SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF ITS EFFECTS ON A
SENDING COMMUNITY

A Dissertation by

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Submitted to the Department of Educational Leadership
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Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

December 2010

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SENDING COMMUNITY

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DEDICATION

To my wife Gita – who has been by my side throughout this endeavor – your persevering commitment and love for me and our family during these years enabled me to achieve this dream. To my three beautiful daughters Eva, Ellie, and Emma – who are young enough to remember Dad as "always being in school" – my love for you continues to grow each and every day. May you always have a passion for life-long learning. To my parents Roger and Pat Noble – who instilled in me the value of an education and inspired me years ago to become a teacher – throughout my life you have modeled for me what dedicated educators can do for the lives of our youth and our communities. Thank you all and I love you

Trust everybody, but cut the cards.
Finley Peter Dunne

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson, for her willingness to put up with my self-deprecating humor, "sprinter-like" disposition, and unfavorable choices for eating establishments. You were committed to being accessible to your students and I gained so much because of your commitment. Your consistent availability challenged and supported me in class, the Tuesday writing groups, Skype, and email. Your patience, support, and uncanny ability to make me think differently cultivated in me profound personal and professional growth.

I am grateful to dissertation committee members Mara Alagic and Jo Bennett, who provided me valuable council throughout my dissertation proposal and defense; Jay Price, who graciously stepped in to serve in the absence of the late Dr. Craig Miner; and particularly to Patrick Call who encouraged me to take the plunge into the program and supported me as I progressed. I am also indebted to the faculty in the WSU Educational Leadership Department, including Ray Calabrese and Randy Turk, who prepared me well for the dissertation journey. I especially want to thank Kathleen, Kim, Lisa, Robin and Bob from Cohort 16. I could not have made it without your companionship, and I will always consider you family. Bob, we began this journey together in the WSU District Leadership program in June of 2006 and now we have completed our doctorate together. The relationship we have built these past few years means so much to me.

Appreciation also goes out to the Community of Spring Valley who welcomed me and my research with interest and candor. I particularly appreciated the efforts of Alan Grier from Spring Valley who provided me with considerable documentation on the history of Spring Valley and their consolidation with Burr Ridge. I am grateful to the boards of education and district office staffs of USD 650 and USD 651 who encouraged and sustained me as I pursued

ABSTRACT

This research studied the affect of school consolidation on a sending community – a community that lost their high school – from a social constructionist perspective using the theory of social capital as the framework to explain conclusions. The researcher conducted the study using qualitative case study methods grounded in a naturalistic inquiry approach. Using Putnam"s (1995, 2000) theory of social capital, it was concluded the sending community tightly bonded when they felt threatened by outsiders" attempts at further consolidation. The sending community was more willing to bridge to the receiving community – the community that contained the district high school – when they stood to gain something in return and when there were high levels of trust between them. Implications are that school district leaders and boards of education should make efforts to better understand the history of sending communities in consolidated districts. Additionally, including people from sending communities in decision-making may prove valuable in enhancing communication and efforts for change.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND, RESEARCH PROBLEM, PURPOSE OF THE STUDY, AND RESEARCH

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Chapter 1 provides an historical background of the controversy of school consolidation in

rural America. It continues with an explanation of the research problem of school consolidation

and its impact on sending communities, or communities that lose their schools. This chapter then

expresses the purpose of the study and the research questions which guided the study.

The Controversy of School Consolidation

Although local control of education is still perceived by many to be a core American

value, the debate surrounding whether or not America's public school system is effective and

efficient has rarely included analysis of schools as local democratic institutions and important

sources of community and individual identity. Rather, rural educational history has revealed that

educational reformers in the early 1900's successfully established school consolidation as the

primary means of addressing perceived academic and economic inefficiencies (Reynolds, 1999).

Whether defined in terms of combining school districts or in terms of combining school

buildings, it is generally agreed that school consolidation or unification means to combine

educational resources and offerings that were previously autonomous. Blending several

definitions into one, school consolidation involves combining two or more schools or districts

into a larger school or district (Fitzwater, 1953; Kreitlow, 1961; Peshkin, 1982).

School consolidation often involves "sending communities;" communities that send

students away to attend school, and "receiving communities;" those that receive students from

other communities (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2008). A sending community has typically lost

its school as a result of consolidation, and the receiving community is often viewed as the

beneficiary of consolidation. The idea of sending and receiving has also been termed vacated and host communities (Sell & Leistritz, 1997). The perception of many affected by the consolidation or reorganization process is there are winners and losers as a result.

School consolidation in America has been a controversial topic for decades. Consolidation supporters argue that school consolidation was the impetus to provide more and better academic opportunities for schoolchildren. Additionally, supporters argue it as a viable solution to address financial inefficiencies. Opponents point to research that indicates consolidation does not save money and in fact increases costs (Hays, 2007). Opponents also point to the detrimental effects consolidation has on communities that lose their schools.

Educational reformers of the early 20th century persisted in their efforts to restructure schools to make more revenue available for an expanded, more standardized, and more modern public school curriculum (Reynolds, 1999). They argued increased spending on existing rural schools was wasteful and investments should be made in newly created consolidated districts. The education of farm children in rural areas would then be equal to those in urban cities and much more financially efficient than what was realized in small rural schools. Many also cited the importance of graded classrooms and how curriculum could be more appropriately delivered to specific age groups of children rather than in a one-room multi-grade setting. Reformers hoped to model the rural consolidated school after the progressive educational ideas of John Dewey and others at the University of Chicago (Reynolds, 1999) which stressed the importance of educational diversity, freedom, and empowerment.

While consolidation supporters argue the benefits of school consolidation, the greatest argument against it has been made by people who do not want their schools to be closed. School closures create tremendous pain and loss for communities that must send their children away for

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educational services. This creates a void in the sending community that is difficult, if not impossible, to restore.

