers may turn to the findings in order to craft effective implementation policies, perhaps avoiding some of the noted pitfalls and counterproductive, unintended consequences discovered through this study. There is also the possibility that observations about
relationships in a changing learning community may aid those seeking to improve, evaluate, or simply understand such environments.

Teachers and administrators, school board members, parents, and community members may find insights that shed new light on the complex nature of relationships involved in significant reform efforts. Stakeholders in similar situations may look to the study for guidance or confirmation when their SWAS model experiences difficulties or triumphs.
CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this review of the literature is to provide a discussion of the related research that places the study in a framework of past and current reform practices and theoretical underpinnings. The review is organized as follows: Definitions of Downsizing Structures, Historical Overview of Downsizing Reform Efforts: 1900-1980, Major Urban Efforts to Downsize High Schools: 1980-2002, Major Influences on the Movement: A Nation At Risk, Breaking Ranks, “No Child Left Behind” (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001), Recent Findings in the Literature Regarding Schools-Within-a-School Structures, Conflicts in and Barriers to Schools-Within-a-School Reforms, and Summary.

Definitions of Downsizing Structures

In the school size reform efforts of the twentieth century, districts attempted to reduce size by numerous
means, with mixed degrees of success. From career academies, to house systems, to schools-within-a-school and numerous variations, these structures have attempted to solve problems associated with larger schools (Legters, Balfanz, and McPartland, 2002). Smaller learning communities incorporate the students of a larger comprehensive school into the context of a smaller grouping (Legters, 1999). These groupings are often by grade level or interest, but can also be for other specific reasons, such as discipline and remediation (Cotton, 1996).

Smaller school structures have been shown to improve performance in numerous areas including attendance rates, dropout rates, incidences of crime, violence and drug use, student and teacher satisfaction, test scores and graduation rates, to name a few (Fine and Summerville, 1998; Cox, 2002). Most often, subunits have been created “to make schools more responsive to individual students” (Raywid, 1996, p 4). That is not to say that all large schools perform poorly, or that all comprehensive high schools are fraught with problems. Larger comprehensive high schools can offer more academic choice, a greater diversity of curriculum levels and approaches, more activities, and more opportunities for involvement.
Larger schools have also operated under assumed cost-effectiveness (economies of size), however there is some question as to the actual financial advantage of larger schools over smaller ones (Ishmer, 1997; Lee & Smith, 1996).

Although smaller school structures are well established throughout the United States as alternatives to large comprehensive high schools, it is difficult to define or label specific models of subunit or subschool, because there is a proliferation of variants. Structure types range from a “tentative, semi-unit organizationally supplementing a high school’s departments to totally separate schools which just happen to be located under the same roof” (Raywid, 1996, p 16). There can also be great variation within a single type of subunit or school.

Though many variations of smaller learning communities exist, to some degree they all share some similar elements. A difficulty encountered in studying these groups is finding a discreet terminology with which to define the variants. In many instances, stakeholders in very different models use identical terminology to define differing aspects of the model. For instance, in Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York, proponents of the
smaller learning communities movements used the terms house and small schools interchangeably, yet the plans were distinctly different in each city. This is not uncommon in the literature, and indeed the experiences mentioned above “illustrate an absence of standard terminology” (Raywid, 1996, p 20). Nevertheless, if similarities can be defined or illuminated, it is valuable to do so.

There is a degree of agreement among researchers on a few common, core characteristics of these downsized school structures. Nearly all assert the notion of small numbers of students, sometimes even under a hundred within the structure, selection often by choice, and a high degree of flexibility, autonomy, and control by teacher teams (Burnett, 1992; Dewees, 1999; Raywid, 1996; Oxley, 1990).

While there are almost unlimited iterations of small learning communities, Diane Oxley (2001) points out:

Many researchers and reform leaders share the view that the essential feature of a small learning community is an interdisciplinary team of teachers that share a group of no more than 500 students for a large part of their
instructional time in a physical space dedicated to this collaboration. (p. 7)

This definition is still quite broad, but it provides a trunk from which the branches of the small learning communities tree can be explored. Model-specific characteristics of several types of smaller learning communities or downsized structures follow. In addition, where useful, a few examples of existing smaller learning communities will inform the definitions.

**Schools-Within-a-School**

Generally speaking, schools within schools are large schools that have been divided into smaller somewhat autonomous subunits (McAndrews & Anderson, 2002). Budget staffing allocations and programs are controlled from within the subunit, however building operations such as cafeteria, gym and auditorium scheduling, and safety are still under the control of the building principal.

Designers of SWAS hope to include the advantages of smaller learning communities and the resources of the larger facility. Sicolo (2000) includes as a key element of SWAS, that classes and programs remain small, with the whole SWAS under about 500 students.
A precise definition of schools-within-a-school by researcher Mary Anne Raywid (1996), states:

A school-within-a-school is a separate and autonomous unit formally authorized by the board of education and the superintendent. It plans and runs its own program, has its own staff and students, and receives its own separate budget...reports to a district official instead of being responsible to the building principal. (p. 22)

In an ideal SWAS structure, teachers and students are involved in the school as a matter of choice. These choices are made along academic lines or interest areas. Students and teachers are said to be more involved in the school and focused on learning because of the choice element. Indeed the personalized environment of such schools is associated with rising student levels of achievement, positive feelings and behavior within the school (Wehlage et al., 1989).

At one end of the spectrum of implemented SWAS are the loosely configured arrangements that remain closely tied to the host school. At the opposite end, there might be so little connection to the rest of the larger school that it could be termed, as Deborah Meier (1995) has
suggested, a school-within-a-building. That is to say there may exist several autonomous schools within a single physical structure.

**Career Academies**

Career Academies, initially conceived of in the late 1960’s have experienced an accelerated growth rate since about 1990. Accurate accounting of the number of career academies is unavailable, however there are established Career Academies in at least 30 states, sponsored by the National Academy Foundation. Networks of Career Academies exist in California, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Florida, Hawaii, and others (Stern, Dayton and Raby, 2000). Again there is no single authoritative definition for what a career academy is but generally, they share three basic features. “A career academy is a type of school-within-a-school that provides a college-preparatory curriculum with a career related theme” (p. 3).

An academy is a cluster of students who share most classes and teachers over a two-year period or longer. The teachers, from both academic and technical disciplines, work almost exclusively with these academy students, conduct regular team meetings and training and share the decision-making responsibilities for delivery
of instruction, curricular content, and policies (Legters, 1999). A team member usually serves as a liaison to the building principal or other officials and community partners. The career academy usually combines a career theme with college-preparatory course work. Academic courses are linked with technical courses in the field of choice, such as science and health care, or technical drawing and mathematics. Partnerships are fostered with businesses and organizations that can provide valuable work experiences for students in the academy. Articulation agreements with colleges and technical schools sometimes highlight the cooperative nature of the relationship between the academy and post-secondary institutions. Employers serve on advisory teams and visit the school for lectures and conferences with the students of the academy (Stern, Dayton and Raby, 2000).

An academy design that has garnered considerable attention is the Talent Development High School. This approach was developed by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, or CRESPAR. The goal was to improve achievement of at-risk students in large high schools, but also addressed problems with attendance and dropout rates, and discipline (McPartland,
Legters, Jordan, & McDill, 1996). First implemented at Patterson High School, in Baltimore, the school divided the students into a series of academies. A ninth grade academy helps students with transitioning to high school, while the upper grades are divided into career interest academies. In addition, the district operates a twilight school for students with severe disciplinary problems. Each academy has its own faculty, management, physical space, and a separate entrance to the building.

CRESPAR has developed curricular materials, professional development programs and guidelines for schools accepted as a Talent Development High School, to help ensure a complete, successful implementation of the system (Legters, Balfanz, and McPartland, 2002). According to Legters (1999) a growing number of districts around the country have adopted models strikingly similar to the Baltimore approach.

House Systems

House systems or house plans, assign students and teachers to groupings called houses. Students are scheduled primarily or solely within the house and are taught by the teachers likewise assigned there. Houses can be organized to operate on a single year basis or on
a vertical, multi-year arrangement. Usually houses are established without eliminating the pre-existing departmental structures characteristic of most high schools. There may be little effect on curriculum and instruction, and extracurricular activities often are typically shared with the larger school although some events can be unique to the house. House plans are sometimes created to help ease the transition for incoming ninth grade students from middle school to high school.

The Northwest Education Magazine (2000) cites but one example of the diversity of approaches found in house plans. Putnam High School in Milwaukie, Oregon, first initiated a house system in 1997 for 90 students and a team of teachers who would work and stay together for two year. This house, called GATE, for Gaining Access to Excellence, was considered so successful that it led to the establishment of a fleet of nine distinct houses with widely divergent structures and purposes, in a school of 1300 students.

The well-researched Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS) yields another example of a house plan. The student body (grades 7-12) is sectioned into division at CPESS. Grades 7 and 8 are together in division I,
while 9 and 10 in division II; each division is essentially a two-year block. Grades 11 and 12 are grouped as well. Students follow a core curriculum of interdisciplinary subjects and individual essential courses. The divisions are grouped into houses of four to five teachers and seventy-five to eighty students. After remaining in the house for two years, students progress to the next division. Numerous other house plans exist throughout the United States, with a wide range of structure and delivery formats (McAndrews and Anderson, 2002).

Variations

A myriad of alternative types of smaller learning communities continue to evolve based on size, degree of autonomy, physical placement, mission, and other foci. Some districts have implemented mini-schools or clusters, while others have focused on charter schools for specific interest groups, and others yet have labeled their offerings magnet schools (Dewees, 1999). Recent legislation has changed the direction of the school-to-work programs and realigned them with smaller learning communities (NREL, 2000, Winter), which has also generated considerable activity in the genre. As many
innovative, reform-minded groups or individuals exist, a like number of variations contribute to the diversity of offerings in the genus of smaller learning communities.

**Historical Overview of Downsizing Reform Efforts:**

**1900-1980**

An early reform effort, which incorporated smaller learning communities, developed in Texas in 1919 (Plath, 1965). House plans have been a part of the British private school tradition for over a century, and a majority of the public schools in England have adopted house systems (Dierenfield, 1975).

The first “Career Academy,” another school within a school concept was developed in 1969 at Thomas Edison High School, in Philadelphia. The program was so successful that by 1991, sixteen similar programs were in place in Philadelphia, and the model was exported to California in 1981, as the basis for its Peninsula Academies program (Burnett, 1992). Career academies now exist throughout the country in various iterations.

House programs were developed and implemented with a degree of success in the New York City schools. A report
published in 1990, by Diane Oxley examined four house systems in NYC high schools and the successes and difficulties encountered in each.

Another SWAS model that has experienced success has been the Talent Development Model, which includes academies, alternative schools, and other smaller units (McPartland, Jordan, Legters & Balfanz, 1997). Movement to smaller learning communities, although begun almost a century ago continues to gain footing today, with increasing numbers of comprehensive high schools considering implementation. Dewees (1999) asserted, “To capture some of the benefits of small-scale schooling, educators are increasingly looking for ways to downsize, including dividing large schools into subschools or subunits” (p. 1).

While consolidation of smaller to larger schools was traditionally undertaken as a cost savings measure, the SWAS model for large schools adds a credible degree of cost effectiveness. Absenteeism among students is reduced, increasing average daily membership (ADM), which figures in state funding formulas. In addition, incidences of school violence, including vandalism, especially present in larger settings are shown to
decrease in SWAS. (McPartland, Jordan, Legters & Balfanz, 1997).

With the advent of significant funding from sources such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Federal Small Schools Grants program, there appears to be considerable ongoing interest in the development and promise of small schools and SWAS concepts (Gregory, 2001). Organizations including the Small Schools Workshop at the University of Illinois (Chicago) and the Small Schools Project of the Center on Rejuvenating Public Education (University of Washington) are engaged in substantial ongoing research into effective strategies for SLCs and schools-within-schools.

Major Urban Efforts to Downsize High Schools: 1980-2002

Chicago

Chicago has invested in smaller school structures for decades in several formats. Historically, elementary schools in more affluent, integrated, low-crime areas have used smaller school structures. For this discussion, smaller indicates schools of 350 students or less, freestanding structures and are not alternative or
special education schools. Notable reform in Chicago began with the Chicago School Reform Act in 1988, leading to the creation of 150 small elementary and high schools (Wasley, Fine, King, Powell, Holland, Gladden & Mosak, 2001). There were several SWAS models as well as other reforms initiated through this period. Powerful advocacy agencies and investment groups formed a support group, called the Small Schools Coalition, to mobilize support for small schools.

The 1995 Chicago School Reform Act shifted the management of accountability away from local schools, and included an oversight board to insure standards and good management practices. This new board was supportive of continued small schools initiatives, and helped define what the instructional and physical shape of these structures would be in the future. Legislation in 1996 and in 1999 made the formation of charter schools more attractive for public school entities, increasing the number of new small schools dramatically (Wasley, et al., 2001). These actions, coupled with the effective centralized evaluation and accountability system, have created a thriving small schools environment.

Chicago does not maintain one size, shape, culture or design plan for its small schools, rather if the
particular small school meets the board criterion in general terms, and the school performs to established standards, it will continue to operate. Chicago high school SWAS are organized generally around vocational themes and professions, and serve primarily grades 10-12. Freshmen academies are a component in some sites. Wasley, et al., (2001) found that Chicago’s new small schools were generally successful at achieving the aims of smaller learning communities on several counts including improved attendance rates in SWS (SWAS) at the high school coupled with significantly reduced dropout rates. Course failures dropped, as did grade retention rates in SWS, and grade point averages were higher, “even after controlling for demographic differences between schools” (p. 26). Within small schools, reading and math scores improved over a measured two year period (1997-1999), in both elementary and high school assessments.

In Chicago’s successful small schools there were a few conditions required for start up which included advance planning time, stability, a small, broad community and student-focused curriculum, and quality teaching and assessment. Also necessary for the success of the reform, was ongoing development featuring vision-directed planning, regularly renegotiated roles and
responsibilities (for parents, professionals and students), data-driven decision-making, and the presence of “high levels of academic press and strong social support” (Wasley, et al., 2001, p. 65). Finally, the Chicago schools that showed the greatest gains also included student and school-based staff development, and sufficient autonomy to bring creative ideas to reality. Despite the positive data, some concerns were expressed regarding the degree of improvement, in some cases negligible, which resulted in a call for “more professional support, more academic rigor, and for SWSs to compare themselves to other high achieving schools in addition to their hosts” (p. 32).

New York

New York City has long struggled with its schools. In 1987, the city adopted a policy for reforming schools that mandated that all ninth graders across the city in comprehensive high schools be enrolled in house plans. The move continued for several years with greater and lesser degrees of success and implementation (Oxley & McCabe, 1990). As with many reform initiatives, this large-scale effort fell victim to numerous unfortunate circumstances. Although the policy is still on the books,
few schools adhere to the house structure due in part to a lack of attendant policy structures. The initial policy was not supported with enough tools and design elements to make full implementation feasible. School administrations have changed frequently, with few espousing the same views as the initial Director of the High School Division, who left office before the beginnings of implementation (Raywid, 1996).

Downsizing was strengthened in 1992, when a small schools initiative was christened that would break ground for 50 new small high schools. Deborah Meier, a noted school reform researcher and visionary was instrumental in developing and implementing this project, along with substantial support from the Center for Collaborative Education and the Fund for New York City Public Education. The first 32 schools to be born of this venture opened in 1993. All were small and most were organized around a particular strand or theme. The number of these smaller schools continued to grow through the 1990’s, supported by the original sponsors and a major matching grant from the Annenberg Foundation, which pulled in several additional major sponsors. A notable feature of the New York small schools experience has gone beyond just the creation of small schools, to include,
“the systemic reform necessary to their sustenance” (Raywid, 1996, p. 11).

Central Park East Secondary School has sustained a very successful small schools experience, around which much study and modeling of other programs has revolved. As noted previously, the student body is grouped by grades into three houses. After remaining in the house for two years, students progress to the next division. An innovative work design has reduced teacher workload to 36 total students and an 18:1 ratio in the classrooms (Meier, 1995). Each teacher is responsible for two subjects, such as mathematics and science, and is responsible for other areas including advisories, counseling and certain administrative responsibilities. This work arrangement has eliminated the need for (and expense of) counselors, assistant principals, attendances officers, supervisors, and other non-teaching roles, streamlining the staff almost exclusively to essential teaching personnel (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Philadelphia

Philadelphia experienced its initial downsizing reforms in the late 1980’s, initiated by a substantial grant from the Pew Charitable trust. The expectation of
the grantor was that there would be a “massive overhaul of the curriculum and organization” (Walton, 1991, p.19) of Philadelphia’s urban schools. The grant helped establish an independent organization to assist in the reform and restructuring of the high schools in the city. This Philadelphia Schools Collaborative sought to transform every aspect of education from instruction to administration. The key tool for this overhaul was to be the formation of schools-within-schools or charters in Philadelphia.

Raywid and Schmerler (2003) indicate that Philadelphia was really the first urban setting to attempt such a massive downsizing effort, and it was intended to extend to each and every high school in the urban district. Many of the high schools in existence in Philadelphia at the onset of the reform effort were massive and impersonal, old and run down. Many elementary schools likewise were dilapidated. School superintendents promised, and built, numerous new schools in the district replacing the poorly functioning structures, while other new SWAS were initiated.

One prevalent form of the SWAS for Philadelphia included charter schools. Fine (1994) defines charters in the Philadelphia sense to designate a particular type of
smaller school with defined boundaries for size and composition of student body and decision-making. School based teams were employed to introduce and implement the facets of the charter school reform model. By the mid-1990’s, there were already 110 such charter schools with 61 percent of Philadelphia’s high school population enrolled (Raywid, 1996).

Despite the promise of new schools, new ideas and more personalized learning, numerous critical setbacks and roadblocks beset Philadelphia’s intended reforms. The ailing financial status of the School District of Philadelphia and resistance from communities, stakeholders and the teachers, underlined by markedly poor test scores, were significant enough factors that the small school reform effort was rendered impotent.

Major Influences on the Movement: A Nation At Risk, Breaking Ranks, “No Child Left Behind” (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001)

As noted, high school reform began as early as 1918, with publication of the findings of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education. A Nation at Risk,
published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, ushered in the era of modern reform in 1983. Among other recommendations, the commission suggested that in order to reverse the decline in science and math achievement in this country, schools needed to improve teaching and learning in key areas in all public schools. Principally, the commission sought reform in the areas of content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, and leadership and fiscal support (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Although not expressed as a solution specifically in the report, it has been widely researched and reported that smaller school initiatives may result in improvements in several of the Commission’s recommended areas of need; including high expectations for student academic performance and behavior, the reduction of lost instructional time due to absenteeism and disciplinary issues, retention of high quality motivated teachers, and leadership in reform efforts (Fine and Summerville, 1998; Cox, 2002).

*Breaking Ranks* (1996) initiated a new wave of school reforms and supported existing research in the area of school size. This report by the NASSP and the Carnegie Foundation, made nine key recommendations for school improvement. The findings suggested that in order to be
effective instructional institutions, schools should not exceed 600 students in size, ideally, a small school or SWAS. *Breaking Ranks II* (2004) reiterated and expanded upon the significance of smaller schools and SLCs.

*Breaking Ranks II* outlines the need for current high schools to engage in the process of change that will ensure success for every high school student. Its first set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of a professional learning community, wherein leadership throughout the institution refocuses its work on what will successfully support every student in their high school experience. The second set of recommendations and tools focuses on the need to provide every student with meaningful adult relationships that can best support every student. And the third set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of personalized learning, where students see their learning as meaningful and relevant, as well as rigorous and challenging, ensuring their success both within and beyond high school (Ollarvia, 2005 p.1).
This report listed seven cornerstone strategies for improving student performance. The strategies that are reflected in SWAS include increased quantity and quality of connections between students their peers and teacher (through reducing the number of students in a cohort), an effective advisory program allowing students to plan academic and social progress with a faculty member, and leadership structures that allow for distributed decision making by students, teachers, family members, and the community. Numerous researchers, including Goodlad (2003) and Peterson (2003), have questioned the findings of the original report, citing political motivations and sensationalism. Although the commission’s report did spur discussions and movement toward comprehensive school reform, it failed to note either the causes of the problems, or the underlying political pressures affecting the educational system.

From a legislative reform perspective, larger urban school districts and their suburban counterparts have been scrambling since 2001 to meet the expectations of “No Child Left Behind,” (NCLB) the reauthorized federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Schools that have traditionally suffered from the effects of larger, depersonalized structures have attempted deep changes in
instructional delivery, assessment and infrastructure, including small school reforms, in an effort to meet the increasing demands of student, school, and district performance stipulated in the act. The accountability requirements of NCLB and ongoing data relating to poor urban schools performance and drop outs has made it clear that many schools must make significant changes in operation, structure and size (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

Conflicts in and Barriers to Schools-Within-a-School Reforms

Despite widespread interest in downsizing reform models, numerous efforts to adopt SWAS have been unsuccessful or have experienced negligible gains. In addition, due to budget concerns and the politics of economies of scale, many small rural schools, seemingly ideal educational settings (based upon prevailing research), have actually consolidated into larger, less personal, comprehensive high schools. “The school consolidation trend that began early in this [20th] century continues into the present with both schools and
districts becoming fewer in number and larger in size” (Cotton, 1996, p. 1).

Published findings also indicate that size adjustments are not complete cures for what ails schools. Researchers have asserted that the relative affluence of a community may impact the success of a school, positively or negatively, regardless of size, (Howley, 1994). In addition, to assert that the personalized environment created in smaller school structures will save the school alone is misplaced and dangerous. As Michelle Fine, professor of psychology at the City University of New York (Gewertz, 2001) points out, “hugging is not the same as algebra.”

Robinson-Lewis (1991) questions the actual gains by subschools and the like in student achievement, indicating only mixed or moderate improvements. Others contend that serious cultural problems exist when moving to SWAS. Most schools have a firmly rooted culture in place before reforms change these structures. Divisiveness, negativity and alienation, rivalries, and loyalty conflicts have been shown to result from movement to restructured SWAS models (Muncy & McQuillan, 1991). Additional concerns and negative results surface when SWAS models are only partially implemented, sometimes
because of incompatibility with current organizational structures, lack of support from all district stakeholders and inadequate materials, physical structures and human resources (Oxley, 1990).

According to Raywid (1996), Philadelphia’s small school effort fell victim to some of the same concerns as other reform efforts have succumbed to, including “significant resistance from multiple sources” (p. 12). Expectations were established at the very top levels and left to grassroots efforts and local sites to fund and convert. Top leadership inaction helped harden local resistance and strengthened union resolve against the needed changes. These factors, as well as significant budgetary and student assessment shortcomings led to disarray and collapse, and eventual state takeover of the city school system. The implementation of smaller schools was not wholly to blame, but rather political pressures, leadership, financial and implementation ineptitude of the district, and the intransigence of the local groups of influence, coupled with increasing public scrutiny on poor performance, made the smaller schools reform largely ineffective. These problems are not unique to the Philadelphia experience however.
One area in which the Philadelphia reform failed to meet its promise, was in lack of choice, both for teachers and for students. Raywid and Schmerler (2003) found that teachers often were not able to choose the colleagues with whom they would collaborate in the SLC structure. In addition, while students hoped to select a SLC based upon interest, there was no guarantee that the school of choice would be available to them. Further complicating the matter was an issue of roster integrity, which meant that, “just because a student was assigned to a particular SLC did not mean that all of his or her courses would be taken within that SLC, or taught by teachers assigned to that learning community” (p. 46). McMullen, Sipe, and Wolf (1994) found that the number of courses taken by students within their SLC had a direct bearing on their achievement; the higher the SLC purity, the higher the achievement.

Thomas Gregory (2001) discussed five types of errors that were common to smaller learning community reform efforts. These five critical concerns are associated with autonomy, size, continuity, time and control. Often, in an attempt to not ‘ruffle too many feathers’, reformers state that they intend to preserve traditional structures such as athletics, clubs, music groups, and student
government groups, even as they move to schools within a school. These remaining elements, according to Gregory, tend to undermine the efforts and effects of reform models; they may even “Kill off the nascent small school culture” (Gregory, 2001, p.2).

SWAS structures are usually sized large enough to justify a principal. Groupings of 400-600 students, while in keeping with the Breaking Ranks recommendation, are still large enough to seem impersonal to students. Faculties necessarily then, are so large that they too lack the interpersonal contacts intended as part of a small school structure. Gregory adds that under these circumstances, social constructs are difficult, and the system tends to drift backward, toward the previous larger school stratifications.

Schools within a school are often set up to create divisions in age; beginners, those about to graduate, and those in-between are grouped as units. In some cases, instead of creating smoother, personalized transitions, students are segregated, experience many more transitions as they move from group to group and have less time to make the required transitions (Gregory, 2001). To some, after an all-too-short acclimation period, they have to
become reoriented to a new structure, faculty, curriculum, and methodology of instruction.

Wide, comprehensive curriculums were the drawing card of the previous all-serving large high school. In an attempt to maintain these offerings, the broader curriculum is force-fed into the smaller schools. In order to reduce scheduling conflicts, a common bell schedule is adopted in many cases. The mere use of common time structures however makes it difficult to engage true independent program offerings and structures in the SWAS. Traditional schedules also promote older notions of faculty workload, elimination or curtailment of innovative advisement programs, limited independent study options, and difficulty with the establishment and maintenance of viable teaching teams.

Finally, errors of control, according to Gregory, imply that although the freedom to move in the building is important to students in SWAS, for various reasons, it is difficult to implement because the lack of professional staff familiarity with these students when they find themselves in other areas, diminishes the personal contact and identification so closely tied to successful SWAS. Gregory’s concerns are supported by Cox (2002), who found that very few SWAS models have been
fully implemented, due to multiple and complex issues in existing school bureaucracies, economics, and school cultural issues.

Recent Findings in the Literature Regarding Schools-Within-a-School Structures

In “Schools Within Schools,” Lee and Ready (2007) provide a comprehensive report on the SWS movement and frame their observations of five schools in which SWS reforms were attempted. Their findings underscore the benefits of SWS models and the necessity of proper planning and implementation for success. In “Beating the Odds” Jacqueline Ancess (2003) contends that successful schools must develop as “communities of commitment,” in order to fulfill their role and accomplish their mission. This commitment comes in several forms, but Ancess critically notes, “one of the organizational variables that most easily affords opportunities for close and caring relationships, which humanizes schools, is size” (p. 29). Individuals are more accessible, and relationships are deeper in smaller school populations. In this qualitative study, Ancess describes three
successful schools that, although they vary in size, scope and demographics share among them many of the characteristic elements of SWS models. These include human scale organization, smaller class size, hands-on, involved leaders, distributed decision-making, and other key common factors (NASSP 2002).

Today, numerous school districts use small school iterations as a central strategy for improving high schools and overhauling the way the district itself does business (Allen & Steinberg, 2004). Raywid and Schmerler (2003) have sorted these school size reforms into six key patterns. The first grouping is identified by the establishment in larger districts of a specified office for the development and management of the smaller school structures. In New York City, the Office of Alternative Schools served in this capacity. By 1997, this officer had oversight of over 400 individual downsized schools.

A second scheme involves reform of school size through policy adoption. In Philadelphia, Superintendent David Hornbeck mandated that no school exceed 400 students in size, that the schools adopt a specific theme, and that eventually students and parents would have a choice of school. Pilot schools were suggested by the teacher’s union in Boston as, “an alternative to the
charter schools being launched” (Raywid & Schmerler, 2003, p. 5). Smaller schools in Chicago have had to rely on partnerships with community organizations for funding sources and other supports, as the district administration was not granted a budget or a staff to support the initiative. This smaller schools format somehow thrived in spite of years of separation from district administration and governance, and recently heralded the creation of a new Office of Small Schools. A fifth pattern of SWSs is conceived at the instigation of the principal. Teachers in the Kapaa Elementary in Hawaii, a 1500 student school were invited and encouraged by the principal to create their own schools-within-a-school. Although no teachers were directed to do so, the school eventually subdivided into a more human scale of eight smaller sub-schools. In this iteration, the SWSs had “particularly strong support within the school, but “very little support from the system outside it” (p. 6). Finally, a prevalent but unstable grassroots form evolves from a teacher and parent initiative for a SWS but requires the principal’s approval to proceed. In this iteration, any new principal can do away with any SWS.

Funding for smaller school structures continues to flow from several sources. The Bill and Melinda Gates
Foundation (2006) has invested over 1.2 billion dollars in education alone, much of it for the creation of smaller schools. The Department of Education maintains a funding stream for smaller learning communities (USDOE, 2006), that was provided in the form of a $175 million dollar grant program, as of fiscal year 2005.

Unfortunately, and despite significant funding and voluminous research into the effective reform of schools, many efforts are less than wholly successful for numerous reasons. Even with the expenditure of significant capital, energy, and time on the part of reformers, consistent and significant improvement remains an elusive target in many cases.

Copland and Boatright (2004), present eight critical lessons for those seeking to transform large comprehensive high schools to smaller learning communities. The typical expansive comprehensive curriculum is not suited to SWSs. Schools need to narrow their curricular focus to a few specific learning goals, and provide the vehicle through which students may attain them. The authors concur with the oft-stated need for personalized structures in schools-- "know and be known" (p. 764). Create an environment of educational equity where all students feel that they can learn and succeed.
Comprehensive high schools, even the best of them, tend to classify students, or expectations for student success. Fourth, for more sustainable results, reformers are encouraged to distribute power and share leadership and avoid the usual and customary trait of top-down management. Successful reforms feature flexible and effective conversations among the teachers regarding instruction and learning which create strategies that better meet the needs of students. In the typical large school, this expedient consensus is all-but-impossible, thereby forcing centralized decision-making. Copland and Boatright further suggest that the typical reactionary processes in the high school environment need to be replaced by an opportunistic zeal to reinvent and refocus the norms and expectations of the learning community. “When staff members invest time and energy in creating and reinforcing positive messages for teaching, learning, and behavior, daily glitches will emerge as learning opportunities,” (p. 767) not as roadblocks. The seventh lesson is that schools must grow as professional learning communities. Teachers need to feel that they are about the business of improving their instructional craft skills in meaningful and relevant ways, rather than the pervading focus on bureaucratic administrivia common to
larger schools. Finally, there needs to be a persistent focus on connections with families and the community. Leaders need to take advantage of every opportunity to see and be seen, to touch and serve the larger community. The 'office principal' is not an effective touchstone for the public, and as is typical in many larger schools, cannot engender deep commitment or cooperative action from these stakeholders.

Summary

Schools-within-a-school and similar reforms have long been touted as one type of cure for the common school. Many of these efforts produced strong results and generated favorable responses from stakeholders. The reasons for success are sometimes easily understood, as in the case of the Chicago schools reform. The existence of these reforms over a sustained period has provided researchers such as Raywid, Copland and Boatright, Lee, the NASSP, Rand Corporation and others the opportunity to sift through best practices, and list what appear to be common elements of successful school downsizing reforms.
In many settings across a wide-range of demographics, SWAS and other downsizing reforms seem difficult to implement. The reasons for failure are most often tied to the significant challenges associated with change in organizations, structures, policies, bureaucracies and cultures, or to the degree of implementation of the needed changes. In New York, reforms were subject to the political or other motivations of the chancellor of schools, of which several have come and gone, leaving their impact on the movement. Sustainability was seriously impacted at most levels due to political inconsistencies. Philadelphia’s school reforms also suffered through the shifting sands of politics. Other reforms falter because critical personal connections to and between students, staff, and stakeholders were not made, not effective, or not sustained. Researchers such as Gregory, and Raywid and Schmerler have been able to document the common implementation faults and errors in less successful reforms.

This chapter does not attempt to pose as a complete review of downsizing reform literature, experiences, or iterations of small schools efforts. Indeed, for every source cited herein, there are dozens left outside of the written scope of references for this work. This review is
therefore designed give the reader grounding in the elements and iterations of SWAS reforms, and as a foundation and resource tool for the research that follows.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Focus of the Research

Throughout the latter decades of the 20th century and continuing today, larger schools have instituted a plethora of programs to personalize and downsize, including the establishment of smaller learning communities, house systems, schools-within-a-school, mini-schools, and career academies. Credible research findings have strongly supported the move from large comprehensive high schools toward more personalized and smaller learning environments. Analyses of implemented programs however display a wide range in results. This study specifically addressed the schools-within-a-school reforms in the context of one large, formerly comprehensive suburban high school.

The key question was: From the perspective of the stakeholders, what was the perceived efficacy of the schools-within-a-school model as implemented in a formerly comprehensive suburban high school? Subsidiary
questions included: (1) What does the SWAS model look like in this school? (2) What did the school hope to accomplish by instituting this reform? (3) What unintended consequences developed as a result of the reform? (4) To what degree did the stakeholders perceive that the goals of the reform met with success or failure?

Logic and Rationale for the Use of a Qualitative Approach

A qualitative case study approach was necessary in order to achieve the thick and rich descriptions needed to fully understand the world of the participants, and their perceptions of the success or failure of the move to smaller learning communities from their traditional comprehensive school structure.

In developing his theory of a ‘working hypothesis’, Lee Cronbach (1975) noted that in local settings for research, there are always factors of personal characteristics and uncontrolled conditions that influence and to some extent confound data findings. If these contextual influences are not treated with proper weight, results are not trustworthy. Naturalistic holistic inquiry embraces these contextual influences and
through that acknowledgment, provides a more reliable understanding of the phenomena of interest.

This study, in attempting to understand the perceptions of individuals, was informed by these principles. Especially notable is the recognition that people are interactive by nature. They do not live or operate in a vacuum, but travel through an interpersonal, interactive lifescape. Understanding this required a holistic approach to research, rather than a limited stimuli and response examination (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Researcher as Participant

In a naturalistic study the researcher interacts with the participants and forms interpretations and conclusions influenced by his or her experiences. In some cases, this can be a confounding factor, which limits the effectiveness of the study. However, the interest that I have in the topic was borne in large part out of my own active experiences in the field in this area. As a professional educator, I was first employed in a smaller school setting in a rural environment. Sixteen years in this setting formed my basic beliefs about smaller
settings for learning and teaching, both positive and negative. I then moved to a large suburban high school with a school population over 2000. As an administrator, the effects of a large comprehensive high school on the students, teachers and community were clear-- and again both positive and negative. Finally, my current position as building principal in a suburban school with 1650 students affords me the opportunity to view a SWAS effort first-hand.

The dual roles of administrator and researcher may have influenced the study results. While the site of the study was outside of my current administrative assignment, the three significant experiential platforms mentioned above have informed aspects of the research, from questioning strategies, to the collection and sorting of data, and to the analysis of data and identification of emerging understandings.

**Research Design: Delineation and Justification**

This study examined the efficacy of a SWAS reform from the perceptions of the stakeholders and utilized an evaluative case study design. A comprehensive
understanding of perspectives of stakeholders as well as critical other sources of data for triangulation and illumination was developed. Guba and Lincoln (1981) indicate that effective case studies have comprehensively included a wide variety of information and data collection techniques, ranging from “a few test scores for an individual, to volumes of demographic, social, industrial, and cultural information for an entire society” (p. 371).

Yin (1994) defines a case study design through its scope and various other technical characteristics. The scope of a case study is described as an empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Technical features of the case study inquiry can be summarized as “an all encompassing method” which includes managing a technically complex situation with “more variables of interest than data points;” a reliance on “multiple sources of evidence” and “triangulation;” and the use of “prior theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (p. 13).
As Guba and Lincoln (1981) state, “case study research provides thick description, is grounded, is holistic and lifelike” (p. 375). They also enumerate other features of case studies that are appealing, including simplification of data for the reader, strengthened meanings, and the communication of tacit knowledge.