Research Problem

From the late 1800''s until the mass consolidation efforts nationwide in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the number of school districts was greatly reduced mostly due to combining small districts into consolidated districts (Kenny & Schmidt, 1994). Leaders of educational reform at the time attempted to build educational systems that were more consistent with the needs of the larger, urban capitalist society rapidly gaining momentum throughout the U.S. Reformers felt constructing an educational system that fed the country''s economic appetite after the Great Depression and Second World War was a critical first step in ensuring that America would continue to grow economically. To accomplish this, they believed success for schools required greater control of rural education by educational professionals. They had little confidence in a system that allowed local control of rural schools by farmers and their families who did not share in their vision (Kreitlow, 1961). They selected rural school consolidation as the necessary first step in their program of reform.

As far back as the late 1800''s, consolidation was legislated by states with the hope of creating more effective and financially efficient schools (Samuelson, 2000). Throughout the history of schooling in America, consolidation has been a way in which statesmen and school officials attempted to solve rural issues in education. Today, many of these issues continue and the controversy of school consolidation is no less divisive (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2006). The thought to provide students a more thorough education by eliminating small schools in favor of large ones was paramount in the initial movement away from one-room schools during the early 20th century. Reformers'' attempts at providing children with a greater education were

modeled after John Dewey's seminal work, *Democracy in Education* (Dewey, 1903). Dewey wrote,

> As an outcome of the forces thus set in motion, democracy has in principle, subject to relative local restrictions, developed an organized machinery of public education. But when we turn to the aim and method which this magnificent institution serves, we find that our democracy is not yet conscious of the ethical principle upon which it rests – the responsibility and freedom of mind in discovery and proof – and consequently we find confusion where there should be order, darkness where there should be light. The teacher has not the power of initiation and constructive endeavor which is necessary to the fulfillment of the function of teaching. The learner finds conditions antagonistic (or at least lacking) to the development of individual mental power and to adequate responsibility for its use (p. 194).

This attempt by early 20th century educational reformers resulted in an unintended consequence. They began to view educational opportunity as "bigger is better" and used consolidation as a means to achieve this end. Ultimately, the thinking that "bigger is better" would lead the reform movement away from the ideals of Dewey. Dewey argued for resources, including items and materials that encouraged the inquisitive nature of children, but he also stressed the importance of maintaining an identity for the individual learner and school and providing the support structures necessary for the individual to succeed (Reynolds, 1999). The bigger is better idea may have allowed for greater exposure to educational opportunity, but it eroded away the personal and individualistic approach to educational processes Dewey espoused. The bigger is better logic has remained one of the pillars of the school consolidation movement throughout the years. Of equal significance to the consolidation movement was the belief that

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through consolidation, money could be saved thereby increasing financial efficiency – i.e., more bang for the buck (Samuelson, 2000).

Yet, opponents to the consolidation movement have argued the detrimental effects that consolidation has on communities losing their schools. Studies abound on the ill effects and hardships that consolidation creates, particularly for sending communities (LaPlante, 2005; Patterson, Koenigs, Mohn, & Rasmussen, 2005; Reynolds, 1999). Sending community patrons view consolidation efforts as a way to provide more opportunities for those that already have the most and take away opportunity from those that have the least. When they sense this is happening, lack of trust and heavy resistance ensues. Communities in danger of losing their schools have great concern about loss of community identity because of the strong, shared attachment they all feel toward their school (Bennett, Grant, Patterson, Stout, & Surland, 2009). Studies also note the negative impact of school closure on the local economy and population of these communities (Funk & Bailey, 2000; Johnston & Duncombe, 1998; Lawrence et al., 2002). Additionally, lack of understanding of local culture creates resistance to consolidate from community members. It is possible that experiencing the loss of a local school can further lead to the community turning within to protect their interests and thus close off avenues of reaching out to others. This phenomenon can be particularly harmful to achieving true "unification" in consolidated school districts.

Communities that lose their schools, the sending communities, can experience a loss or a shift in financial capital, human capital, and social capital (Putnam, 2000). Financial capital is the ability for an individual or community to secure needs through financial means, and is the most tangible form of loss sending communities experience with school closure and consolidation. Human capital is the level of education or cognitive ability one possesses. Sending

communities send their human capital (students) to another community. Human capital always remains with individual persons, wherever they are. For sending communities, this means their human capital is growing somewhere else. Social capital is created from connections and is the culmination of resources, which are linked to a network of relationships, acquaintances, and recognition. In essence, social capital is accrued from belonging as a member of a group. Sending communities experience loss of social capital when groups of students leave for another school and form a new network of relationships. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1983) described the concept of capital as an entity that creates and regulates cultural and social norms, and persists even as a society experiences change.

The potential loss of various forms of capital in a sending community due to a school closure merits further examination. Developing a greater understanding of how sending communities have experienced consolidation may prove beneficial in assisting consolidated districts in meeting the needs of all stakeholders. Studying the effects of school consolidation that took place during the 1960s can inform policy and practice in the current economic climate where consolidation is again being considered as a means to resolve school funding issues.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of school consolidation on citizens, parents, and students of a sending community. For this study, "citizens" referred to community members who attended the sending community high school prior to its closing and have remained in the community. I wanted to better understand the social ramifications consolidation had on sending communities. To accomplish this, I asked the question, "What impact has school consolidation had on the community and people of Spring Valley, KS?" These additional research questions guided the study:

1. How has school consolidation affected citizens of a sending community?

2. How has school consolidation affected parents of a sending community?

3. How has school consolidation affected students of a sending community?

This researcher has studied the impact of school consolidation on a rural sending community using Putnam‟s (1995, 2000) theory of social capital, which is elaborated in the following section.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 2 includes the theoretical framework and the literature on rural school consolidation. The research used the lens of social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995, 2000) to examine how consolidation affects sending and receiving communities as well as social capital relative to human capital, bridging and bonding capital, and trust. The review of the literature centers on the arguments for and against consolidation. It also takes a more focused look into the history of school consolidation in Kansas from the early 1900's to the present time.

Theoretical Framework: Social Capital

Because an event like consolidation can have a tremendous impact on the social structure of students, their families, the communities, and the school district, social capital offers a lens for understanding and explaining the impact of school consolidation on a sending community. This theoretical framework begins with a look at how levels of social capital are directly tied to the number of contexts in and around a group. For example, a group of people that live, work, attend school, and worship together experience greater levels of social capital than a group with fewer of these contextual layers (Lin, 2001). Subsequently, how social capital is connected to, and can further enhance, human capital, or the accumulation of knowledge and educational attainment, is explored (Coleman, 1988) and includes a discussion of how social capital differentiates from physical and human capital. After these well researched ideas of social capital have been explained, the theory transitions into the specific concepts of "bridging and bonding" social capital (Putnam, 2000). It is this component of the theory that ultimately framed this study.

Finally, a look into the correlation of trust and elevated levels of social capital occurs as trust is a fundamental component of social capital theory (Gubbins & MacCurtain, 2008).

Social Capital: Sending and Receiving

Social capital takes into account there are several entities at work with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions within the structure. Yet, not all forms of social structure are useful to everyone. What is useful can vary from person to person. While one form of social capital is valuable to certain individuals, it can be useless or perhaps even harmful for others (Coleman, 1988). This concept is important for understanding consolidated school districts, particularly when it involves the unification of separate communities into one common school district. Decisions that may be good for certain communities are not necessarily good for others. Consolidation often involves communities that receive students and communities that send students. Coleman (1988) articulates when people leave a social structure, the social structure loses social capital. While students can lose some levels of social capital when being "sent" to other schools, other sources of social capital are available to them from the new school. Even so, in a consolidated district, this loss of students can negatively affect the sending community these students leave behind.

Students who leave their community school to attend a consolidated school lose this "layer" of social capital because they leave behind their families and community, which can negatively impact them, their families, and their community. Coleman (1988) goes on to identify capital in three different, but interrelated realms: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Economic capital is that which is immediately convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights. Cultural capital may be converted into economic

capital, but it is institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications. Social capital is the connection of people that, in certain conditions, may also be converted into economic capital.

Social capital is accrued from belonging as a member of a group. This group, in turn, provides its members with collectively owned capital allowing them to draw upon each other's credit, so to speak. The greater the volume of capital within these connections of people, or groups, allows for a greater opportunity for individuals within these groups to draw from this "capital credit." In communities with consolidated schools, it could then be deduced that those who receive students into their communities and schools generate more capital than those communities who must send students away to other community schools. Applying this sending and receiving application to the social capital theories of Bourdieu (1983), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000), allows for the study of social capital differences that exist in consolidated communities. The next section will take a more in depth look at social capital and its role in creating and expanding human capital which are the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual (Coleman, 1988).

Social Capital: Human Capital

Social capital is affiliated with the relations of persons. Trust and trustworthiness are paramount in the growth of social capital within a social structure. Social structures that involve making connections among people, establishing bonds of trust and understanding, and building community provide extraordinary opportunities for groups to thrive in places that otherwise might appear destined for ruin. In other words, these connections and bonds of trust and understanding, all involve building social capital which further develops networks of relationships that weave individuals into groups and communities and sustain learning (Putnam

& Feldstein, 2003). From this enhanced connectedness, greater levels of human capital emerge. Putnam (2000) defines human capital as the level of education or cognitive ability one possesses.

Investments in education, training, medical care, etc. are investments in human capital. Skills achieved as a result of these types of capital investments stay with the person. That is, this form of capital is not something that is physically moved while the person stays put. If the person stays, the capital stays, if the person leaves, the capital goes with him or her (Becker, 1993). Education and training are the most important investments in human capital. High school and college education in the United States greatly enhances earnings abilities. Evidence can also be shown this is not a phenomenon unique to the United States. It is a global finding and even more pronounced in underdeveloped countries (Becker). This loss of "human capital" when students are transitioned to high school outside of the community in which they grew up and their families live, promotes a loss of "human capital" that may never return. This is detrimental to sending communities.

It is collective learning that provides individuals, in this case children and young adults, with a greater opportunity for academic growth and success in school. In fact, it is argued that the knowledge of a group is greater than the sum of the individual member"s knowledge (Senge, 1990). Group knowledge is derived from high levels of social capital, which is sustainable through a collective appreciation of knowledge and a value of how that knowledge is attained. In most communities, attainment of knowledge is largely associated with the community school because it was the primary place where a group received its knowledge. Collective commitment to a community school is a result of a common bond among group members who attended the community school and achieved greater human capital. This, in turn, feeds a spirit of collective learning (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003).

Collective learning, as opposed to individual learning, points to the social network component. This perspective of learning conceptualizes the whole rather than the parts. A theory of social capital can offer further insight into how learning occurs within a highly connected group. Generally, trust in a collective learning environment fosters intensive social relationships, high confidence in others, help-seeking behavior, and the free exchange of information (Gubbins & MacCurtain, 2008).