In order for case study research to be effective and trustworthy, the researcher must thoroughly understand each respondent’s interpretation of the phenomenon from within her or his lifescape. Purposeful questioning and re-questioning of the participants helped me to understand these distinct perspectives. Accurate and thorough description of naturalistic phenomena requires extensive planning, insightful interactions, and thoughtful follow-up. Sending out a survey or conducting a scientific experiment cannot fully facilitate the necessary understandings. Rist (1977) supported thicker, richer inquiry, stating,

This inner perspective or understanding assumes that a complete and ultimately truthful analysis can only be achieved by actively participating in the life of the observed and gaining insights by means of introspection.
Emphasis is placed on the ability of the researcher to “take the role of the other;” to grasp the basic underlying assumptions of behavior through understanding the “definition of the situation” from the view of the participants; and upon the need to understand the perceptions and values given to symbols as they are manipulated by man. (p. 10)

This study of schools-within-a-school reform was well suited to the naturalistic, holistic case study form of inquiry. The multiple levels of stratification and consequent multi-faceted analysis required an interactive process of examination for thorough understanding. The complexity and interrelatedness between context and phenomenon (school environment and SWAS reform) demanded such an approach.

Site Selection: Definition, Description and Justification

Permission was obtained in writing from Principal Eugene D. Habeisen at W.L. Prestman High School, in the Overland School District, in central Pennsylvania, the site for this study. (All proper names were replaced with
pseudonyms throughout this study.) Prestman High School was a logical choice for this study for several reasons.

Proximity was important to me, in order to allow for frequent, extended visits. Prestman High School was within commuting range of my place of employment and 12 miles from a densely populated urban area. This selection of convenience was also vetted to assure that the school site met the requirements of the research and could provide the necessary data to form whole conclusions of the reform’s degree of effectiveness from the stakeholders’ perspectives.

It is critical to note, as Patton (1990) asserts, the “logic and power” (p. 169) of qualitative sampling is not to be found in the number of samples but in the quality of the selection. Such is the case in this study, where the rich descriptions arrived at in a single site, with a limited number of participants provided a deep understanding of the reform. I was aware that an inadequate number of respondents can undermine the validity of the study, but as contact after contact corroborated others’ perceptions, as documentation confirmed the statements of the interviewees, and as those of opposing viewpoints confirmed that the
perceptions existed, it became clear that this research was not only valid, but also reliable and meaningful.

Experience in SWAS was critical to the understanding of the reform. Prestman High School had been actively engaged with SWAS for several years, having first investigated the reform model in the mid 1990s. During this time, the district had opportunity to develop, implement, experience, assess, and revise the SWAS model processes. The years of experience helped to establish a base of assessment results and understandings that informed the research and led to fuller, thicker explanations of the phenomenon under study. There were numerous stakeholders who remembered the ‘old ways’ of operation. Their ruminations helped me frame understandings about perceptions of the new structure.

Another justification for the selection of W. L. Prestman High School for this study was its size. The high school encompassed 1400 students in four grades, 9-12. This formerly comprehensive high school has been divided into several smaller learning communities. An excerpt from the district’s website summarizes this division,

The school is segmented in Small Learning Communities that help facilitate this process.
Small learning communities are groups of no more than 300 students working together to learn about the careers in a particular pathway. Students share common interests and goals. They begin to relate high school course work to their future, thus providing purpose and motivation for learning (Site school website, March 18, 2006).

Research Strategies and Instrumentation

I gained access to the school through several levels of communication. Initially, an informal conversation with introduction and explanation of my proposed research was held with the superintendent of schools. Following preliminary approval from the superintendent, telephone correspondences were held with a few key administrators in the district, beginning with the high school principal. The high school principal sent a letter of approval for the study.

After initial contacts were established, communication included follow-up e-mails, and personal conferences with the high school principal. Personal conferences helped to establish credibility, common
ground, trust, and relational protocols. These conversations also permitted me to discuss the proposed research. On-site document review was approved, and many documents would later be given to me for off-site study and reference.

It was clearly communicated to the participants and their leaders that, although total anonymity could not be guaranteed, all measures would be taken to assure the highest degree of confidentiality possible. There was no need for questioning of any persons less than 18 years of age, nor was it deemed necessary to conduct focus groups of current students. Prior to agreeing to participate, the district and individuals were made aware that there would be an opportunity to review the study prior to publication. The participants also understood the potential benefits of the study in helping other schools involved in this kind of reform. The general direction of the research questioning was shared openly, and the participants were free to suggest additional illuminating questions. A strategy and timeline for the study was presented and discussed with the building leadership.

The data collection phase of the study was initially anticipated to take from eight weeks to four months to complete. The period was considerably longer due two key
factors; my full time administrative responsibilities and the highly conflicted nature of the site. The data collection phase began on August 29, 2006 and did not draw down until March of 2007, a total of seven months. The duration of the study was also influenced by the frequency and depth of my conversations with the participants, the amount of initial information collected, the willingness of the participants to provide useful information, and the amount of additional inquiry generated through the observations of, and direct contacts with the members of the school and community (Marshall & Rossm, 1999).

At each phase of data collection, the data were scrutinized for leads, and tangents that may have provided useful illumination. Looking to the research literature framed the possible pursuits in this area. In particular, as the reform effort seemed to unravel, I was able to look at several of the studies that depicted pitfalls and problems with small school reform as noted in the prior review of the literature. Themes were drawn from the research and applied to the site as new pursuits for scrutiny. Pursuit of clues in this manner also necessitated an iterative approach to the data collection phase. I returned to previous sources several times for
clarification, deeper explanations into the particular area of interest and to get answers to new questions that arose through the research. As this recursive approach played out, new leads and points of interest diminished at which point the data collection phase came to its appropriate conclusion.

Data Collection Techniques: Description and Justification

The use of multiple sources of evidence in the discovery of truths and realities is a major strength of case study research (Stake, 1995). This multifaceted approach yields thicker and richer descriptions of the case and the participants, and allows for verification of findings through triangulation. This study included the use of a preliminary survey, several interview formats and intensive documentary review and analysis.

It was critical to identify the key stakeholders in this study. Data were collected from teachers, administrators, and other informants as needed. Due to the inherent complexity and size of the teacher group, an instrument was developed to break down the larger group into smaller, more clearly defined subgroups. These
teacher groups separated quite dramatically into supporters and opponents of the reform, however there were fewer differences than expected between the perspectives of the old guard (senior staffers), and the recent hires to the district. In order to identify these critical delineations, a survey was distributed to the teaching staff to gather preliminary information. This instrument (see Appendix A), provided qualifying information on some of the potential stakeholders to be included in the research. Of the 85 high school teachers and administrators present, 100% returned the survey, although 5 were blank or were otherwise unusable. Questions in the survey explored the respondent’s role in the district, their length of service, and educational background. Analysis of the survey data allowed for a “purposeful sampling” (Patton, 1990, p. 169) of the teaching corps. The data gathered in the survey permitted me to select those key stakeholders with the necessary unique orientation to generate captivating, fertile data. Factors guiding selection for the interviews included length of service in the district, commitment to or participation in the reform, and the role or position held in the building, and in conjunction with the reform effort. Survey participants were also given the
opportunity to volunteer in the first round of interviews by noting this on the survey.

Once the key stakeholders were identified, I pursued an initial round of informal, semi-structured interviews including administrators, teachers, and some community members. These conversations followed my approved interview protocol closely (see Appendix B), but care was taken to allow deviation and tangential lines of thought as appropriate. These discussions provided material for thick descriptions and insights from unique, divergent perspectives. “Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case” (Stake, 1995). The settings for the interviews were diverse, as I attempted to make the respondent as comfortable with the process as possible. Interviews were held in coffee shops, a bookstore, respondent’s homes, the school site itself, other schools, and even in my home.

A few questions were standardized across the interview spectrum for comparison purposes, but each item also featured the opportunity to respond from each unique stakeholder’s perspective and the interviews were specifically open to pursuit of these unique perspectives. As Stake (p. 57) asserts, “each interviewee
is expected to have had unique experiences, special stories to tell." This openness to diverse perspectives further thickened the descriptions of the phenomena and body of knowledge regarding the reform in question. An interview protocol (see Appendix B) containing the specified questions was developed and utilized in every interview as the foundation for the interview. Although an open data collection approach was used, “departures from the protocol [were] limited by design” (p. 57). Questioning techniques were developed through study of several excellent sources, including Denzin and Lincoln (2005).

Follow up interviews were conducted, based upon data collected and analyzed from the initial round of interviews. This second set of conversations featured questions based upon understandings and qualified leads from analysis of the first round of interviews as well as researcher ‘hunches’. Furthermore, as my understanding of the situation evolved, new questions arose regarding the special conflicted nature of the site. As time progressed, it was also important to attempt to verify that those early reactions from August and November were still valid in February and March.
Document analysis from before the advent of SWAS through the present helped to deepen my understanding of the structure, development and implementation of the SWAS model at this site (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Yin, 1994). This analysis included two years of faculty meeting agendas, cabinet minutes and notes, monthly minutes of board meetings dating back to the advent of the reform, the grant proposal document, district-wide committee reports, independent analyses of the district and the reform (as a function of the grant requirements), notes and memos from the files of the administrators, and policies adopted to engage the model. Additionally, test data, assessment results, and other documentary evidence were used to support interviewee responses and perceptions regarding efficacy. Document analysis yielded additional strands of inquiry, follow-ups with prior respondents, and a new depth of understandings regarding the reform at Prestman.

The iterative process continued into the spring of 2007, until new interviews, new questions, and emerging data needs of the research began to taper. This was an indication that the study approached conclusion. Resisting premature closure, however, was a challenge to me (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this phase of the process,
I returned to several key interviewees for clarification and illumination on points of confusion or controversy. These interviews did not lead to any additional respondents or strands of inquiry.

**Data Analysis Strategies: Description and Justification**

Case study research is an intellectual struggle of sorts with the goal of producing a "meaningful and trustworthy conclusion, supported by a concise account of how it was reached" (Bassey, 2000, p. 84). The enormous volume of raw data must be somehow sorted, sifted and culled to draw these conclusions. The researcher is charged with finding a way to make sense of this huge, seemingly divergent volume of information.

In qualitative research, particularly in case studies, data collection and analysis are concurrent ventures. One collects and sifts as the process unfolds. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest numerous useful tools for accessing and completing this process. In addition, Silverman (2001) provides basic grounding in analytical methodologies for speech, written text and conversation. Crabtree and Miller’s (1992) continuum describes the
direction of this study as editing analysis style. This style is more emergent and free flowing than traditional statistical research, which channels the data points into tightly preconceived structure. The emergent intuitive direction allowed for the possibility of the “unusual or serendipitous” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 151), that might, if attended to, refocus or redraw the entire research direction. In the case of this study, that is exactly what has happened. Nevertheless, to draw and focus the data into clearer meaning, certain themes, classes, and properties eventually crystallized from the careful, iterative examination of data. As themes, classes and properties emerged, they were tested by cross examination of subsequent stakeholders and redirection of questions to repeat interviewees. Although the data seemed to build to clear explanations of the phenomenon, alternative explanations were sought, examined, incorporated or discarded as non-vital. A comprehensive narrative report has been developed, featuring the descriptions, expressions and perspectives of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).
Validity of the Study: Discussion and Management

The highly detailed understanding of the phenomena of interest that is developed by the researcher and methods of data collection and analysis helped to enhance validity (Yin, 1994). These thick descriptions came from an intense context-based exploration of all discernable aspects pertinent to the phenomena in the natural setting of the site under study. I drew plausible conclusions from the observations of participants, from their input into the process, and from a thorough document analysis. These varied and extensive data sources were cross-analyzed, sorted, categorized and scrutinized for meaning. As meanings began to emerge, I again sought clarification through input from participants, and illuminating field observations thereby strengthening internal validity (Yin, 1994).

External validity refers to the degree of generalizability of the findings of the study. In qualitative research, the nature of inquiry revolves around thick descriptions of a relatively small number of participants, involving a multitude of individual conditions and influences that cannot exist wholly in a larger or separate population. “Local conditions, in
short, make it impossible to generalize” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.124).

To enhance reliability in naturalistic research one must attempt to “minimize the errors and biases in a study” (Yin, 1994, p.36). Such minimization can only occur with rigorous attention to detail in procedural documentation. A case study protocol was used to help ensure proper documentation and attention to detail. A general survey was used to gather data on the stakeholders and their general perceptions. These data were analyzed, and participants were selected from the respondents. I made every effort to broaden the foundation of respondent data, selecting those for interview who first demonstrated interest interviewing, but secondly, with an eye toward the demographics—age, experience, subject area taught and level of participation in the reform of each potential interview. Further contacts were made with these and other participants as the data analysis and new discoveries dictated. The iterative approach played itself out as new leads and new information trickled down naturally.

Systematic management of the data collected in the study has been critical in insuring the accuracy of reporting and conclusions. All contacts were logged and
stored at my home research office. Documents were arranged and filed according to the nature of the item, whether it was a handwritten note, an interview transcript, school board minutes, faculty agenda, or other document.

Another key to the reliability of a study, holds that the research be conducted so that an auditor could potentially replicate the study. A fairly transparent approach has been used for the bulk of the data collection, the interviews, with all discussions recorded and transcribed (with permission). Procedures have been carried out “as if someone were always looking over your shoulder” (Yin, 1994, p.37).

Limitations of the Study

Case study research findings are not intended to be applicable to the general population, in fact the strength of a case study-- thick and rich descriptions of a single phenomenon in a single space-- is also its weakness. A study such as this is limited in general appeal, both to researchers and practitioners in the field. While findings in case study research may be
generalizable to theoretical propositions (Yin, 1994), specific usefulness of findings to those not involved in living within, or studying similar situations will be narrow.

The school however does share many commonalities with other schools involved with this type of reform, thus the research conclusions from this study may prove meaningful and relevant to those parties. The degree to which these findings are applicable to another school has to be based on the 'fittingness' of these data to the second school (the receiver) (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Fittingness is the degree of congruence between the two contexts-- the research site (sender) and the site to which application is being considered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Exposing the experiences in this study to others may create an opportunity for generalizability, for other schools to learn from the experiences at the studied site, providing that the contextual match is highly correlated.

It is perhaps more useful to consider transferability in this naturalistic setting than generalizability. Transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) refers to the degree of similarity of context between the original study and any subsequent sites under scrutiny. Though it
is not the task of the original researcher to provide an “index of transferability” (p. 316), that is to say a chart by which a future researcher can be assured of applicability of the context, it is important that a broad and rich description of the phenomena be provided by the sending researcher to enable others to make transferability judgments. It has been my attempt then, to paint as vivid a picture with as much detail and depth as possible for potential applicers, so that these transferability judgments may be made as effectively as possible.

Collecting this highly detailed and deep data in qualitative fieldwork is messy and difficult even for the most skilled of researchers (Miles, 1979). Good research takes time to conduct, skill and intense scrutiny to analyze, and patience to complete. Thus it was critical to maintain focus on the research questions throughout the data collection and analysis phase (Wolcott 2001). The reliability of data could have been influenced by reluctance in certain stakeholders to be completely forthright, due to several factors, including the individual’s acceptance of the reform itself, and concerns for the effect (positive or negative) of the outcomes of the research. Careful analysis of these
perspectives has shown however that the reform under scrutiny was so polarizing that stakeholders were eager to share their perceptions, on both sides of the conflict. I therefore had to be diligent in controlling the data for extreme positions and to corroborate as much testimony as possible, thereby drawing the most complete and accurate picture of stakeholder perceptions possible.

Excessive length and limited reader accessibility is another complaint of qualitative research, according to Yin (1994). Frequent participant quotes have enlivened the style and depth of the writing however, alternative solutions to the traditional lengthy narrative have been employed where possible.

My acknowledged experience with SWAS reform efforts is an issue of concern. My vested interest in the reform was motivational and energizing, but safeguards were necessarily engaged and maintained to prevent the confounding of questions, interviews and interpretation of the data by researcher bias. To compensate for the bias noted above, I applied reflexivity, or “rigorous self-scrutiny” throughout the research process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p.411). It is not essential to standardize the research protocols in order to prevent bias of this nature, but rather it is important to
understand, according to Maxwell (1996) how my values affect the processes of the study. Nevertheless, critical readings by research associates and disinterested practitioners in the field provided additional rigor to help discover unintended bias. These peer debriefers were instructed to search for evidence of bias, having been given the context of my experiences and the research questions in advance.
Perceptions of Smaller Learning Communities Reform

Introduction

Significant reform of any organization, school or otherwise, must be born out of a true need, well-considered, appropriately tailored for the organization, and supported by the stakeholders in the organization— in particular, the teachers, students, parents and community at large. It is important to understand the phenomenon of study not only from afar, as in a quality literature review, but also from within, from the authentic perspectives and experiences of an educational community whose members have actually lived the reform. Stakeholders can share their personal feelings and perspectives, and these expressions can lead to a more holistic understanding of the experiences under scrutiny. Further, such in-depth examination can help us to understand and frame the planning and implementation stages of the reform, and to identify both missteps as well as successful decisions in the change process.
Data collection for this study proceeded from the major research question of interest: from the perceptions of the stakeholders, what was the perceived efficacy of the schools-within-a-school (SWAS) model as implemented in a formerly comprehensive suburban high school? In addition, the following questions were also addressed: Why did the school choose the SWAS model? Which characteristic elements of SWAS were present in the participant school? What was the stakeholder perceived degree of success or failure regarding these elements? And, did the school’s approach to SWAS implementation result in unique benefits, shortcomings, or unintended consequences?

A Portrait of W. L. Prestman High School

Overland School District, located just outside of an urban area in Central Pennsylvania, encompasses about 90 square miles, and includes six schools, three elementary schools, an intermediate school (grades 4 and 5), one middle school (6-8), and one high school. Employment is primarily blue collar or agrarian. As you approach the small town of 27,000 from any direction, working farms
and scenic woodland vistas still dot the countryside. One large factory dominates not only the town’s skyline but also the workforce and economy. Only 25% of the population earns $75,000.00 per year or more.

At W. L. Prestman High School, the student population is 98% Caucasian, with slowly increasing minorities, primarily Hispanic and African American. The high school has been experiencing a marked overall growth, expanding from 1100 students in 2001, to over 1300 just four years later.

The teaching corps of PHS is predominantly female (54/81) and highly educated, with 65.3% of all participants at a master’s equivalency or higher (53/81). Over half of the teachers (62) are in their first 5 years of service with the district and nearly half have never worked in another district.