Coleman (1988) compares the function of social capital to the resources that people use to achieve their interests. Social capital is the means to achieve an end, which is the accumulation of human capital and physical capital. Simply stated, human capital is the acquisition of knowledge while physical capital is the acquisition of things. Lin (2001) chooses to distinguish the various forms of capital differently. He classifies capital into two types: human capital and social capital. Human capital consists of resources possessed by the individual who can use and dispose of them with great freedom and without much concern for compensation. As discussed earlier, education and training is the greatest investment in human capital because increased academic achievement enhances a person"s ability to think, create, communicate, and participate in society. Social capital consists of resources embedded in one"s network or associations. Regardless of how one constructs meaning around it, social capital affects the creation of human capital which is most influenced by education and training (Becker, 1993; Putnam, 1995, 2000).

Within the family structure, social capital attempts to define the level to which parents are meaningfully involved in a child"s life. The more direct, meaningful, and genuine the involvement, the greater the opportunity for a child"s educational growth, regardless of outside influences (Coleman, 1988). The involvement of financial capital, measured by the family"s

wealth or income, and human capital, measured by parents" education, may be irrelevant to outcomes for children if parents" involvement is directed exclusively at work or elsewhere outside the home. The social capital of the family is the direct relation between children and parents or other adult members of the family. Coleman (1988) goes on to explain the relationship of human capital to social capital within the family structure:

But this human capital may be irrelevant to outcomes for children if parents are not an important part of their children"s lives, if their human capital is employed exclusively at work or elsewhere outside the home. That is, if the human capital possessed by parents is not complemented by social capital embodied in family relations, it is irrelevant to the child"s educational growth that the parent has a great deal, or a small amount, of human capital (p. 110).

Studies of social capital and its application to education have looked at family structure, parent-teen discussion, parents" aspirations and expectations of teens, parental education, and educational achievement (Dika & Singh, 2002). Studies have found a positive correlation between social capital and factors that directly benefit student educational achievement. Parents of families with high levels of social capital tend to clearly convey educational expectations to the children and there are frequent discussions between them and their children about school. These parents have greater involvement in school and provide study resources in the home for their child. The result is a smaller generation gap due to elevated levels of communication and trust and positive peer group values (Dika & Singh, 2002).

The amount of social capital a student possesses influences dropout rates in public, Catholic private, and independent private high schools (Hoffer, 1986). Catholic dropout rates were found to be significantly lower than public or independent private schools. In addition to

attending school and belonging to the same community, students and their families that attended Catholic schools worshiped together in a common faith, which provided yet another "layer" of social capital. Gluckman (1967) refers to these multiple layers of social capital as "multi-plex" relationships. Multi-plex relationships involve persons who are linked to more than one context – neighbor, fellow worker, fellow parent, fellow worshiper, etc. "Simplex" relationships are linked through only one of these relations. Coleman (1988) concluded social capital in the family and outside it, and in the adult community surrounding the school, showed evidence of considerable value in reducing the probability of dropping out of high school. The more contexts of social capital that exist for adults in a child's life, the more likely it becomes that child will experience success in school. Coleman's theory of social capital (1988) informs Putnam's theory of bridging and bonding social capital (2000), which is reviewed in the following section.

Social Capital: Bridging and Bonding

School consolidation often involves joining two or more schools from different communities which has a direct and immediate impact on those communities (Bard, et al., 2008). This separation of communities, linked only by a school, can further diminish an already limited social network for families, particularly those who are isolated and distressed. By definition, isolated and distressed families do not possess the social capital that would provide them the support they need (Terrion, 2006). These families are often mobile and living in temporary housing. Mobility and lack of permanence in their residency does not allow for connectedness in a community. Therefore, it is especially important for sending communities and their families to have what Putnam (2000) refers to as bridging and bonding social capital.

Bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity from town to town in a consolidated district. Bonding bolsters a group's narrower selves thereby building up

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"protection" from outside influences. However, many groups simultaneously bond along some social dimensions and bridge across others. Putnam (2000) argues communities that have an established norm of bonding and bridging social capital are most successful, thereby creating a great capacity for greater levels of human and physical capital.

A key concept in the theory of social capital lies in the distinction between bridging (or inclusive) and bonding (or exclusive) capital. Bridging capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital fosters a narrower look at a version of local reality. Examples of bonding social capital include ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women's reading groups, and fashionable country clubs, which are closed and exclusive groups, and the avenue to them is through invitation. Examples of bridging social capital include the civil rights movement, many youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organizations, as their purpose is to reach out and join with others to realize their goals. It is important to understand how the positive consequences of social capital can be maximized and the negative mitigated (Putnam, 2000).

Bonding social capital is internally generated within a particular group or a smaller community. This can also refer to homogeneous relationships within the family between parents, children, and kin (Woolcock, 2001). Bonding social capital provides a sense of belonging and is critical to the sense of well-being of the members of families and groups and fulfils immediate needs for belonging, love, emotional support, and solidarity (Terrion, 2006). Putnam (2000) further describes bonding social capital as "sociological superglue" (p. 23). Creating strong group loyalty associated with bonding social capital can also create antagonism toward outsiders. Bonding social capital often occurs among a homogeneous population and only benefits those with internal access. The very factors that promote its development such as tight bonds of trust

and solidarity may ultimately prevent its most entrepreneurial members from reaching their full potential. They may be held back by family members and close friends that find it difficult to face tomorrow without them (Leonard, 2004). Group members do not necessarily engender positive externalities (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988). Yet, bonding social capital can offer very positive values in people and communities. They instill democratic and cooperative values, build trust, and provide norms of reciprocity that people generate in associations that spread over the whole community (Coffe & Geys, 2007).

Connections in the workplace also provide a context for bonding social capital to grow. Work related organizations are seen as economically and sociologically important to the sustainability of the community. The work place is a natural site for connecting with others. In fact, some research points to the fact that social capital has not diminished in America, it has simply moved into the workplace. Today's generation of workers is much more likely to make social connections on the job rather than participate in other social networking opportunities (Putnam, 2000). As a result, America has witnessed diminishing numbers of people involved in voluntary social organizations, political activism, civic associations, churches, unions, and the like.