A majority of the staff indicated little or no experience with systemic reform in educational settings before coming to this district. Staff expressed minimal experience prior to their Prestman appointment with Career strands-- a curricular organization of courses, leading to a particular career or continued study beyond high school. Career Academies, the arrangement of academic clusters of teachers and students around a
general career area were also new to most staffers. Only a few in the teacher corps were acquainted with the terms smaller learning communities (schools within a school is but one example), freshman academies, magnet schools, charter schools and the academy structure.

Since 2000, W.L. Prestman High School has performed below state averages on the state standardized tests, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) (see Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Performance and Attendance Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement (percentage of students scoring basic or below basic on state standardized test; math/reading)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35/46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note. First year of grant was 2003-2004.*
Furthermore, according to School Matters (May 7, 2007), an organization that tracks and posts school data online, the school experienced a decline over the entire period, in both mathematics and reading proficiency. Additionally, the dropout rate at Prestman was significant, at more than 4% (see Table 1).

More troubling, there seemed to be little in the demographics of Prestman that explained this decline in performance. Historically, there were few students labeled as learning disabled, few in the economically disadvantaged category, a small number of English Language Learners (ELL), and relatively few transient persons— all demographic factors that could possibly affect student performance on standardized tests. In addition to the declining test scores, steady growth in student numbers, overcrowding at the school, and increasing absentee and dropout rates created an environment of concern that seemed ripe for reform. A reform aimed at school size and emphasizing student engagement looked to be just the prescription needed.
W.L. Prestman High School first began a major restructuring of its curriculum, instructional delivery, and organization with a Future Search Conference conducted by the district in the fall of 2001. The conference, organized by the district administration and board, featured input from all segments of stakeholder groups as a precursor to the development of the district Strategic Plan. The conference participants met intensively to identify key areas of concern at the district and building levels, and then to provide guidance on the development of the strategic plan for the district.

The 72 stakeholders who participated in this conference included teachers, administrators, board members, parents, student representatives, graduates, law and governmental representatives, civic and business leaders and school district support staff members. The Future Search Conference essentially kicked off the district’s Strategic Planning cycle.

The conference created a list of common themes that would serve to shape and guide the district’s growth in
the coming years. Five of these themes were to strongly influence the direction of reform at the high school. Unfortunately, and despite repeated, concerted efforts to obtain the culminating report of the Future Search Conference, I was unable to access the document. Regardless, ample references to the conference and its efforts exist elsewhere in documents and dialogue obtained through this research study.

The first of the common themes stated that the district would focus on continuous student progress throughout the educational process. To facilitate this, the professional staff would identify mastery competencies for content in all curricular areas. Students in each of the disciplines, whether math, science, world language, or other subjects, would be required to demonstrate a mastery of a specific set of competencies. For communication arts, that might mean for example that all 9th graders will produce an acceptable five-paragraph essay, and demonstrate the writing process through one research paper.

Second, the conference deemed it critical that all students with learning needs outside the norm (gifted, special education, English Language Learners), in addition to all regular education students, have the
right to a quality individualized education. This instruction would be delivered in a disciplined environment, with emphasis on early intervention.

Third, there was a clear desire to actively engage many facets of the community with the school. The hope was that the networking of parents, businesses, service providers and others would enhance each student’s development into a contributing member of society.

Fourth, the conference named increased global and diversity awareness as a goal for schools. Staff would meet this goal through appropriate instruction for students, specially designed to prepare them to enter a more interdependent world.

Finally, the report cited the need for internal and external security improvements. These involved not simply physical security enhancements, but climate and culture improvements to assure that the schools offer physically and emotionally safe environments for the children. These five themes would later significantly influence the decision to adopt a reform focusing on small learning communities. In fact, all of the themes would appear prominently in the grant application document.
In the next phase of the strategic planning, the district’s Academic Services Coordinator, Ms. Jamie Kauffman, whose responsibilities included grant writing, began investigating funding sources to meet the needs expressed in the Future Search Conference findings. As noted previously, high school standardized test scores were not keeping pace with state scores, the dropout rate was higher than desired, and the percentage of students advancing to college was lower than that of similar schools. In addition, faculty attrition was above the state average, and increasing by 1.6% yearly (Application for Federal Assistance, 2003).

Ms. Kauffman determined that an appropriate course of action was to pursue federal assistance for funding school improvement. The important factors under consideration included the school’s performance on standardized tests, demographic changes (including consistent growth), student behavior, teacher attrition, spending per pupil, and current research and trends in school reform. The coordinator looked at possible reforms that might address these and other needs of the district.

The small schools model quickly emerged as a front runner, as the key benefits of this model seemed to provide a solution to the most pressing issues
confronting the school. Small schools benefits cited in the literature included: a greater sense of personalization, improved academic performance, decrease in dropout rates, increased student and teacher satisfaction, and decreased absenteeism. The selected model, supported by a massive federal grant through the Department of Education (DOE), was the Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) Program. As Kauffman recalled, “When I researched grants, Small Learning Communities, from the federal government, was an effort at that time to do all those things.” She added, “We desired to motivate interest and become personalized with our high school students, as well as have a more rigorous environment.”

During the 2002-2003 school year, a grant team including the high school principal, Mr. Habeisen, Ms. Kauffman, the assistant superintendent, a school counselor, and a handful of teachers began to collect data for the grant application. One of the teachers involved in the writing team stressed that the grant was sought because “it seemed to dove-tail with elements seen as critical to the future of the district.” The grant team, according to Kauffman, provided information to assist her with writing the grant proposal.
Kauffman assembled information drawing from the Future Search Conference report, the grant team information, and district performance and demographic figures, and completed the grant proposal. The application was certified by the superintendent on May 10, 2003, and submitted to the DOE under the Federal Education Assistance program.

The grant proposal indicated that growth in the district had caused overcrowding at the school, requiring the construction of eight mobile classrooms and a new cafeteria at the high school to accommodate the increase in population. The application cited this growth as causing an “atmosphere of decreased individual student attention, management and personalization” (Application for Federal Assistance, 2003). Though short-term data cited in the grant application actually indicated an improvement in student behaviors prior to the reform, the writer expressed the need for smaller learning communities as a key solution to this problem.

In the summer of 2003, the district was informed that the grant application was approved. The grant was to provide for personnel, equipment, consultant(s) and miscellaneous operational expenses for a three-year period, commencing August 2003, and ending August 2006.
The abstract contained the purpose of the grant: “In order to provide motivation and personalize student services, the district is seeking this grant to implement smaller learning communities within a large, overcrowded high school facility.” The document went on to state:

Objectives within the smaller learning community would be to develop student rapport and connection with a teacher advisee [sic], to provide advisor counseling relative to correlating academic course work with students’ post-secondary goals, to identify and remediate academic skills deficits, and to hold students accountable for rigorous academic standards. (section III, p. 1)

It seems significant that Administrative Services Coordinator Kauffman, in defining the career academies concept, expressed an idealistic conception of what academies are. In her view, an academy would be “a group of teachers and students that stay together for four years, become personalized and very well known to each other.” At least in the mind of the coordinator, the concept of “ownership” of the educational achievement of the school appeared to be firmly linked to the small schools reform. As the coordinator noted, “You think
about teachers all of a sudden getting the message, ‘I am responsible for somebody’s adequate yearly progress.’”

According to Kauffman, “the huge difference in my mind is advising a student, worrying about a student—not only their academics but their attendance, their behavior, the total overall performance.” Clearly, she understood the small school reform as strengthening the relationship between teacher and student with the teacher taking “ownership” of not only student academic performance, but behavior as well.

The grant amount was $429,000. Without these funds, it seems unlikely that this large-scale reform would have even been launched, because of the complexity of the reform and the extensive hours needed to plan, coordinate, and execute the programs required by the grant.

Small Schools Reform at Prestman High

The planned reform consisted of several key elements designed to personalize the atmosphere, add accountability, and enhance rigor. These elements were not all implemented fully but were at least part of the
initial plan. The specific elements included Career Academies, Career Pathways or strands, an advisory program, personalization activities, and leadership changes to facilitate the new small learning communities. Ideally, these key structures would satisfy the needs expressed by the Future Search Conference and, subsequently, the District’s Strategic Plan.

Smaller Learning Communities

As the reform got underway at Prestman, the high school was restructured into smaller learning communities (SLC), or career academies. The planned structure of the school was to include four such SLCs. They were labeled Arts and Humanities, Science and Engineering, Business, and Health and Human Services.

Each SLC was to include all four major subject areas: communication arts (also known as language arts), science, mathematics, and social studies, as well as course offerings from elective areas. These elective subjects such as health and physical education, music, and art might be required to service multiple SLCs, due to a lack of teaching faculty in the disciplines needed to fully staff each SLC. For example, there were only three Spanish teacher positions at PHS, leaving one
community without a Spanish teacher. It is also germane to note that specific academy foci dictated the presence of some of the specialist teachers, such as music in the Arts and Humanities academy, further limiting their availability to the other academies. While teachers believed at some point that they would have the freedom to select the learning community they preferred, the grant application clearly stated that teachers would be assigned to an SLC, based upon certification and the academic needs of the specific academy.

According to the grant timeline, in the 2006-2007 school year, teachers would be responsible to teach all or a significant number of their discipline’s courses within the assigned learning community. For example, previously, Abby Worthington had taught English 11 and 12 for 16 years at Prestman. She and her communication arts department colleagues were informed in the spring of 2006 that they would each have to teach the entire curriculum—all courses— for their academy students. Abby learned that she was to teach 7 courses with 7 different preps, and 5 of these would be new. She was slated to teach English 9, 10, 11, and 12 plus three elective courses in the coming fall semester.
In addition to teaching assignment changes, the arrangement required students to select their academy—and essentially, their career preference—near the end of 8th grade. Students were given SLC information earlier in grade 8, and from that they were to make a choice of academy—a placement that would last their entire high school career. This early choice was critical in understanding some of the concerns that later arose, as many parents and even teachers felt that the students were not equipped to make such a significant decision at age 13 or 14.

Career Pathways

The Career Pathways model was designed to provide articulation in the curriculum that supported a student’s given career choice or area of interest, guiding the student toward more complete preparation for work beyond high school. Within each academy or SLC, there could be several articulated pathways (see Appendix C). While there is no one-size formula for academies and pathways, some patterns help to define the reform. In some schools’ implementation, these arrangements are strictly adhered to in that students elect a pathway and all courses, every discipline, are taught within this small learning
community (SLC). These “strict-adherence” schools, however, are a minority. The more common presentation features a larger comprehensive high school that is subdivided into academies or pathways that contain the specialty classes for the pathways. An example of such a strand and its curricular elements is the Health and Human Services (H&HS) SLC and it’s attendant pathways. The curricular arrangement of H&HS provided core academic classes and specialized coursework. Human and child development, psychology, culinary arts, music therapy, anatomy and physiology, health and fitness, first aid, and athletic training are all examples of courses that could be specific to such an academy. Different models will vary, however in essence, a student should have been able to travel through the strand (pathway) and take course work that would lead to her post secondary training or the world of work, and to a greater understanding of the careers supported by the SLC pathway.

In Arts and Humanities, one might find all music classes, languages, fine art, graphic design, commercial art, pottery, and textiles. The pathways would further funnel the academy students into their area of interest, such as music, or art, education or performance.
The SLCs would also provide course work in the major disciplines of language arts, social studies, science, and math. These core courses are generally required for all graduates and thus would be present in the pathways model. What was to differentiate the delivery of core subjects was that, ideally, the language arts teacher in a specific Business and Finance pathway would link their content and instruction in this core subject to the pathway theme of interest, integrating examples and real life problems into the classroom for the students to experience. For instance, grade 10 English primarily covers American literature. In the Business Academy however, one pathway may have a number of students interested in manufacturing management. The instructor might, instead of *The Great Gatsby*, select *The Jungle*, because of its depiction of the hardships in the manufacturing industry in the early 20th century.

The most common Pathways plans present in high schools could be grouped into iterations of Health and Human Services, Arts and Humanities, Business and Finance, and Science Academies. The Career Pathways at Prestman mirrored this pattern, with the academy titles at PHS reflected in these groupings (see Appendix C).
Curriculum and instruction revisions therefore were planned at Prestman to align these career strands or pathways. Students and teachers were to be connected by curriculum and proximity into the academy groups for all four years of high school. Classrooms within each SLC were located in the same wing and theoretically, all classes for the academy would be taught there. Teachers would primarily see only students from within their learning community over the four years of the student’s high school experience. As originally conceptualized, the impact of the career pathways on instruction was to be far reaching, according to several of the interviewed teachers. Courses were to be modified to focus the content toward the academy’s theme.

Interviewed teachers remarked that they had initiated new curricular offerings at the request of high school administration. As one noted:

And, as a general music teacher, what they asked me to do was to take the “general music class” that I teach for everybody. (We have to pass it to get your diploma here.) Instead, what they said was, “Break it down into some four or five different classes that maybe could be taught, something that you know, students would
be interested in, that we can promote, that could kind of divide it up so it wasn’t one big class of thirty students.

What basically happened was we didn’t realize that it was going into effect the very next year. And so we started going off the wall with, well, we could do Music Technology class or you could do a History of Rock and Roll or a History of American Xylophone Music and History of Blues class. And they said— they came back a couple months later and said, “Great, you’re teaching that next year.” And we were just thinking it was brainstorming.

*Homeroom and Advisory*

The high school reform plan in the Overland School District included grouping students into homerooms with each homeroom containing an equal portion of students from grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. The students and their teacher in these homerooms would all be in the same academy and the same teacher would stay, at least in theory, with the same cohort of students through the pupil’s four years of high school. Students met daily for 18 minutes in homeroom, for purposes of attendance,
record keeping, and school-wide information gathering and disbursement, but this grouping also served as the Advisory group, which met regularly in extended periods of 30 minutes, on a semi-weekly basis.

The critical attribute of the advisory was its ability to provide a trusted adult and cohort with whom the students could feel safe, in order to establish a sense of belonging and participation in activities as an equal. It was felt that these connections would contribute to the feelings of belonging and personal contribution that any potentially disenfranchised students might otherwise have lacked.

The advisory program also included its own curriculum of sorts, wherein the advisor led students through a wide variety of topical discoveries and discussions ranging from conflict resolution, communicating with others, planning for higher education, work on the graduate exit project (a requirement for each senior), and interpersonal skills. Advisory meetings were also designed to present career information specific to the academy and pathway. Each teacher in each academy was an advisor for 15 to 20 students in that academy, and each entering 9th grade student would remain with the same advisor for all four years of high school.
Special Activities

On occasion, the school scheduled specific activity days designed to emphasize the career pathways and academy structures, and to support the personalization goals of the grant and the school. Specific activities were held for students purportedly in support of the career pathways in each academy. The planned activities ranged across a broad spectrum— from a Career Day to tie-dying, career planning, relays in the gymnasium, a school kick-off day, birthday celebrations, and even painting pumpkins.

It remains difficult to ascertain the connection between some of the activities and the academies; however, optimistically speaking, the provision of an enjoyable activity at a smaller scale (within the academy) might have improved the sense of personalization. There were quarterly activity days arranged by each academy, with distinctive activities in each academy. The arts academy developed and presented more performance type activities, whereas business and other academies were more focused on speakers and career pursuits. Since the teachers in each academy developed the activities independent of the other groups, each activity had its own flavor. Based on stakeholder
comments, it appears that the teachers did not need to seek any kind of administrative approval for the specific activities.

Leadership Changes

The high school principal was responsible for all areas of implementation of the reform. Mr. Habeisen introduced the initiative to the faculty in the fall of 2003, after the grant had been awarded, and implementation efforts quickly began. Habeisen selected the faculty who would fill the critical roles of academy coaches. The reform required a redefined leadership group for administrative purposes that used two teacher “coaches” in each academy in conjunction with the principal and other members of his formal administrative team. These coaches were semi-volunteers (asked to serve) who met with the principal for direction and then worked with their respective academy to develop and implement aspects of the reform. As one academy coach shared in an interview:

I was approached by the principal. I don’t have a problem holding my opinions back, and he was trying to find some people who weren’t afraid to take on some leadership roles and become
coaches or co-coaches for the different pathways. He sort of explained it to me in the interview process that this is where the school district was headed.

It was not a paid position, however you could fill up blue [comp time] cards for additional time put in. And it all sounded great. We were supposed to be facilitators of information, like sharing information from administration to faculty.

The coaches, two for each academy, were instructed to lead the facilitation and development of initiatives and activities that were unique to their particular academy. These coaches met with the other teachers in their academy to plan activities, but as one coach remarked, “we really did nearly all of the work,” both in planning and implementation.

The coaches held monthly meetings with their academy teachers, covering such agenda items as career pathway information sessions, departmental curriculum work, revising the graduate project, creating a more rigorous schedule for the senior year, and numerous functional trainings, such as how to use a new grading program. It appeared through interviews and documentary evidence that
the high school staff was relatively free from any
district level oversight as they planned and executed the
reform.

Implementation- Problems and Perceptions at PHS

Change was inevitable for Prestman High School. The
District expected the high school to address the needs
expressed in the Future Search Conference report and the
Strategic Plan. Beginning with the formative stages of
grant writing in 2002, through to the awarding of the
funds in late summer of 2003, events were set into motion
that would inexorably progress from a low smolder to a
full-blown forest fire by spring of 2006.

The Grant

Thorough, if not exhaustive, research is required
before implementing any reform initiative. It was never
clear that Coordinator Kauffman, Principal Habeisen and
the grant team ever considered exactly how the smaller
learning communities reform would be implemented. As is
frequently noted in the reform literature, the devil is
in the details, and insufficient consideration appears to
have been given to the critical issues and ramifications of staffing, structural, and cultural changes at Prestman.

Analysis of the grant document revealed some significant errors and misconceptions. For example, on page 11 of the Program Abstract, the writers err with the name of one of the most prominent educational researchers, Willard R. Daggett, calling him “William Daggart”. While this could possibly be a minor editing error, it could also reveal a lack of attention to detail and insufficient preparation.

The grant cites Daggett’s phases of successful career pathways programs in support of the Prestman grant proposal. Daggett notes that a “clear, shared understanding among teachers, administrators, board members, and the general public” (p.13) is essential to successful programs; however, there is little if any evidence that the district followed through on this imperative prior to implementation.