Informal social connections, while more frequent in terms of the numbers of people involved in such activities, are also experiencing a downward turn. Examples include getting together for drinks after work, having coffee with the regulars at the diner or Quick Mart, attending poker night once a week, visiting with the next-door neighbor, or simply having a barbecue picnic with friends. People who spend many hours in informal conversation have an active social life but their connectedness is less organized and purposeful and more spontaneous and flexible. Evidence suggests that most Americans connect with others in many different ways,

including a shift from face-to-face social networks into virtual networks. Yet, it also suggests there is a significant decrease of regular contacts with friends and neighbors. People spend less time in conversation, exchange visits less often, and engage in fewer leisure activities that encourage casual social interaction (Putnam, 2000). Often, in smaller communities, it is this informal social connectedness that is a powerful structure for enhanced bonding social capital. When these types of connections diminish, bonding social capital is impacted in rural communities in perhaps a more pronounced fashion than their urban counterparts.

As discussed in the previous section, an individual embedded in a social circle tends to have characteristics consistent with others of the circle's members. While bonding social capital is a necessary antecedent for the development of the more powerful form of bridging social capital (Larsen et al., 2004) it tends to homologize human capital (knowledge), physical capital (wealth), and cultural capital (embodiment) within the social circle (Bourdieu, 1983). This is a common phenomenon in smaller communities. If an individual embedded within a particular social circle, or community, wishes to acquire new variations of capital, a person must branch out to other social circles, or communities, in order to retrieve it. To reach another social circle then would mean to create ties that link two social circles (or communities) together. This tie is referred to as "bridging" social capital. Without bridging, social circles are forever isolated and independent of each other (Lin, 2001). Some evidence suggests that individuals who bridge are already on the fringes of their social circle and therefore do not pose a "threat" to the group to take much, if any social capital with them. Therefore, bridging social capital is strongest when entire groups bridge with other groups.

Bridging social capital has also been referred to as generating "collective action" with another group. This allows for each group to draw upon the bonding capital that exists with the

other. By combining both groups social capital, greater and more diverse amounts are made available. Bonding social capital is good for "getting by," but bridging social capital is essential for "getting ahead." As stated earlier, bridging social capital can pave the way for acquiring other forms of capital such as physical or human capital that a community by itself, is unable to acquire (Leonard, 2004). Bourdieu (1983) focuses the benefits of social capital in a primarily economic sense whereas Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1995) argue the greater benefit of social capital is with the generation of human capital. Yet, Bourdieu's work is conceptually the piece with which communities relate when needing financial resources for improving their circumstances. Economically privileged individuals have the financial resources to fund the development of cultural capital and these privileged positions can be utilized to create social capital as well. Communities often rely on these individuals to grow, and thereby place them in positions of power. It is the idea of bridging social capital that can provide communities with another means to grow. In fact, Coleman and Putnam argue that bridging social capital is a far more powerful force than any amount of economic capital. The importance of building relationships with valued people that can provide the financial resources is greater than receiving financial resources alone.

In order for communities to truly get ahead, they need to form links with other bonded social capital communities. As discussed earlier, bonding social capital tends to create great trust among the members of the community. Yet, trust at the local level may feed on distrust of wider institutions in other communities. When trust in one group is high because of a lack of trust towards another group, bridging between them becomes very difficult. Lack of financial and human capital can be a direct consequence of years of support based on family, kinship, friendship, neighborhood, and community networks that were fed by a distrust of outside

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influence (Leonard, 2004). In the case of forced school consolidation, sending communities may exhibit this same sort of distrust toward receiving communities because of the fear that more will be taken from them if they bridge the gap. As a result, sending communities may have an overabundance of bonding social capital they use to fend off outsiders. In order for these communities to set in motion the process of moving from bonding to bridging social capital a restoration of trust in wider institutions is paramount. The ideal outcome for a sending community in a consolidated district is maintaining bonding social capital while enhancing bridging social capital with the receiving community.

Trust and Social Capital

Trust is central to the full realization of the significance of social capital. Gubbins and MacCurtain (2008) looked at three types of trust: deterrence-based trust, knowledge-based trust, and identification-based trust. Deterrence-based trust is based on consistency of behavior that is developed and sustained through fear of punishment. It also sustains trust by rewarding those who preserve it. Knowledge-based trust is grounded in the other"s predictability. It stems from knowing the other party well enough to actually be able to predict their actions. Identification-based trust is based on identification with another's desires and intentions.

A sending community can view a receiving community"s intentions as negative which erodes at this form of trust; yet, when attained, identification-based trust is founded in mutual understanding and empathy. Full fruition of the two other types of trust – deterrence-based trust and knowledge-based trust – allow for identification-based trust to be realized (Gubbins & MacCurtain, 2008). One could then assume that building trust among the first two types may allow consolidated school communities to have identification-based trust. When this level of

trust can be reached, bridging social capital can be attained (Putnam, 2000; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003).

Review of Research and Related Literature

The review of the literature begins with an historical review about the decline of rural America – the urban and suburban migration resulting in loss of small towns and family farms. It is perceived this loss of small farms and rural communities caused the loss of cultural information, cultural capacity, and know-how for more livelihoods that are more evenly distributed (Jackson, 2005). The review continues with the examination of the arguments for and against school consolidation focusing on economics, declining enrollment, and student achievement (Benton, 1992; Bryant, 2002; Burlingame, 1979; Duncombe & Johnston, 2004; Webb, 1989). It is the complexities of these issues, and the research supporting the positions for and against consolidation that significantly lend to the ongoing debate and are contrasted in the following sections. Loss of social capital associated with the loss of community schools is also discussed. Ultimately, towns in danger of losing their schools feel this will lead to the loss of their community. This creates strong objection from small communities to the idea of school consolidation.