It appears that many of the teachers, and later, students and parents, felt uninformed as to the basic intent of the reform or its implications for teaching and learning, despite early revelation of the reform by the
principal. A well-respected senior member of the teaching staff, Robert Hawthorne, noted:

Well, I can still recall the faculty meeting when our principal announced that he had great news for us; that we had won a grant, and it would be, it would mean wonderful things for us all, and the grant involved something known as a Small Learning Community and that was my introduction to it. And at that point we were given some papers discussing small learning communities, and we were on the road to small learning communities—without ever having (to my knowledge) discussed whether it was a road we should even get on. We just won a grant.

Many teachers cited the lack of communication by administration and limited buy-in by teachers as critical missteps in the process. Hawthorne continued:

As [a] principal and any good leader of the school knows, there are certain people in the school that have positions of power and then there are people that just plain have power throughout the school, and you need to get people on board and start selling them on this idea. You just cannot throw it at people and expect them to
accept it. The leadership, I mean, implementing this, was sad.

Part of the early implementation effort included sending several small teams to various sites where some version of Career Pathways or smaller learning communities was in operation. Two teams traveled to Maryland, to Winter Mills High School, an SLC charter school. Both teams visited on the same day, one in the morning, the other in the afternoon. Another team traveled to Irving, Texas, to visit two school districts that were engaged in smaller learning communities.

The visiting teams consisted of one assistant principal, four pathway coaches, one school guidance counselor and the career coordinator, or administrative grant writer. Unfortunately, the visits all occurred after the grant was written and approved, and Prestman High was already in the implementation phase. Several teachers suggested that had the trips occurred as part of a feasibility study, many aspects of the implementation might have been different.

*From Flicker to Flame*

As noted above, teams from Prestman visited several schools with SWS models. The schools or sites visited
however seemed to present a utopian version of the SLC model, according to several of the visitors, which may have given team members an overly optimistic view of the possibility for success at Prestman. One of the team members who visited the select charter school in Maryland was also an SLC coach.

We visited the Winter Mills School. They are-- I left there like, ‘I don’t want to leave.’ I mean it’s just looked like such a utopia to me and to everyone who was there that day. But, when you sit back afterwards, it’s like, “Okay, maybe they just showed us the good part.” And it probably isn’t all that it seemed to be but. . . . I mean they had built a school because the one school in town just got too big. They had to build another school.

They had kids, you know, helping out at the dig site. The day they were breaking ground, they had a parade. They had people from the community. They had a big, huge picnic where they gave out hotdogs and all this stuff. I mean every little step that was done, they showed like all these photos and all these things, was all like the community took part in it.
The teachers were, you know, part of the decision in how the schedules would run, and how the day would look, and who would teach what, and, you know, did they want homerooms, did they not want homerooms, did they want announcements, down to all those things. They were all a part of the decision. But it was all done prior to anything else being in place. So, it was fresh, everybody was on board before it started.

Members of the visiting teams and faculty at large who did not make the visits expressed differing views of the effectiveness of these trips. One teacher, not on a visiting team, noted “they took that school’s plan and just did it to us,” with little or no adjustment for any differences. This underscores the lack of unity, communication, and buy-in regarding the implementation at Prestman, as opposed to the apparent unified support at the visited schools.

Others opined that the SLC plan worked in other schools because of other factors—larger faculties, more students, student self-selection at the charter school, or more money. Kauffman countered, referring to the strategies borrowed from other sites, “when we bring them back, they are always altered to meet Prestman High
School’s needs. I cannot think of any that we could just adopt.” Still other staff members noted, “we were shown programs that were being done in a lot of other places and a lot of schools with different students than we, different community than we have, different teachers and schedules than we have.” And so, “we were not convinced that it was right for our school or, if it was going to work here.” The majority of members of the visiting teams seemed impressed with the schools, however, and agreed to apply what they learned at these sites to Prestman High.

Teachers generally greeted the grant award and the small school reform with a fair amount of skepticism. A common perception was that the selection of this particular reform (small learning communities) hinged more on the money to be garnered rather than the content of the reform or the goodness of fit with the school and its problems. As one respondent summed it up, we “got a grant so we had to create these SLCs.”

It appears that one of the core problems that plagued this reform from the beginning was the lack of purposeful engagement of the teachers, students, and the public. Not only was buy-in of the teachers necessary, gaining the informed support of the community also would have
provided powerful allies to the administration when the early signs of trouble appeared.

Despite some minor public concern with attendance, dropout rate, career choices, behaviors, and academics, there appeared to be no singular event or series of events that had so shaken the community at large that they were convinced that a major reform effort was needed. Articles and press releases were published as the reform progressed in district newsletters and building communiqués, but these failed to engage the citizenry and appeared to be largely ignored.

The leadership team failed to fully heed the dictum that effective change in schools requires buy-in at the grass roots level. The vast majority of teachers were largely uninvolved and even unaware of the reform effort until after the grant was received and the initiative was a “done deal.” This created a negative attitude and simmering resentment toward the initiative. One of the grant writing team members conceded that the teachers were “kept out of the information loop” until the grant was secured, and that in retrospect that was probably not the “best way to handle” the rollout. One senior SLC coach lamented,

I really feel like the bottom line was the

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‘cart before the horse.’ I feel like had things been laid out in a different manner there would have been a lot more acceptance for it. But I don’t know. A lot of things were put into play before the reasons why they were put into play [was made clear], and before the “how is this really going to work?” piece got [put] together. It’s like the emperor— we were acting like he had clothes on, we all knew he did not, but we were always playing along, doing what we were told to do.

As teachers met in their academy groups, ostensibly to plan for implementation and collaborate on best practices, they also took the opportunity to share concerns about the reform. Notes gathered from these meetings reflected growing concerns, or at the very least ambivalence, with the reform on a number of fronts as time progressed. What seems conspicuous is that in very few cases did the academy teachers actually focus on academy-specific goals, practices, curriculum or initiatives. In fact, the academies met as such, but conducted business as would have been appropriate before the reform in departments or committees. In other words, there appeared to be little substantive reason for
meeting as an academy or SLC as these agendas were not advanced in any meaningful way. In the end, the meetings devolved into little more than a vehicle for mounting opposition to the reform effort.

Entering the reform, teachers believed they would be able to choose both the academy and the classes they would teach, despite a reference to the contrary by Principal Habeisen at the October 2003 faculty meeting that had first introduced the initiative. One teacher, Mrs. Bakersfield, indicated that she distinctly recalled from the very first meeting that decisions would have to be made to “balance” the academies. In fact, administrative adjustments had to be made to balance staff assignments across the four academies. This came as a surprise to most of the teachers. Mr. Witherup, a veteran art teacher noted that, “it was impossible for everyone to get their choice, and there were too few teachers to go around anyhow. So they had to tell some teachers where they’d end up-- in which academy.” Others however complained of being misinformed, of having to “start all over again,” and of having the already difficult role of the teacher now becoming next to impossible. Jeannine Wofford, one of the academy coaches, noted,
And then I remember hearing about how all they are going to split all the kids up into four schools. They won’t intermingle. And I remember thinking, “Really?” So, I raised my hands just to clarify and, you know, I’m sitting at a table and there were a couple of veteran teachers that are just like, “been there, done that, reinvent, whatever, like I don’t care anymore.” And they just sit there and do this thing like, “hogwash” you know. They don’t want to listen or doodle and whatever.

And, so, I’m like, you know, “you mean that we’ll separate everything?” “Yes, you know, we’ll separate everything.” So, I remember that, vividly, thinking, “My God.” I always kind of knew in the back of my head that’s where this was going. I don’t think anyone else did. And those people in my group who I can’t recall anymore-- I remember just a few around me, they don’t seem to recall that. But I did. And regardless, the other groups may not have had that conversation. So, aside from that, it really was never mentioned again as that being the ultimate goal.
Teachers also claimed that clarification and explanation of the goals and timeline would frequently come only after repeated requests again reinforcing the concerns with the effectiveness of communication,

We brought up our concerns constantly and did not feel our concerns were being addressed or looked at, at all. Things were just, there was administratively, there were goals-- and they were heading towards them all, whether people were on board or not, even whether the community was on board.

We would ask, “Where are the goals? What are we doing? Where does this take us next year and the year after that kind of thing?” And then, we would get a sheet saying, 2006 or 2007, this is the goal for 2007 and this is the goal where we hope to be.

Parents, community members, and students remained largely passive and silent throughout the initial implementation of the reform. Lacking a strong base of support in the community or among the teachers, when the going eventually got rough there was simply not enough support there to sustain the reform.
An Outside Evaluation

In the fall of 2004, an independent evaluator was hired through the grant to review the progress, collect data, and make suggestions for improvement. Data were collected from teachers and students, and through a focus group for parents. Unfortunately, very few parents showed up for the informational focus group in the fall of 2004, so their data were not included. The student data consisted of an eight-question advisor survey. Students responded over a range of topics including advisor attitude, formatting of advisor meetings, perceptions on effectiveness of the meetings, and favorite things from advisor meetings. A majority of students favored the advisor program, curriculum, and activities. As might be expected, teachers were involved much more deeply in the evaluation.

In the progress report that resulted from the data collection, the evaluator discussed progress on the objectives noted in the grant. These findings were then combined with the student and teacher results to draw conclusions. A comparison of the first two years of implementation revealed little substantive improvement along several areas of concern. The number of students involved in extra-curricular activities was static. Test
scores for the PSSA, Terra Nova, SAT, and other measures were mixed, with some results rising, others falling. These changes were attributed to natural population changes not program effects. Only one positive trend was noted in the evaluation report— that of decreased school violence. This was noted as a significant change from incident totals dropping from over 300 to under 100 within 3 years. Unfortunately, the dropout rate showed a significant increase in the 2004-2005 school year. The same number dropped out in this one year as in the previous two years combined.

Improvement objectives, drawn from the conclusions of the report, were established for the third year of the reform. The objectives and the observable results included several key findings. First, the report indicated that it was critical to improve the organization of students into pathways and clusters. Unfortunately, the improvement that occurred consisted of the principal shifting students from student’s selected groups to others, to “balance” the sizes of the groups. Another recommendation was to review and improve teacher assignments for the various pathways. The report revealed that teachers’ initial selection of a pathway preference was not based on special skills, aptitudes, or interest,
but rather on personal/social ties with other teachers and even, in some cases, a moment’s whim. According to one teacher respondent in the report, “Teachers did not recognize the significance of the pathway choice.” Major recommendations made by the independent evaluator included improving nearly every aspect of the small learning communities. The evaluator made a specific, pointed reference to improving community and parent involvement, and to more shared planning and leadership responsibilities in the academy teams. Unfortunately, the vehicle chosen for improving the community involvement was a report delivered to the school board in April, 2005, that amounted to little more than a general statement about “why we must redesign” the high school. This presentation appeared to have no specifics about the Prestman experience, but rather focused on national trends and international pressures on trade and education.

Additional key recommendations of the evaluation included more intense and specific professional development and better use of data for differentiated instruction. The evaluator noted that test scores had actually decreased in some areas in the period since the grant was awarded. Again, some teacher feedback indicated
a desire for more appropriate professional development. It is not known if the decrease in school violence was related to adjusted accounting measures, but the evaluator encouraged continued efforts at personalization, relationship building, and positive attitudes among teachers.

In conclusion, the evaluator strongly suggested that the implementation for the 2005-2006 school year focus on documenting changes to advisor activities and the impact that the reform was having on curriculum. The report reiterated the critical need for improved communication with stakeholders, and called for redoubled efforts at engaging parents and community members in the process.

The school administration seemed to respond to the report, as evidenced by the agendas from faculty meetings, by instituting a staff development plan, student tours for orientation, and other planned but marginal events. Teachers commented more critically after the study recommendations that the limited staff development was “focused too much on pathway goals” and not enough on curriculum development for the new structures. Educators at PHS consistently expressed concerns that the curriculum needed much more work to “marry academic goals with SLC needs.” In the evaluation
phase, mixed feedback came from the teachers regarding the effectiveness of class scheduling in support of the SLC, with some saying it simply was “not happening” while others remarked that they were not sure there were nearly enough teachers on staff to make the SLC system work. Teachers commented in the independent evaluation survey that their students claimed no interest in the pathway, and that they themselves were looking for the opportunity to change pathways. Teachers also spoke about the loss of instructional time due to pathways activities.

These same comments occurred over a year after the proposed changes were to take place, reinforcing the lack of progress on the administration’s part with meeting the recommendations of the evaluation. Though all of these comments were clearly noted in either or both the independent evaluation and survey, significant changes did not appear in the 2005-2006 school year to mitigate these concerns. Teachers still reflectively noted the same concerns in the fall and winter of 2006. The failure to satisfactorily address these teacher concerns and evaluator recommendations most certainly led to heightened frustrations of an increasing number of stakeholders as the reform continued. The feedback generated from this evaluation did not seem to engender
the kinds of mid-course adjustments that one might have expected. The ship was not righted, the course not corrected.

**Heightened Frustrations**

Throughout the 2005-2006 school year, teacher discontent over the small schools reform manifested over a number of specific concerns. Clearly, the former curriculum would require some modification to reflect the academies’ very different career paths. This alarmed veteran teachers who were concerned that their cherished, and well-practiced lessons might have to be overhauled to infuse an academy focus. Although administrators did not seem to see this adjustment as significant, some teachers viewed them as nothing short of cataclysmic.

Significant dissent erupted at PHS when, in addition to academy placement, the teachers learned that they were to cover all of their department course offerings rather than those classes they had previously specialized in teaching. Many of the instructional assignments did not match well with the desires or requests of the teachers. These changes were difficult to bear for many of the faculty, who perceived the new course load as overwhelming and insurmountable. One English teacher who
had formerly taught all English 12 classes, now found that she would be preparing lessons for English 9, 10, 11, 12, Speech and Acting I. As Mrs. Wofford commented:

And then it seemed like right before the end, it came out... Mr. Habeisen brought a couple of department heads and then said, “You guys are going to be teaching-- you know, if you are the Arts and Humanities English teacher, you are going to have freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior classes and advance placement or whatever all to yourself.” It became like, “What?” You know, like, “Are you kidding me?”

And it was news to most people. I mean I could tell it was like honestly, sincerely news to most people. And I remember thinking, “Oh, God,” like it really did happen. But it happened like that and it didn’t happen with input or there weren’t baby steps or, you know, change theory. I never saw it.

Teachers should not have been surprised, however. Again, Mrs. Bakersfield continued, “They told us in that very first meeting that we would be teaching across the subject area, and most teachers were like, ‘doodling’ or ‘yeah, whatever’, I remember that clearly.”
The assignment of specific teachers to specific academies had other unanticipated consequences. By sequestering teachers to a single academy with an intact group of students, and requiring these teachers to teach their subject area in all four grades 9-12, students would quite possibly have the same four teachers all four years in the language arts, math, social studies, and science. This had the potential to decrease students’ exposure to a wider variety of pedagogical approaches previously available, and to significantly narrow the number of adults with whom they would have contact.

From a parent perspective, there were concerns as well. One remarked, “Okay, you are going to get a first year teacher because this person has never taught this subject before. So, it was sort of frustrating. A lot of the students were in uproar.” Additionally, in the view of some vocal and influential parents, asking students to select a career pathway that would shape their education for their entire high school career while still in grade 8 seemed a bit much to ask. They complained that their 8th grade children were “too young to take on these kinds of career choices.” Since students would not be allowed to switch academies once they decided on their pathway, they were locked into a decision that would have ramifications
for their entire stint in high school. This fact alone raised serious questions about the legitimacy of the entire philosophy of the Career Pathways model.

Knowing that children change their minds frequently, and realizing that the SLC concept is first and foremost an opportunity to provide a personalized atmosphere regardless of the selected academy should have led the leadership team for the reform to be more flexible with the placement and movement of students. They could have, for instance, arranged for a freshman exploratory academy, wherein students could learn more about the career groupings and make a more informed choice. It appeared from interviews with Mr. Habeisen and Mrs. Tillery the assistant principal, that they felt committed, even compelled, to adhere to the structures laid out in the grant, or seen at the schools they had visited. Flexibility, instead of rigid adherence to the plan, might have alleviated some of the parent concerns and provided a smoother transition to the SLC concept in Overland School District. Unfortunately, this was not in the cards, and more kindling was tossed on the fire.

As teachers began to fully realize the impact that the reform was to have on their workload and their ability to perform, their dissent grew more energized and
desperate. Teachers questioned the school’s ability to meet the needs of the students within the disciplines when each teacher would be forced to teach several new course preps. The familiarity and expertise built up in the courses taught over the years would be lost. As some teachers expressed, it would be as if all the teachers were now first-year teachers for at least part of their class load. The reform, already suffering from seemingly poor planning, poor communication, and a lack of substantive stakeholder participation, now had become a powder keg, with sparks flying about from numerous sources.

The teachers approached the administration in early 2006 with their concerns. The principal, according to teacher leaders interviewed, was unwilling or unable to effect any meaningful change in the implementation of the academy structures, meaning that teachers were inexorably heading toward a complete revision in the material they were accustomed to teaching. The teachers pleaded with the principal to approach the district administration to put a hold on the implementation until the concerns with teaching load, assignment by academy, and student choice were reviewed and addressed; however, no such action was taken. One teacher recalled that meeting and noted, “We
addressed our opinions to our principal, and we were told ‘Thank you for your opinions but it is going to happen whether you like it or not.’”

The impassioned discontent had reached its flash point. One spark was all that remained to ignite the blaze. A teacher with five years at Prestman recalled what happened in late March of 2006.

So, he dropped the bomb, poor thing. I mean he really didn’t have a choice. I adore Mr. Habeisen, but he dropped this on them on a Friday, and he was out for the next week or a week and a half. Schedules had to be done and submitted back to him for the following year, like who is teaching what and what books. I don’t think anything had really been discussed in detail, I mean it just would have almost seemed impossible to actually work to me.

Anyway, he left, so teachers felt under the gun and pressured, we have to make decision now. He is not here. We can’t talk about it. You know, they want these things yesterday on their desk. And we are not down [in agreement] with this. We didn’t even get to discuss it. And, so, they had no choice but to go to the board, because we felt
we couldn’t get a dialogue with anyone. And it has to be done.