The literature review then transitions into an historical review of school consolidation in Kansas from one-room schools in mid-19th century to the 1965 landmark school consolidation case – Tecumseh v Throckmorton. Finally, a present day look into school consolidation in Kansas is reviewed. The recent economic recession and declining state revenue in Kansas have fanned the flames of the current consolidation movement.

The Decline of Rural America and Consolidation Beginnings

Rural schools at the turn of the 20th century reflected and shaped a sense of community (Tyack, 1974). School districts were largely created by groups of rural families who shared the same ideas about needing a school for the education of their large groups of children. These one-room schools took on the personality of the families it served. If the families got along, the school did also. When there was conflict among family or community members, the school itself could become contentious. At times, this dissention created factions or new school districts (Tyack). These conflicts occurring over one hundred years ago were seeds to the growth of school consolidation, but regardless of whether the school district was in harmony or split because of conflict among the family and community members, most rural patrons believed the school was theirs to control, whatever the outcome. Rural schools resisted pressures to "modernize" their schools through further consolidation because of the perceived loss of local control in their own schools and communities.

During this early 20th century time period, the trend toward urban and suburbanization that defined America for much of the next 100 years, began. The countryside slowly started emptying out and the cities swelled (Johnson & Beale, 1998). The industrialization of America at the turn of the 20th century drew many from rural areas who were searching for greater opportunities to make a living. Factory jobs were more stable and paid better than what they had earned scratching out a living in the country. Many of America"s rural poor left marginal farms and hard times in more remote areas to join immigrants and other low-income groups in growing urban areas in the hope they would find better paying jobs (Tickamyer & Duncan, 1990). Still, others remained in rural areas continuing to struggle with limited skills and education. Outside of agriculture, jobs were scarce and unstable in most rural communities for decades during this

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time, and the limited opportunities in rural areas perpetuated a social structure that reinforced poverty and underdevelopment (Tickamyer & Duncan). Rural areas in the U.S. continued to decline in the face of the advances in science and industrialization. This decline provided opportunity for education reformers to gain a foothold in rural education to impart change.

With the explosion of the industrial age, education reformers began the movement to structure schools in much the same way as America was structuring its factories. They sought to expand access to education so that more young people could attend schools for longer periods of time. They also introduced the standardization of schools regarding buildings, equipment, professional qualifications of staff, administrative procedures, social and health services and regulations (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Some aspects of the rural school culture were deemed positive by education reformers who felt certain rural school ideals had a place in their vision for what the reformed institution of education required. Tyack and Cuban had this to say about these early education reformers:

> Though sometimes nostalgic about the values and experiences common in the rural and small town America of their youth, they still located an educational golden age in the future rather than in the past. The pathway to that golden future was punctuated with orderly bumps called "problems" to be smoothed out by experts. The evidence that they were making progress came in equally orderly statistics of success. (p. 17)

Education reformers of the early 1900"s, influenced by John Dewey"s seminal work, *Democracy in Education* (1903) attempted to bring valued rural life experiences into their urban schools. Vocational and social teachings available to rural children included important work and community experiences readily available outside the classroom, which was not fully realized in the urban schools. What reformers sought was the ability to implement the whole child ideology

of John Dewey (1903). Reform educators, who found something of benefit in rural America, were still hesitant to incorporate it in the schools. They instead sought to objectively define and incorporate the nonschool type activities found in rural areas into the urban schools and modern America. While reformers fancied the benefits of what rural schools could provide, they detested the perceived lack of administrative oversight and curricular progressives found in their new vision of the western world. The vocational and community aspect of Dewey's whole child approach was deemed to lack the scientific rigor needed for the future of the country (DeYoung, 1987). Eventually, the effort to bring the community-like advantages of the rural school environment into the structure and standardization of the urban school won out. School activities, vocational classes, and social skill development became intertwined with a rigorous core curriculum of reading, writing, math, and science that included strong administrative oversight. This blended model of education permeated the country and marked the beginning of the end for one-room schools which ultimately led to mass consolidation.

Arguments for Consolidation

Two primary arguments have proven consistent with the pro-consolidation position over the years. The first, economy of scale, is the primary theory reformists have used. "Bigger is better" was the mantra not only on the issue of economics, but also with regard to financial efficiencies in education. Secondly, pro consolidation advocates argued the smaller a school becomes, the less opportunity for maximum student growth and achievement. This is due to a lack of available materials and supplies, homogeneous populations that hinder diversity, and a smaller pool from which qualified teachers are obtained (Haller, 1992; McGuire, 1989; Webb, 1989). Reformists believed larger schools created greater opportunities for learning and personal growth.

In education throughout America, particularly in the Midwest, the 1920‟s represented a time when one-room schools were closed in favor of consolidation (Bard, et al., 2006; Baritelle & Holland, 1975; Davidson, 1961). There was both praise and concern over this movement but critics seemed outnumbered by supporters who, over time, started agreeing with the arguments consolidation proponents were presenting. Consolidation supporters gained believers in rural America who began to see the bigger picture being painted by urban reformists who were attempting to model the educational system after business and industry. Reformers believed America needed a workforce prepared to help these industries become the foundation for strengthening the economy, which would make the U.S. more formidable on a global level. This position was illustrated by Miner (2006), who stated,

> A few complained about loss of land values due to higher tax, and others griped about the time on buses or said the large schools were cold. But the overwhelming majority felt consolidation was a success. The head of the state Good Roads Association, who toured the state promoting consolidated schools said, "People are beginning to see everything on a broader scale." (p. 212)

Moving to an industrialized society caused educational reformers to view the system in the same context as the industrial revolution. They believed that for schools to be most effective, they needed to look alike which garnered policies that advocated an urban, centralized model of education. These larger schools were viewed as more economically efficient, which many equated with economy of scale or the "bigger is better" theory (Bard, et al., 2006). This large school concept became the norm for structuring education at the beginning of the 20th century and continued until the peak consolidation movement of the late 1950‟s and early 1960‟s when many states legislated the requirement for small schools and districts to consolidate. The

reduction of schools was a trend not limited to the heartland. States from coast to coast showed reductions in school districts due to the consolidation movement. Yet, the rural states have seen the greatest reductions due to the original establishment of the one room school districts that were to be within walking distance for every child (Kenny & Schmidt, 1994; Samuelson, 2000).

At the height of school consolidation efforts in the early 1960's across the Midwestern United States, three general approaches were taken to accomplish this initiative. The first was to allow each of the original one-room schools within district boundaries to remain as they were and build two or more consolidated high schools. A second approach was to eliminate one-room schools and build a few multi-room K-8 elementary schools and one consolidated high school. A third option was to simply build one building that housed all students in all grade levels but with each grade level having its own teacher in his or her own classroom rather than the one-room approach that preceded it. During that period, many educators and community leaders felt that reorganization, or consolidation, meant better school districts and improved education for students (Kreitlow, 1961).

Studies from the 1970"s suggested school district consolidation was an alternative to small, inefficient schools for the successful accomplishment of educational goals. These studies would suggest that as enrollment decreased, educational opportunities decreased as well. This led to the belief that small schools were inferior to the supposedly more efficient and diversified larger schools (Self, 2001). It is logical to predict the decrease of school enrollment is largely connected to decreased community population. During the consolidation wave of the 1960"s and 1970"s, the decline of enrollment in schools was identified as a fiscal inefficiency. In addition to economic inefficiencies, some studies suggested the loss of enrollment negatively impacted

teacher availability, decreased curriculum and instruction quality, reduced amounts of categorical

aid for districts, led to declining facilities, and reduced available technology (Mathis, 2003).

Much of the research on maximizing academic opportunity involves the attempt at

identifying optimal class size. While several studies have made this attempt, the results are

inconclusive. Optimal class size has been linked to the consolidation debate with varied results.

There are, however several factors that do positively impact effective education. More important

than school size was the need to incorporate educational grouping in a positive learning climate

and culture, the need for a positive physical and community environment, rigorous academic

expectations, and supportive human relationships (Stockard & Mayberry, 1992).

The challenges associated with declining enrollment are rooted in the fact that operational

costs of buildings stay the same or increase while funding decreases when enrollment decreases.

Also, staffing and administrative costs remain even though enrollment decreases and new state

requirements continue to be added annually with insufficient funding to neither comply with

these new requirements nor sustain existing programs (Mathis, 2003). State funding of public

education has consistently been at the forefront of the legislative debate in many, if not all states

in America. Because the educational budget is often one of the largest pieces of the overall state

budget pie, it is scrutinized often, particularly when state revenues dip and funding challenges

emerge. Numerous references have been made to school size and cost relationship. The

consensus is that excessive costs were usually found in districts with less than one teacher per

grade and that per-student cost decreased rather rapidly up to 100 pupils and continued to

decrease but remained stable at the 300 student level (Link, 1971).

As far back as the 1800‟s, one-room schoolhouses were eliminated in favor of

consolidation because it was believed that with larger schools came greater academic

opportunities for students. Some states even began to provide free transportation in order to facilitate the move to consolidation (Bard, et al., 2006). Those who sought to consolidate districts did so in the name of equality; they believed small schools were not only economically inefficient but were also inferior in creating educational opportunities for students which were believed to be essential for improving society as a whole (Burlingame, 1979). Central and local perspectives are contrasted here. From a central perspective, large, bureaucratic organizations make sense. They are big enough and standardized enough for information and influence to flow smoothly to and from the center. Conversely, smaller and less formally organized districts facilitate linkages to the community and are a better match for the variant cultures that can make up local conditions (Strang, 1987).

Arguments against Consolidation

Contrary to the pro-consolidation arguments, other literature points to studies that indicate small schools operate at greater financial efficiencies than their larger counterparts. Many cite reduced administration and supplemental services as the key ingredients for the reduction of cost (Howley & Howley, 2006). Additionally, anti-consolidation positions cite how the loss of a school in a community negatively impacts a community''s economy, population, and social structure (Howley & Howley, 2006; Lawrence, et al., 2002; Putnam, 2000; Streifel, Foldesy, & Holman, 1991).

The declining enrollment and student achievement arguments tend to be grouped together in much of the research. Anti-consolidation viewpoints state declining enrollment is tied to declining population, which is largely a rural issue. Because of this rural connection, advantages of rural schools over urban lie particularly in the areas of community partnerships, low pupil to teacher ratios, and high levels of social capital, which is linked to the network of relationships,

acquaintances, and recognition that students in small schools often experience (Lawrence, et al., 2002). Maintaining community schools encourage school and community connections and identity. Small, rural communities are often tightly knit, take pride in their sense of place and history, and provide social capital for their children (Bauch, 2001; Berger, 1983; Friedberger, 1996; Peshkin, 1982). Familiarity, community spirit, the influence of elders, and social activities in which the whole town participate provide opportunities that support a parent–teacher–community model of school renewal. It is this way of life that citizens of small communities champion and it becomes a main reason for resistance when it is threatened.