*Conflagration: The School Board Enters the Fray*

On April 17 2006, a representative of the teachers spoke before the school board with the signed backing of over two dozen teachers in two departments, and the unwritten backing of most of the faculty. In addition to the brief but pointed speech from this teacher, several students and parents addressed the school board. All spoke in opposition of further implementation of the SLC and Career Pathways plan at Prestman High.

The faculty presenter, Mr. Tre Adams, a teacher highly regarded among colleagues, administrators and the community, recalled the board meeting with clarity.

It is one of the hardest things I ever did. I ruined my Easter weekend preparing for that because we did not go slow. I know the chain of command. We did not go slowly enough through it, but as I said in the presentation to the board, I tried to explain that we had no time; you are implementing this. And so, the whole faculty supported me with this. They wanted to sign petitions and everything else, and so it was a
unified group that I was representing. It is a very, very hard thing to do because we should have gone much more slowly, but as this speech says, “We felt as though our hands were tied, it was almost a suicidal thing to do.” I mean I care about the school a lot.

Before the meeting, letters were sent simultaneously to Mr. Habeisen, the School Board President, the superintendent and assistant superintendent. The letter was telling Mrs. Kauffman, “We do not support this in any way.” I was speaking for the whole school with the exception of probably only two or three individual teachers in that whole building.

Well, the school board was flabbergasted, because one parent after another also stood up and said some other things. We did not organize the parents, but the word was out in the school apparently that changes were in the air, and whether the changes were good or bad, the community did not know about them. Their kids had signed up for a pathway that parents saw as meaningless.
They [the board] just were embarrassed by how little they could answer parents who came to meetings and said, ‘what about this or that’ and it became a big communication problem because you can lay a fluffy nice article in a school district newsletter that makes anything sound really nice, but as educators we look at it and say, “we are not getting any smarter here in this school doing this.”

Over 100 parents and students came to that meeting and the subsequent board meeting. Later in that first meeting, a motion was presented that carried by an 8-1 vote against the career academies and pathways. The board was taken aback by both the emotion and breadth of the concerns. The carried motion tabled any further scheduling of students or teachers by Career Pathway until the May 2006 board meeting in order to allow the board sufficient time to investigate the concerns. From the April 18, 2006 board minutes:

Approval to direct the Administration to cease and desist with all 2006-2007 school year planned and proposed changes affecting teachers and or students associated with the Career
Pathways program at the high school until after
the May 15 School Board voting meeting.

A planning meeting ensued on May 1, wherein
Superintendent of Schools, Donald Boyer, Principal
Habeisen and Assistant Superintendent Abel presented
information regarding Career Academies, as noted in the
May 1 minutes:

Dr. Boyer, Superintendent, introduced the
Career Pathways information for discussion and
review. He commented on issues with communication
of the program with students and parents, state
standards and goals in this area, and the
responsibility of school districts to implement
mandated standards and goals. Dr. Elise Abel,
provided additional details of the four Career
Pathways programs including their relationship to
PDE standards, high school reform research,
student advisory services, and the Small Learning
Communities philosophy.

Mr. Habeisen, high school principal,
outlined his role in the development of the
Career Pathways, its implementation with students
and communication with staff regarding
scheduling, expertise of staff, and other related
information. Dr. Boyer presented his recommendation for Board consideration. The Board discussed problems with communications with students, parents, and educators, scheduling for the 2006-2007 school year for students and staff, changing of Career Pathways for students, core curriculum in career pathways, impact on department teams of the career pathways, teacher assignment within pathways and student choice of courses throughout their high school experience. After lengthy discussion, the consensus was to consider the recommended motion as presented at the May voting meeting.

Mr. Adams, continuing his commentary on the May Board meeting noted:

By the next Board meeting, they got all kinds of other parents coming in. All of a sudden, these parents who had their kids signing up for this pathway or that pathway found out that the pathway means something. That means, ‘now my kid is going to have this set of teachers for three years, four years,’ whether that is good or bad-- and so that took on a life of its own at that point.
The minutes of the May 15 meeting reflected the parent/community pressure the Board was clearly feeling.

After a lengthy discussion among the Board members concerning the Career Pathways, Mr. Duane Field made a motion to amend the Career Pathways board action request to:

“Approval for the Administration to schedule High School students without linking student and staff schedules to Career Pathways but with the understanding that we will continue to integrate career education and work standards into our planned programs.” Mr. Dale Lethers seconded the motion. Vote by roll call to amend the board action resulted in the motion carrying [6-3].

Vote by roll call on the amended Item A. Career Pathways resulted in the motion carrying [7-2].

Eugene Habeisen and assistant principal Tillery were shocked; some of the teachers even expressed surprise and dismay at the severity of the response as the board actions effectively killed the initiatives.

Many thought that the teacher and parent action would force a reexamination of the process and perhaps slow the implementation down. Conversations with several teachers indicated that few expected the entire reform to be
scrubbed, even those most vehemently opposed to the initiative. To the spectators present, there was a ‘throw the baby out with the bath water’ sense regarding this action.

Aftermath

I had settled on this site for the study long before the spring of 2006 board meetings. The site visits began in August of 2006, at which point emotions were still high and many of the aftereffects of the failed initiative were just becoming evident. The following section explores the ramifications of this action for the participants and the surprising consequences of the board decision.

Bitterness and Disappointment

Teachers were quite willing to share their feelings and perceptions about the reform in the months after its demise. As might be expected, reaction was mixed but emotionally charged. Among some teachers there was vitriolic anger that the school had seemingly wasted so much time and effort on the initiative. Some members of the faculty were saddened by the loss of so many positive
characteristics of the reform. Still others were eager to note that they never thought the reform was appropriate in the first place.

Responses from the teachers were scattered, regarding why the school chose the model, indicating a less than solid understanding of the objectives of the reform. Several participants felt that the reform was undertaken at least in part as means of personalizing the school and commented that, “We personalize anyway,” and “good teachers always personalize.” Several remarked that the idea of the reform was to provide career opportunities or examination for the students, although one noted that the academies “really don’t serve a purpose.” A math teacher, Wil Dasin, indicated that the reform “appears to be a matter of convenience for the funding.” This was not the only mention of the perception that the reform was initiated because funding was available. This actually became one of the common themes among the stakeholders’ perceptions.

The absence of flexibility in the academies arrangement raised the ire of parents and teachers alike. A social studies teacher remarked, “Kids can’t choose their careers this soon,” while a support staffer claimed, “8th graders hardly know what they want to be
when they grow up, and then they’re stuck.” Teachers interviewed indicated concern that students could not be guaranteed their first choice and for the same reasons of balance that were stated in regard to teachers.

The structured view of the reform held by Mr. Habeisen, dictated that each academy should be the same size, forcing students into their second choice or even placing students in opposition to their preferences to “even out the numbers.” A document recovered from the principal’s notes drove this preoccupation with balancing home. The sheet was a tally of students who had selected the various academies. At the top were the student requested totals: Arts 223, Business 100, Health and Human Services 270, Engineering (Industry) 386. A notation across the top of the page, “switch to Bus.” accompanied numbers of students that were to be switched out of their chosen academies. The new balance after the switches, marked across the bottom of the page, was to be Arts 203; Health and Human Services 234; Industry 315; and Business 227.

Staff emotions were highly charged when discussing their perception of the reform’s efficacy, ranging from anger and feelings of disenfranchisement to support for the concept, though not its execution to concern for the
future of the school. A respected member of the science department noted, “The way it was half-assed in our school destroyed any possible impact, due to the faculty’s frustration.” Harold Spaulding, a teacher with many years of experience and little time for gregarious responses summed it up well commenting, “Liked the concept, disliked the implementation methods.” Several others graphically described their disdain for the implementation process, noting, “It was shoved down our throats.”

Some results were mixed, as one former industry academy teacher cited, “the career academies concept is good but I have a concern about the warm fuzzy aspects.” The phrases “warm and fuzzy,” and “touchy-feely” came up often and were usually portrayed in a negative light.

Several responses cited the size of the faculty as “too small” to properly implement the reform, and a number cited a “lack of staff development” as a critical factor in the negative perceptions. “Too many students and too few faculty” was a concern of one teacher. Some expressed concern that students would have been “locked in” to career choices from grade nine on, significantly limiting them academically.
The advisor program and the meetings that were part of this program were the source of many of the negative comments. Numerous teachers throughout the range of experience and across most subject areas labeled advisor as too “touchy-feely.” In addition, many teachers felt ill-equipped to ‘personalize’. “I am a teacher, not a counselor,” was an oft-heard exclamation.

One activity day during which the Arts and Humanities students were engaged in tie-dying was roundly criticized, as was the infamous painting pumpkins exercise. Several professional staff members, including a faculty leader, noted the “loss of instructional time” as a critical concern with these and other activities. These concerns also were noted in the evaluation report completed during the second year of implementation. Others however found the special academy and advisor activities meritorious in the area of personalization a key goal of the reform.

The most common and damaging concerns focused in on the communication and implementation of the reform. Lack of planning on the part of the administration was a broadly held perception. Lack of training offered to teachers was also agreed upon as a considerable deficit of the implementation at Prestman. As one teacher noted,
“They expect us to ‘just do it’.” Several indicated that the reform, “was launched without adequate information given to staff prior to implementation.”

A slightly conflicting but equally negative appraisal came from a senior member of the teaching faculty. She opined that the reform, “consumes a great deal of time planning and implementing to the point where its value is questionable.”

Teachers from all strata of the staff expressed concerns such as, “There was no buy in,” or, “students have not bought into this program,” and still, “there is not enough staff support,” for the reform. Teachers also seemed to feel that the school was not suited well for the selected type of small learning community reform. “We do not have the staff to make a SLC program work efficiently.” “We don’t have the number of faculty we need to adequately implement.” Further, although smaller schools have attempted and been successful with SLCs, “We’re too small to merit reorganization,” and “Our school is too small to have SLCs work effectively with academies so it’s very difficult to implement SLCs as intended.”

Of those who truly believed in the reform, there were some positive notes. One educator remarked that the
reform was “extremely valuable, but not all saw the benefit.” One of the academy coaches indicated that the reform provided a “great resource for all students,” and “an excellent way for all students to be successful.” Two of the reform proponents also keyed in on professional benefits, “I like the team teaching opportunities,” and, “coordination of staff and individualization for students had great potential.”

A social studies teacher also reported that increased opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines would have been a benefit. Some liked the planned “community building opportunities” and remarked that the concept “provided excellent opportunities for student engagement and success.”

Finally, as is often the case in a volatile setting, there were polar opposites expressed among the staff. One long time teacher indicated that she “disliked the lost connections” which would have resulted between faculty members within her discipline, and for students with similar interests, such as science fair kids, who might now be parsed out into several disparate academies. Another teacher indicated satisfaction with the opportunities for “team teaching and collaboration” but decried the potential lost subject area camaraderie. Some
appreciated the personalized structures, “we have a chance to really know the kids,” but again others countered often with, “it was all a bunch of touchy-feely stuff.”

Collateral Damage

Since the board action, several key staff members directly involved in the design and implementation of reform resigned their positions, left the district, or have been reassigned to less strategic roles within Overland Schools.

The principal, Mr. Habeisen, an eight-year veteran of that position, resigned only a few months after the board actions of spring 2006. While there were other concerns related to his decision, the dismantling of the SLC reform loomed as a large factor according to several individuals close to the situation. He has since moved on to a principalship in another district.

The assistant principal, Mrs. Tillery whose role was to support the principal and execute communications and directives related to the reform, was named interim principal upon the resignation of the principal. She applied for the permanent principal post, and though teachers remarked that she was “doing a fine job” and
was, “holding the school together,” she was not selected for the role. In fact, she was reassigned to a middle school assistant position. Many would consider this a significant demotion, as she had effectively been the high school principal for the majority of the 2006-2007 school year.

In August of 2007, I attempted to contact Jamie Kauffman, the Academic Services Coordinator, for a follow up interview. The automated e-mail reply was ominous; “Mrs. Kauffman is no longer serving the district in this capacity. She may be reached at Sunnyvale Elementary, where she will be serving as a reading specialist.” This latest role change is perhaps the most significant. An individual of district administrative rank, in this case, the SLC grant writer, transferred to a support function at a single elementary is quite extraordinary.

A Summary of Stakeholder Perceptions

What follows is a summary of the key perceptions of small schools reform, as witnessed by the stakeholders at Prestman High School. Included in these perceptions are concerns regarding the need for reform, the applicability
of the reform at Prestman, the planning of the reform, communication, the advisor program, career academies and pathways, and curricular and instructional implications of the reform.

Uncertainty Concerning the Need for Reform

The data indicate that few teachers, community members, or students were aware of or sold on the need for reform. It is critical that all of their concerns are well vetted and published to the community at large, even though to do so is potentially damaging to the reputation of the district in the short term. Without agreement that reform is both necessary and timely, participation will be limited to what is required and nothing more. Buy-in will not be achieved under these circumstances, creating the potential for catastrophe at the advent of serious concerns.

Applicability of the Reform

Data indicated a divergence between fact and opinion in this area. Most stakeholders among the rank and file, and the community seemed to feel that school and/or district were “just fine” before the reform. Evidence existed to the contrary, including test scores from PDE,
Standard and Poor ratings, and other sources. Even after the initiative was introduced, discussed, designed, implemented (at least in part) and dismantled, perceptions persisted that there was no real need for it, and thus no need for change.

Many stakeholders, primarily teachers, were also under the impression that their school was “too small,” both understaffed and lacking sufficient student numbers for any version of SLC reform. Teachers also expressed significant concern about the instructional impact of the initiative.

Planning

A critical component of successful reform is the participation of all stakeholders. This reform began as a federal grant, which stemmed from a community-wide assessment of the district (the Future Search Conference). The writers of this initiative did not engage the stakeholders in that same level of inclusiveness as they created the grant and implemented the initiative at Prestman. As one coach noted, “we were mostly kept in the dark,” regarding the development of the grant and initiative.
Often grant writing is a lonely experience, due to the nature of the process, deadlines, specialized language use requirements and the expert knowledge of how to obtain funds. These skills are usually possessed by only a few, or only one at the district level, as in the case of Overland School District. Involving stakeholders from the outset however, perhaps even reconvening the original 78 contributors to the Future Search Conference, would have been logical. That action could also have prevented some of the shock and consternation that arose as various phases of the implementation caught folks by surprise. With more participants in the process, there would have been more voices available to handle dissent, explain processes to teachers and parents, or at the very least assist in tamping the flames of discontent down to manageable levels.

Communication

A careful review of several years of school board minutes and agendas showed that little had been done in the way of communicating plans or progress with the SLC and pathways reform. School board meetings are by law, public, and as such provide an acceptable venue to share positive aspects of a particular program or initiative.
In Overland school district, based on review of board minutes, many citizens attended the school board meetings and voiced their opinions, but little was available to them to opine on regarding the reform. One document found was listed as a Small Learning Communities Update, but in fact was simply an 11-point listing of factoids from national news that supported high school redesign in general. It would have been impossible for the school board to understand the reform from this document, nor could they gauge the progress of the initiative. School board meetings could have provided a key communication tool for the administration throughout this implementation.

Efforts to communicate more details about the pathways approach and the reform were insufficient. The district website did have a small amount of information on the Career Pathways at Prestman, but the information was static, just a definition with new data rarely added. Parents were invited to an open house to learn about the pathways, but the effort seemed too little for such a major program. Students were ‘oriented’, but along with all of the other things that overwhelm a high school student, the one-time orientation to the pathways was inadequate.
Advisor Program

The advisor program at PHS was perceived as a mostly successful venture. Teachers and students appreciated the opportunity to return to a known place and group of peers over time. The program allowed the teacher a venue to share a variety of important concepts with the students, and to serve as a trusted adult. Students listed the items they most wanted to learn about in advisory. The items were mature and thoughtfully selected, and ranged from career choices, to teen pregnancy, to bullying, test preparation, and understanding others and one’s self.

Some activities of the SLCs and advisories early on were not received well however, generating the ‘touchy-feely’ perspective and a sense among some that the time would be better spent with academic pursuits. One communications arts teacher sums up several perspectives,

We painted pumpkins. We did tie-dye t-shirts. We did all these different activities, where the kids are like, “Why are we doing this?” “Why are we sitting here?” You know, a lot of kids were thinking, “I should be in my biology lab.” So, I don’t think that the teachers had a buy-in at that point either, so, they weren’t pumping it for the most part. I mean even I try,
but my homeroom is like “relax about it.” You know, unless it’s totally sincere, they can see through it.

Academies and Pathways

While a number of staff members, primarily coaches, saw the value of academic strands that supported a child’s growth toward an eventual career, the overriding sense was that the children were too young in grade 8 to make such a critical decision. Most people believed that there was positively no way in the structure for a student to switch once the choice had been made. Had that been the case it would have been untenable for most. However, the administration indicated that there were possibilities for exceptions. Unfortunately, once again this was not communicated well to the public or the teachers.

Parents and students were clearly concerned when they realized the implications of students having to “pick and stick” with an academy in grade 8, and that their ‘choice’ might not be available due to the expectation of balancing academy numbers. Likewise, teachers expressed consternation over “ending up” in an academy that they had not selected.
Curricular and Instructional Implications

The decisive point in the attempted implementation of the Career Academies and Pathways was reached when teachers were told they would have to teach all levels of the curriculum to the students in their academy. Most teachers perceived that this would give all teachers several new preps, and de facto make every teacher a first year teacher--in at least some of the classes they taught. All students likewise would have teachers inexperienced in a particular course, for at least some of their classes. The perceived sacrifice of expertise in the name of a reform, touted to improve student performance, was at the very least ironic to some, intolerable to most. Teachers also repeatedly expressed concern with how they would include career academy language in their academic discipline strand. An exasperated social studies teacher asked, “how does a Civics teacher include elements of science in his lesson on voting?”
Every image leaves an afterimage on the retina, if even for just a moment. In the world of school reform, there are afterimages retained, regardless of the degree of success or failure of the initiative in question. Such is the case at Prestman High School, for there remain several latent images of what was once the small school reform.

Principal Habeisen noted in his interviews with me that one of the driving factors behind the pacing of the Pathways model at Prestman was the construction schedule for the new high school. Many years earlier, the Future Search Committee had identified overcrowding at the high school as a major factor of concern. Consequently, the board undertook the task of funding and approving design for a new high school. Because the school was engaged in the SLC reform model at the time of design, the school was to be built to support the academies structures.

Despite the abandonment of the formal SLC program, the design of the school survived, and the building is well on its way to completion (fall 2007). This will raise some interesting dilemmas in the structuring of departments and classes, unless the school fully follows
the Project 720 process as noted above. In that case, the adage ‘what goes around, comes around’ seems apropos, in that the new school would likely use the wing and floor structure as originally conceived, to feature some form of school within a school!

The advisor program, installed as a key element of the SLC reform has survived the chopping block. While all teachers and students do not fully support, or in some cases understand, its function and form, a majority seems to accept that there is good to be had from the advisor program.

Students and their advisor get to know one another over the four years of the relationship, and the advisor can serve as a trusted adult, career counselor, academic mentor, and friend. Students within each advisory grouping can grow closer, establishing a peer group spanning four grades, and the older students can develop some leadership skills, mentoring the 9th and 10th graders.

Although not creatively titled, and far from their original lofty purpose, small learning communities still exist at Prestman. They have been renamed SLC A, B, C and D. Students do not select nor do they belong to a particular SLC. However the teachers are all divided into these groupings that replace the former Career Academies.
In these collaborative groupings, the coaches still lead the meetings, but the foci are on larger school-wide improvement issues. These range from improving the graduate exit project, to literacy in the content areas, to improving the rigor of the senior year and more. The groups are cross-curricular, providing variety and allowing creativity and collaboration to flourish. Teachers often discuss instructional matters, and to do so with a colleague from another discipline can add a perspective not previously considered.

In the early months of 2007, Academic Services Coordinator Kauffman noted that, although the small learning communities reform had been largely dismantled by the spring 2006 board action, the district nevertheless is now formally engaged in Pennsylvania’s Project 720. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education Website (August 3, 2007), Project 720 is

Named for the number of days a Pennsylvania student spends in school from 9th through 12th grades, Project 720 ensures that all students have access to college-preparatory courses in core subject areas, additional Advanced Placement courses and smaller learning environments for better one-on-one teacher-to-student interaction.
The degree of understanding of Project 720 among the board or staff is not known, but there is a marked similarity between this reform and the former effort at Prestman High School, namely the emphasis on smaller learning environments. As Julia Nethers, a support staff member, noted in a follow-up discussion, “history may repeat itself” with Project 720. Allegedly, teachers have not been fully engaged at the grass roots level, parents remain largely uninformed, and the reform process is marching onward “just like the SLC project did.” This likely will not bode well for those who hope to see enduring improvements as the result of such initiatives.

The conditions prompting the district to look into reform models—overcrowding, dropouts, poor performance on standardized tests, and lack of personalization—remain problematic. The reform, having been swept away, did not achieve its goals. In fact, many of the teachers remarked that the elements of concern were not significantly impacted by the short-lived reform effort.

Recognizing that Project 720, the new school design, and the prior school problems are all still in the mix, it is likely that the district will continue to pursue reform models that might address these conditions. Pressure to perform on state assessments may be the most
significant driving factor as the district struggles to meet state and federal benchmarks.

As noted at the outset, significant reform of any organization, school or otherwise, must be born out of a true need, must be well-considered, appropriately tailored for the organization, and supported by the stakeholders in the organization--in particular, the teachers, students, parents, and community at large.

Scrutiny of the data on student performance, dropout rates, teacher attrition, and other factors clearly showed the need for some reform at Prestman High School. Smaller Learning Communities, SWAS, and Career Academies are all valid initiatives capable of impacting positively on the concerns at Prestman. Unfortunately, and sadly, certain critical elements necessary for successful reforms of this nature were either conspicuously absent, poorly implemented, or only partially realized.
Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

In the Context of High School Reform

Since the advent of comprehensive high schools early in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, numerous reform efforts have come and gone, and come again under different guises, aimed at improving the format, content, or instructional delivery of high schools in America. \textit{Breaking Ranks}, a 1996 report by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Foundation, made nine key recommendations for school reform that have guided efforts for the past eleven years. These recommendations included language suggesting that the maximum secondary school size not exceed 600 students. The recent publication of \textit{Breaking Ranks II}, in 2004, reiterated and focused these positions into three groupings of recommendations. These expectations suggest that the most effective school improvements are created by personalization of the school environment, collaborative and leadership efforts coupled with the effective use of data, and finally, joining of the two to develop
personalized curriculum, instruction, and assessment. One recurring reform practice advocates downsizing large comprehensive schools into ‘smaller learning communities,’ house systems, schools-within-a-school, (SWAS), mini-schools, and career academies.

Credible research findings (Fine & Sommerville, 1998; Raywid, 1996) have strongly supported this move from large comprehensive high schools toward more personalization and smaller learning environments, but despite findings in support of the downsizing reform movement, numerous efforts by larger schools to adopt a school-within-a-school or SWAS model have been unsuccessful or have shown negligible gains. Some researchers (Cox, 2002; Robinson-Lewis, 1991) have found that reform efforts aimed at reducing the size or effective size of schools in order to improve test scores, personalize the environment, reduce violence and drug issues and more, are not succeeding as expected. As noted above, these failures may be the result of political, cultural, economic or philosophical forces, or a combination of various factors (Cotton, 2001; Gregory, 2001).

Smaller learning communities reform, in particular the schools-within-a-school movement, has been the
subject of many studies, dissertations, and scholarly works (Plath, 1965; Muncy & McQuillan, 1991; Robinson-Lewis, 1991; Raywid, 1996; Oxley, 2001; Raywid & Schmerler, 2003; Copland & Boatright, 2004).

Researchers have substantial credibility in support of claims on both sides of the downsizing reforms argument, however the notion of creating a smaller school or group of schools within large comprehensive institutions would appear to represent a solution to the issues of size in schools. In an ideal SWAS structure, teachers and students would be involved in an academy or house as the result of choice, and these choices would be made along lines of academic or vocational interests. Clearly, choice of academy or house affiliation would likely increase the engagement and commitment of both students and teachers.

Conclusions

This study has explored the perceptions of key stakeholders in a larger suburban, formerly comprehensive high school that adopted a schools-within-a-school model (SWAS). Through a naturalistic case study, I explored
participant perceptions about the challenges of implementation, elements of SWAS that worked, elements that did not work, and why. The findings, derived from this exploratory research involving teachers, administrators, school board members, community members, and parents in the Overland School District’s Prestman High School and community, yielded some noteworthy understandings.

The findings from the research at Prestman can be sorted into several broad themes or lessons learned. These themes may assist the reader or future researchers in understanding the nature of school change in general and the dynamics of implementing significant systemic change in high schools specifically.

The first of these themes concerned establishing and maintaining a strong research base for the reform— in other words, have a solid understanding of the nuts and bolts of the reform. Reformers also must identify and then communicate and collaborate with important stakeholders in the school and community and rely on these informed sources to help guide the reform and support its implementation. It is critical to educate the public— parents, community members, and students, all of whom need to know what is coming, why it’s coming and the
effect it will have on them when it comes. Two other key themes are the importance of flexibility within the reform when challenges or obstacles arise, and finally knowing and acting on what matters most--which elements of the reform must be preserved, which can be revised, and which should be discarded.

Do Your Homework

To effectively reform a school or program, school leaders must have extensive knowledge of what their system lacks, what the root causes of the deficit are, and the elements needed to affect the desired change. Leaders should also know as much as possible about how their system might respond to change. School leaders should regularly mine, aggregate, disaggregate, and rearrange the data of achievement, attendance, school violence, dropouts, demographic shifts, and other hard evidence of school vigor. This process should be accompanied by critical analysis of trends, warning signs, and other evidence that change may be needed to correct the course and improve the health of the system.

Other forms of evidence must be examined by those initiating the reform, such as sense of belonging, personalization, perceived academic rigor, social
dysfunction, and other factors that help to paint a more complete picture of a school. Leaders must gather and analyze these data from all sources including test results, graduate surveys, teacher feedback, parent and community organizations.

Unfortunately, in this particular case at Prestman High School, the siren call of massive grant funding along with a sense of urgency to do something-- anything, caused district and school leaders to act without the key groundwork and reflection needed for successful reform. Though Overland School District collected performance and demographic data as part of the strategic plan, these broader data were then used to directly plan the reform rather than providing an impetus for further more specific study. In addition, while the strategic planning process included a broad spectrum of stakeholders, the initial reform planning team was narrowed to only a handful. The grant writers appeared to have cursorily scanned the literature for reform models then sought funding based on available grant monies. The time frame from the initial proposal writing to the approval of the grant to the start of actual implementation was incredibly tight. Because of this compressed schedule, the school district did not appear to have the necessary
time to correctly identify and implement the reform effort that would best address their unique needs.

The planners of the reform also appeared to be largely unaware of the reaction that various aspects of the reform might generate among stakeholders. Consideration of the possibility that stakeholders might have significant concerns and misgivings does not appear to have entered into their thinking. This created a situation that would eventually hobble the administration as they quickly found themselves too far into the reform to change course, but with growing opposition making progress increasingly difficult.

The amount of money flowing into the district from the grant, and language of the grant itself, obligated the district to continue implementation despite the conflicts. The grant document, and stipulations from the Department of Education, forced certain elements to be present in the reform that were not well matched to either the needs of the district or the abilities of the school to accommodate such changes. Chief among these was the pressure toward pure SLCs with fixed faculty and forcibly balanced student memberships.

One area in which the Philadelphia reform failed to meet its promise was in lack of choice, both for teachers
and for students. Raywid and Schmerler (2003) noted that while students hoped to select a SLC based upon interest, there was no guarantee that the school of choice would be available to them. At Prestman, the exact same concern arose. Students were reassigned in order to balance academies, despite their request for specific placement. Overland District had neither the personnel available, nor the will to force school-wide curricular, instructional, and staffing changes over the objections of the teachers and the public.

Significant concerns and negative results surface when SWAS models are only partially implemented, because of incompatibility with prevailing organizational structures, lack of support from all district stakeholders, and insufficient human resources (Copland and Boatright, 2004; Oxley, 1990). This was reflected in the Prestman experience at several levels. First, the dramatic change from departmental structures to small learning communities had so many attendant conflicts that the teachers could not see the forest for the trees, could not comprehend the larger value of the changes in many cases. All district stakeholders were not even aware of the scope of the change, so could hardly have been
considered ‘supportive’ of the reform. Staffing was simply not adequate to the needs of the four SLCs.

Daggett (2003) cites three stages necessary for every successful career pathways program. The first of these is that it is critical for successful programs to develop a clear, shared understanding among teachers, administrators, board members, and the public of the need for change. Teachers at Prestman were confused and frustrated with the implementation, board members were largely uninformed about the particulars of the reform, and the public was largely taken by surprise by the ramifications of the reform. All this clearly illustrated a fatal lack of attention by the reformers to attend to the need for this sense of shared understanding.

Communicate the Need, Collaborate on the Solution

Once data are collected, leaders have an obligation to say ‘here is where we are, these are the problems, here is where we want to be.’ And then in a productive, collaborative, and inclusive process, they must ask, ‘how shall we get there?’ It is imperative that school leaders engage a broad base of stakeholders in the development phase of the reform.
Prestman High School officials fell far short in keeping information flowing to all stakeholders, and failed to gather long-term, broad-based support through meaningful collaborative efforts. Deborah Meier (2006), the renowned founder of Central Park East Elementary School, and significant contributor to the body of research on small schools, urges reformers to keep lines of communication flowing throughout the reform. It is critical to engage all affected parties as the school changes. Copland and Boatright (2004) emphasized the importance of a persistent focus on connections with families and the community. Leaders such as Mr. Habeisen and other administrators in the Overland District needed to take advantage of every opportunity to see and be seen, to connect with the larger community. Doing so could have engendered deeper levels of commitment and cooperation from stakeholders regarding this reform.

Stakeholders need to have their perspectives heard, and reformers need to hear them. Meier (2006) states, “Arrogance can kill the whole program off. Beware the ‘one true way’ and don’t abandon the ones ‘left behind’” (p. 656). Many teachers at Prestman felt that the school was too small to divide into SLCs, and they made this known in meetings and to one another. Indeed the
difficulties the administration encountered when it came to assigning teachers and students to SLC and balancing those groupings bears this concern out well. Had Overland’s District officials and the Prestman principal listened to the teachers and others during the grant application process and thereafter, they might have avoided some potential problems and conflicts in implementing a small schools reform at Prestman High.

Teachers are most familiar with the machinations of the classroom-- instruction, relationships, curriculum, and student interests. In fact, the farther removed from the teaching moment, the less likely it is that the individual will understand the complex nature of the classroom. This is not a condemnation of the role of administrator. Rather, recognition that the administrator, grant writer, and consultant must consider the essential elements of instruction, and interact directly and intensively with those involved most intimately with the classroom process. Copland and Boatright (2004), suggested that “When staff members invest time and energy in creating and reinforcing positive messages for teaching, learning, and behavior, daily glitches will emerge as learning opportunities,” (p 767) not as roadblocks.
At Prestman High School, teachers and other staff had limited exposure to the research and little involvement in the development phases of the SLC reform; thus, solutions were not forthcoming and roadblocks were prevalent. Failure to include these individuals in any major reform effort runs the considerable risk of amounting to little more than something that looked good on paper but failed dramatically in reality. The evidence gathered indicates that this occurred at Prestman High School at least in part.

Failure to hear or heed the teachers throughout the process added fuel to the discontent and concern that grew during the reform implementation at Prestman. Meier noted, “we tend to overlook that the unofficial powers often end up undermining the official ones” (p 658). Had the stakeholders felt that they were heard, and that their concerns were addressed, the school board conflict might never have taken place. Teachers might have worked through the challenges and shared concerns in an orderly progression toward improvement of the school. It behooves all involved in the reform process to be cognizant of the impact that stakeholder opinions and potential mobilization can have on a reform effort.
The timing of communication and action is critical. The series of events that inexorably led to the cancellation of the reform by the board was accelerated by the principal’s announcement in March of 2006 that all teachers would be expected to teach all subject matter within their individual discipline the very next year. Although this information was cursorily shared at the first faculty meeting in the fall of 2004, it was not mentioned again until the spring of 2006. At that time, the principal, bereft of any option to reverse the decision and seemingly unwilling to face the teacher discontent, took a trip out of town and left the teachers to stew about their impending fates.

As Meier (2006) admonished, these reforms take time. What was designed to dovetail precisely with the years of the grant might have been more successfully spread over several more years. Meier suggested that the reform should start with a smaller group of teachers and students, and then as successes grow and problems are worked out, students, staff and programs can be added. Prestman, on the other hand, chose to change everything in a very short span.

Successful conditions created and sustained for start up of the small schools reform in Chicago included
advance planning time, stability, student-focused curriculum, and quality teaching and assessment (Wasley, et al., 2001). Unfortunately, many of these elements were not evident at Prestman. Advance planning time was painfully absent when teachers were forced to approach the school board in the spring of 2006 with concerns that the entire curricular delivery would change the next fall with the new SLC teaching assignments. Quality teaching and assessment could not have been accomplished at PHS, given the expectation that the well-practiced lessons of previous years, would give way to preparing and delivering the full barrage of departmental courses by each teacher in an academy. As one teacher noted, it would be as if “we were all first year teachers.” It was also not clearly established that the Prestman model would lead to a broad community and student-focused curriculum.

Another essential factor for the success of the reform in Chicago was ongoing development featuring vision-directed planning, regularly renegotiated roles and responsibilities (for parents, professionals and students), data-driven decision-making, and the presence of “high levels of academic press and strong social support” (Wasley, et al., 2001. p. 65). Aside from strong
social support, none of these elements appeared to have been engaged even nominally at Prestman. Teachers even questioned some of the support elements as too touchy-feely. Again, as Michelle Fine, as cited by Gewertz (2001) pointed out, “hugging is not the same as algebra” (p. 4).

Finally, the Chicago schools that showed the greatest gains also included student and school-based staff development and sufficient autonomy to bring creative ideas to reality. At Prestman High, there was little evidence of anything beyond cursory staff development, consisting of monthly meetings and faculty briefings. Autonomy was not present within the SLCs, except, to a degree, at the advisory level.

Public Relations

In addition to maintaining open communications with the staff, the larger community must be well informed of any reform effort and its potential impact on them. School officials initially held orientation events for the students, community, and staff to acquaint them with the SLC concept. These efforts fell short of fully informing the stakeholders of the intent, processes, ramifications, and the very nature of the reform. It is
essential that the public relations campaign be rigorous, well planned and, especially, ongoing.

A simple and effective way to keep the public informed and engaged is to provide seats for community members on major planning committees, or subcommittees. This was not done in Overland School District beyond the original strategic planning process. Periodic newsletters with specific section(s) dedicated to the reform or new initiative could have played an important role in the information pipeline. Posting these articles on the district or building website, and providing a response link could allow the community to remain both informed and engaged.

Regular progress reports before the board of school directors could provide another public forum for the dissemination of key elements of the reform. Although some reports were presented to the Overland board, there is evidence that these were not detailed reports of the progress, plans, or consequences of SLCs at Prestman, but rather fact sheets about aspects of the reform such as personalization. Meier (2006) recommends a “wise family/school coordinator, trained to help allies with different kinds of tunnel vision to work well together” (p. 662). Such a person would maintain the open
communications lines necessary for community buy in and inclusion in the reform effort.

*Be Flexible*

The Prestman High School principal did not adjust the initiative to accommodate the growing concerns voiced by faculty and students, though he was aware of their positions throughout the process. Teachers shared concerns on multiple occasions, even including questioning the curricular and teacher load changes at the very first meeting discussing the reform. Unfortunately, little was changed as a result teacher or student commentary. Meier (2006) urged reformers to recognize that there are choices that must be made. All of the elements in a reform cannot be implemented in every situation. Smaller learning communities schools must accept tradeoffs that the large comprehensive school did not have to make. At Prestman, foreign languages, for instance, could not be maintained in the SLCs as they were in the comprehensive high school design. A decision needed to be made that either the SLCs would remain pure (all teachers teach only within the SLC) and languages options are limited, or the SLCs allow teachers from other academies to teach some of their students. The same
issue focused around participation in band, chorus or orchestra. The SLCs could not be totally pure if these elements were significant to the students and community. Prestman, or any other school in this situation, simply would not be able to cut band or French or other elective offerings simply because they did not ‘fit’ the model.

School officials should have seen marked differences between SLC research and the reality of their school. The trips that the visiting teams made generated comments from teachers that the schools were wonderful settings but they seemed, “utopian,” too good to be true, and other such comments. The schools did not match Prestman in critical aspects such as community, demographics, and choice. Each of the communities in which the visited schools were located had at least four other high schools, and participation in the academy schools was by choice, unlike at Prestman.

Administration and planning team members also failed to anticipate and act on critical aspects of Prestman’s educational system that would conflict with the full implementation of a SLC reform model. Faculty size and distribution limitations, difficulties encountered with grade eight selection of academy by students, and the resistance of staff to drastically change what they were
teaching to accommodate their SLC placement were but three powerful roadblocks to engaging this reform as designed.

As in the Philadelphia reform effort, expectations were established at the highest levels, but inaction by top leadership helped harden resistance and strengthened resolve against the needed changes. When the teachers asked for clarification, adjustment support, or revision, they felt their concerns were falling on deaf ears, so their positions calcified at each new development. Rather than digging in his heels at the suggestions of teachers that the SLC model needed attention and revision, if Principal Habeisen had pulled back from the implementation and considered these suggestions, perhaps things might have gone differently. Mid-course adjustments could have mitigated the jarring effects that the teachers, students, and community felt in the spring of 2006.

“What Matters Most?”

Deborah Meier (2006) noted that small schools reform requires us to ask, “What matters most?” (p. 658). At Prestman, it is not clear that this essential question was asked. There were concerns with test scores, yet
small schools reforms do not always result in improved test scores. There were issues with overcrowding at the school, but when the reform was implemented, a new school was not to be built for several years. Some concerns with discipline were not born out in the actual data. So the questions bear repeating, what mattered most, and why did the school choose this model? It really does seem as if the first solution lighted upon was the popular SLC reform model, with some dazzling grant money attached to it. Small Learning Community reform has proven to be highly successful, but only when implemented under the proper conditions, established within the means of the district, accompanied by stakeholder buy-in and participation, and with the needs of the students at the forefront.

It seems that every reform has its zealots as well as its vociferous detractors. These aside, the majority opinions seemed to indicate that the reform at Prestman, while noble in intent, suffered from a lack of planning, ineffective training, poor communication, and an inability to make mid-course adjustments. Probably most damaging as far as many stakeholders were concerned was that the school appeared to be neither suited to the
reform nor was the reform suited to this educational community.

Chief among the deficient elements in Prestman’s effort was the failure to include key stakeholders in all aspects of research and development, implementation, and assessment. If Principal Habeisen had sought to build a broad team for development of the initiative, he surely would have called upon his trusted stakeholders, teacher leaders, and key outsiders to develop a palatable and effective program. However, the urgency of the grant and its rapid implementation timeline seemed to have obliterated this possibility. Also of enormous importance is the persistent, timely communication of critical messages to all stakeholders. These key messages included the need for reform, the value of SLC initiatives, and the applicability of the specific tenets at Prestman High, a reliable and valid timeline with measurable goals, and the possible pitfalls that might lie ahead.

Without stakeholder inclusion and input, the administrators could not know of the dangers lying in the road ahead. The absence of a sustained viable communication plan created a void that quickly filled with misinformation and misgivings at the building level and with the public. Because of these key missteps, the
Prestman SLC reform, noble as it appeared on paper, was doomed to consumption in the flames of discontent before the ink dried on the congratulatory funding letter.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Under certain conditions, and given appropriate planning, implementation, review, and renewal, small school reform is indeed a valid and effective pathway to improvement. However, small school structures are by no means a panacea, nor should they be expected to cure all ills of an ailing system. Small schools reforms are one of many ways to improve an educational system that has faltered due to political whim, economic stress, social devolution or institutional rigidity, yet it is these very factors which can cause a small schools reform to fail, or never get off the ground.

Reformers need to first be researchers of their own systems. They must know what is working, what is not, and why. The detail of understanding must be deep and rich before considering a possible reform measure. Reformers also must be outside researchers, seeking the best practices that most closely resemble the perceived solutions to their problems. In most cases schools that
have succeed at reform efforts are happy to share the genesis of the reform--and in that, similarities and differences to the researcher’s own school can be found.

Reformers must inform and engage all stakeholders in appropriate ways. It is appropriate to share power with each group of constituents thereby gaining trust, cooperation and the value of their ideas. Their participation will strengthen the reform and buffer against challenges that will come along.

Reformers must communicate thoroughly, consistently and smartly--sharing both successes and areas that are being revised. There should be means for constituents to give feedback, such as principal and parent forum discussions or web response forms. These efforts will pay dividends as the reform picks up speed.

Reformers need to be mindful that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Leaders must look carefully at their schools needs and select only those aspects of the reform model that apply or can be modified to apply. Wasting resources on nonessential bells and whistles is tantamount to burning dollars for heat.

Reformers should watch for regressions to older structures, traditional approaches, and convenience solutions, and be wary of potential failure associated
with autonomy, size, continuity, time, and control. In particular, reformers need to take a measured approach, avoiding the simultaneous startup of all aspects of the reform-- again a recipe for disaster.

School leaders who have researched and determined the best course for the reform, have engaged the stakeholders, have meted the reform elements to the school and have careful introduced the elements over time must also be mindful of the need to collect data on the reform. This data, both qualitative and quantitative will, with proper analysis, provide the impetus for the important work of mid-course corrections, additions or deletions of parts of the reform.

Finally, school leaders must be cognizant that there is a tendency to stick with a reform, regardless of its actual results. Whether this is due to ego, perceived wasting of resources, lost time, or stubbornness of the administrator, failure to change or abandon a failed program harms children and must be avoided at all cost. It is always advisable to have a plan B and C, and the will to change course as realities dictate.

It is hoped that this research may be of possible interest to others who are looking into smaller learning communities or schools within schools reforms and that
they will glean information from this study that will guide them in making the right choices in analysis of their needs, selection of reform model, communication to and inclusion of stakeholders, and implementation of the reform as it best suits their particular educational institution.

Suggestions for Researchers or Reformers

Some qualitative research, of which case study is a subset, can be said to be ‘theory generating’. This study may reveal certain truths that, under similar circumstances, may apply, and therefore be of use to other researchers or persons in the field. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as “transferability” (p. 297), but indicate that the burden of replication lies with future researchers, who must “accumulate empirical evidence about contextual similarity; the responsibility of the original investigator ends with providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgments possible” (p. 298).

Researchers may find the study interesting as it will add to the growing volume of knowledge about smaller learning communities, and in particular may add
significantly to the currently underrepresented area of research concerning stakeholder perceptions of school reforms. This study may also provide a point of triangulation for others researching similar situations in the SWAS movement.

Policymakers may turn to the findings in order to craft effective reform implementation policies, avoiding noted pitfalls and counterproductive, unintended consequences discovered through this work. There is also the possibility that observations about relationships in a changing learning community may aid those seeking to improve, evaluate or simply understand such environments.

Laura Desimone, in a 2002 article, discussed five critical factors for the successful implementation of comprehensive school reform. Desimone posited that the more specific, consistent, authoritative, powerful, and stable a policy is, the stronger its implementation will be. All five policy attributes contribute to implementation; specificity is related to implementation fidelity, power to immediate implementation effects, and consistency, authority, and stability to long-lasting change. Reformers may note that the plan at Prestman lacked the specificity and stability that Desimone (2002)
indicates as essential, and the implementation effort there suffered, perhaps because of this deficit.

Reformers looking to avoid some of the pitfalls of the Prestman experience may look to The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform. The Clearinghouse provides Step by Step, “an online collection of select tools and resources designed to aid schools as they plan, implement, and sustain school-wide reform programs” (NCCSR, 2003). The site lists, as the title suggests, step-wise procedures and guidelines for successful planning, implementation, evaluation, and sustenance of reforms, which include downsizing efforts. Clearly, resources are available to help schools engage and sustain meaningful reforms. Far too often, schools respond to internal and external pressures and concerns with poorly constructed, economically implausible or politically hazardous (or temporal) solutions that have little chance of authentic, permanent effect.

Researchers and reformers alike will concur that significant improvements in diverse areas such as test scores, dropout rates, school climate and graduation rates have been attributed by noted studies and researchers to small school reforms. Smaller learning communities are also known to increase sense of
belonging, contribution, and other factors of school happiness and satisfaction while decreasing school violence, bullying, and transition problems. It is no wonder, with the survival challenges faced by larger urban school districts that many would attempt to engage these kinds of reforms. It is also no surprise, given the history of educational reform movements that these reforms would experience widely varying degrees of local success.

On the heels of reform triumphs and successes, difficulties and failures, have come numerous studies examining these phenomena, as in the current study, that supply suggestions to help future brave visionaries try and get it right. Those hoping to successfully institute small schools reforms in their systems, can carry the knowledge of what has gone before, but they also must create a “culture of discipline” (Collins, 2001), must be endowed with the wisdom to make the right choices for their children’s futures, and must have the courage and flexibility to see the changes through, despite multiple, persistent, powerful, and daunting challenges.
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Appendix A

Stakeholder Survey

Initial Survey of Faculty Stakeholders

August 28, 2006

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for assisting with this research process. After analyzing your responses and the subsequent data that develops, I hope to provide a tool for schools and districts like yours, to help them consider the potential benefits or concerns associated with moving to some form of smaller learning communities (SLC), or schools-within-a-school (SWAS). You may also find the information useful as you work with these structures.

As part of the initial process, I need to know a little bit about your involvement with this district and public education in general. The responses to these questions will help me develop a better understanding of the district and its membership (stakeholders). I appreciate your assistance in this initial step in the process. The questionnaire should only take about 10 minutes. Please return the Informed Consent form and this questionnaire at the conclusion of the faculty meeting, or in the envelope as provided, by September 6, 2006. A stamp is enclosed for your convenience. Names and positions of respondents will not be disclosed. Thank you.

Questions:

1. How many years have you been with the district? (circle one)
   0-5   6-10   11-15   16-20   21 and up

2. How many years have you served as a teacher outside of this district? (circle or complete)
   0   1-4   5-8   9-12   Other_______

3. Please indicate highest degree/level attained:
   _a. Bachelor’s Degree
   _b. Master’s Equivalency
   _c. Master’s Degree
   _d. Master’s plus_______
   _e. D.Ed./Ph.D.
4. Gender: M F (circle)

Questions 5-11: On a scale of 1-5 please rate your level of experience outside of your school with the items in questions 5-11 below. Scale:

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<th>Considerable</th>
<th>Extensive</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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Examples for numerical ratings:

- No experience
- Went to a workshop
- School-based experiences
- Some committee work & school-based experience
- Leadership, design & assessment

5. Personalization of schools through advisories
   
   1 2 3 4 5

6. Student mentoring programs
   
   1 2 3 4 5

7. Curricular articulations through career strands
   
   1 2 3 4 5

8. Magnet or charter schools
   
   1 2 3 4 5

9. Class size reform (changing student-teacher ratio to improve performance)
   
   1 2 3 4 5

10. School size reform (changing school sizes to improve performance)
    
   1 2 3 4 5

11. Career Academies or other smaller learning communities within a larger school setting
(Do not include your experience with the career academy reform at your current school for #11.)
For the following elements, please indicate your level of involvement at this school.

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<th>3 Voluntary Participant</th>
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<th>5 Leadership, Design or Assessment</th>
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12. Strategic Plan

1 2 3 4 5

13. Assessment of attendance and dropout rate

1 2 3 4 5

14. Assessment of school-wide academic performance

1 2 3 4 5

15. Assessment of student discipline- trends or concerns

1 2 3 4 5

16. Personalizing the school through advisories or mentoring programs

1 2 3 4 5

17. Personalizing the school through other means

1 2 3 4 5

18. Physical design or arrangement of the school

1 2 3 4 5

19. Master schedule
20. Curriculum revision

21. Career Academies or Pathways implementation

22. In general terms, what do you feel are the potential benefits or drawbacks of schools-within-a-school type reforms?

23. What do you dislike or like about career academies or smaller learning communities in your school?

Thank you for your time. Should you have any questions or concerns about this or any other phase of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me directly. Please consider continuing your contribution to this research by participating in the interview process.

With much appreciation,

Jay Butterfield
717 757-6737

If you would be willing to continue your participation with a confidential direct interview, please print your name below.

Name: __________________________________________
Phone: __________________________________________
Best time to contact you: __________________________
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Name of Respondent: ________________________________
Mailing Address: __________________________________
Telephone Number: ________________________________
Email: ____________________________________________
Time of Interview: _________________________________
Date: _____________________________________________

I. Introduction:

a. Who I am (the interviewer):
   1. Jay Butterfield
   2. Refer to request letter and research description
   3. Completing D.Ed. in Educational Leadership

b. Purpose of the Study
   General Purpose of the study: To consider the perception by stakeholders of the efficacy of the move from a large comprehensive high school to smaller learning communities.

c. Authorization
   1. Refer to Informed Consent Form
   2. Refer to study affiliation and to whom you are responsible for these interviews.
   3. Will take notes during interview. Audio record if consent is given.

d. Use of the Information
   1. Information will be used in the dissertation.
   2. Interviews are only a part of this study’s data collection; other sources will include focus groups, a general survey and document analysis.
   3. Use of respondent’s name and/or quotations
      Study may employ some quotation to illustrate its observations, findings, or conclusion but participant names will not be used in the dissertation. Some sources may be referenced by pseudonyms and/or general role (experienced or newer teacher, administrator, student) as necessary for direct quotations. In this instance, association to a participant might be unavoidable due to identification by title.
e. Why is this subject being interviewed – How subject name was obtained
   1. Initially identified by the researcher as a key participant
   2. Referral by another source

f. Pause--- Any questions?

II. Biographical Information:
Ask for relevant history and background of respondent in terms of his/her current position.

III. THE QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss with me your involvement in the move to smaller learning communities. Did you have a particular role? How did you come to be involved?

2. If you were here before the smaller learning communities, what makes them different than the previous organization and delivery system? (Which characteristic elements of SWAS are present in the participant school?)

3. What kind of factors or occurrences do you perceive contributed to the move to smaller learning communities? (Why did your school choose the SWAS model?)


5. Since the change, how have the above factors changed? Has this been positive or negative? Please explain. (What is the stakeholder perceived degree of success or failure regarding these elements?)

6. Are you aware of anything that your school has done that is different from other schools that have approached this type of change? (How do differences in each school’s approach to SWAS result in unique benefits, or shortcomings?)

7. Are you aware of unexpected benefits or shortcomings as a result of the move to smaller learning communities? (How do differences in each school’s approach to SWAS result in unique benefits, or shortcomings?)
IV. Referrals:

1. Can you recommend other knowledgeable and informed individuals who would be willing to participate in the study and be interviewed?

2. May I use you as a reference when I contact that person?

V. Clarification: Follow-up Responses: Member Checks

1. Request follow-up return visit to clarify statements or to obtain additional information if necessary. Follow-up may also be done via email or by telephone.

VI. Conclusion:

1. Thank participant for time and participation.
2. REMINDER: send follow-up letter of thanks.
# A Career Pathways Planner

Your four year course planner worksheet
(To be updated annually)

## Appendix C

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#### Total Credits:

You are invited to schedule a meeting with your counselor to discuss your career focus and course selection. Every student must schedule a minimum of 30 credits per school year.

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Student Career Pathways Planner
A CAREER PATHWAYS PLANNER
Your four year plan worksheet
(to be updated annually)

Name ___________________________  Address ________________________

Pathway Choice: ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY  Career Choice: _________

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ELECTIVE COURSES:
*Required/Initial Grade/Quarter Courses
**Electives recommended for most career fields
***Electives recommended for technical skilled careers

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TOTAL CREDITS: You are invited to schedule a meeting with your counselor to discuss your careerfocus & course selection. Every student MUST schedule a minimum 25 periods per 8-day cycle.

Student Signature: ___________________________  Date: ____________
Parent Signature: ___________________________  Date: ____________
A CAREER PATHWAYS PLANNER
Four year course planner worksheet
(To be updated annually)

Name ____________________________  Address ____________________________

Pathway Choice: HEALTH & MAN SERVICES  Career Choice ____________________________

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You are invited to schedule a meeting with your counselor to discuss your career focus & course selection. Every student MUST schedule a minimum of 38 periods per school year.

Student Signature ____________________________  Date ____________________________
# Career Pathways Planner

## Subject

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## Required Courses

- Environmental Science
- Physical Education

## Elective Courses

- World Language
- Art
- Music
- Computer Science
- Family Consumer Science
- Elective Courses

## Credits

Student Signature: ____________________________ Date: __________

Parent Signature: ____________________________ Date: __________
VITA

Jay Vance Butterfield
3705 Long Point Dr., York, PA 17402

PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS EXPERIENCE
2008-Present: Intermediate Unit 13, Lancaster, PA
   Director of Instructional Services
2004-2008: Central York School District, York
   Principal, Central York High School
1999-2004: Hempfield School District, Landisville, PA
   Assistant Principal, Hempfield High School
1984-1999: Lampeter-Strasburg School District, Lampeter, PA
   Director of Choral Activities
   Chair of Fine Arts Department
   Chair of Building Professional Development
1984 (spring): Woodland Hills School District, Pittsburgh, PA
   Music Educator

EDUCATION
2008 D.Ed. Educational Leadership, Pennsylvania State University
2006 Superintendent’s Letter of Eligibility
1983 MA in Choral Conducting. Indiana University of Pennsylvania
1982 BA in Vocal Performance. Teacher certification. IUP

PRESENTATIONS
2007 PASCD State Convention, Hershey
2007 Waterbury Summit, State College, PA
2007 House Budget Committee, Harrisburg, PA
2007 Department of Education, Harrisburg, PA
2007 ASCD Annual Conference, Anaheim, CA
2005-2007
   Lincoln Intermediate Unit (IU12)
2006 Pennsylvania Integrated Technology Conference

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Pennsylvania Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
National Association of Secondary School Principals
Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals
Pennsylvania School Boards Association, associate member
Phi Delta Kappa, honorary education fraternity