Objections to school consolidation are numerous. While school consolidation proponents champion the academic achievement effects of the movement, some research diminishes this proposed positive correlation. In fact, much has been written regarding the positive impact that smaller schools have on academic achievement. Small class sizes, student familiarity, parental involvement, and community social capital are factors that have been shown to have a positive correlation with student academic achievement (DeYoung & Howley, 1990; Lomotey & Swanson, 1989; McGuire, 1989). As stated earlier in the theoretical framework, high amounts of social capital can maximize student achievement (Coleman, 1988). The small, intimate, and unique character of a small community and its schools allow for elevated social capital. The relationships among teachers and between students and teachers in small schools are informal and cordial. All staff members know all children and intervene on their behalf. It allows for staff to take direct action to solve problems that can otherwise be difficult to address in much larger settings. It is the perceived loss of these unique small school characteristics that invite the pessimistic view toward school consolidation (Howley & Howley, 2006).

Communities that feel forced or coerced toward consolidation show greater resistance than those communities involved in decision-making opportunities. In one study, a governing philosophy of "my way or the highway" from the superintendent and board of education members, with little reverence to the communities involved, fostered a climate of resistance and resentment (Patterson, et al., 2005). Conversely, communities that had ample opportunity to contribute to the consolidation discussion and furthermore, had the opportunity to develop the policies inherent therein, were much more positive about the entire process (Benton, 1992). Arguments for and against consolidation were evident throughout the history of consolidation in Kansas.

Consolidation in Kansas: From the One Room School to Tecumseh v Throckmorton

Throughout the 1880"s, Kansas experienced a boom in settlers migrating to the state from many outside locations. It was the ambition of thousands of immigrants to realize their dreams to share in ownership of the land which lead to them being bound to it by economic interests through the investment of love and work, by family loyalty, by memory and tradition. The Homestead Act of 1862 said 160 acres was appropriate for these families to not only make their living off the land, but to provide food for themselves in the process. The promise of this land providing for their well-being allowed them to turn away from the big-time promising and planning of the government and instead focus their energies and efforts locally. Rural American immigrants created a culture based upon intensive work, local energies, care, and long-living communities (Berry, 1977). Many arrived with the belief the rains that had filled the rivers, streams, and depressions during the decade were the norm for the region and not the exception. It was believed these regular rains would produce great crops to be sold for good money. As a result, towns flourished. Immigrant settlers were drawn to this thriving land in the hopes of

fulfilling dreams of prosperity (Miner, 2006). These early Kansas settlers also believed they had a responsibility to provide basic literacy and citizenship education for their children (Martinez & Snider, 2001).

As homesteading allowed settlers to claim 160-acre farms, these farm families grew so help on the farms would be available. One-room schools were created when a group of farmers got together and decided there was a need for a school to educate their children. These groups of farmers would form a district with interested neighbors nearby. These small districts were usually no more than two miles wide and the school was built near a central point among the neighbor farmers. Children on a farm were economic assets and if a family wanted to make a modest living farming, they needed to "create" their own labor pool. Within two miles of a central reference point, there could be as many as six to eight sections of land with anywhere from 24 to 48 farms containing several children at each farm. When the local school became overcrowded, families on the fringes of the "district" would form their own district to alleviate the crowding problem. Thus, the schools were responsive to the rural neighborhoods in which they resided and were central to the lives of the residents (Samuelson, 2000).

The Territorial Legislature believed education was critical to the state's growth and development. They believed an educated citizenry could help generate business and industry for the state. As a result of this core belief, the state believed it had a responsibility to support education. The Kansas Constitution acknowledged the responsibility for the state to provide a uniform system of common schools and schools of higher grades for its people. To ensure that children would indeed attend these schools for which the state provided, a compulsory attendance law was enacted in 1874. By 1885, the state began to provide more than an

elementary education to its children. County high schools were authorized and a sequence of

courses was developed, complete with textbooks, for grades 1 – 12 (Martinez & Snider, 2001).

Local control of schools has historically been valued in Kansas. Between 1870 and 1930,

communities in rural northern America faced a number of challenges from national reformers

and professionals who sought to centralize authority and diminish local control over important

aspects of rural society, including schools. Additionally, large-scale business corporations

wielded increasing market power to the detriment of independent family farmers. By

reconfiguring traditional rural values of localism, independence, and agrarian fundamentalism,

country people successfully created a distinct rural subculture which ran counterpoint to the

dominant trends in American society well into the twentieth century. Many farmers perceived an

urban-based consumer culture to be a threat to rural beliefs that were predominant in their local

communities and throughout country life. Views from others in the rural countryside, however,

stressed change and convergence with national and nationalizing trends in spite of the

preferences of their rural brethren. The effort to reform rural schools through school

consolidation created conflict between more traditional rural attitudes and the imperatives of a

centralized, bureaucratic society (Barron, 1997). The Territorial Legislature knew communities

would need school funding and other assistance in order to provide an education for their

children. The legislature set aside land that could be sold to help finance education and create the

offices of Territorial Superintendent of Common Schools and County Superintendents. The

establishment of more governance of the one-room schools allowed for greater opportunities for

children but at a loss of local control. During this time of increased state involvement, a high

schools initiative known at that time as "common schools" began operation. It was the goal of

the state to provide education to students aged 14 – 18 and such schools were created as county

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common schools in 1885. The county common school initiative began the framework for the first state-wide consolidation policy called the "Consolidation Act of 1886" (LaPlante, 2005) which funneled students from the community / territorial one room schools into the county common school.

From the time of settlement until the late 1800"s, school district organization had remained relatively unchanged. In 1893, legislation passed disorganizing many school districts in the western part of the state due to the shift of the population to other areas. By 1896, the number of school districts in Kansas (1st – 8th grade one room schools) had grown to its peak of 9,284. Because of the extreme "territorial" nature of these school districts, the boundaries became rigid and citizens rejected change even when the needs of the state, such as students meeting the already established literacy standards, were not being met. Numerous small districts remained in Kansas long after a new framework for schooling was needed. The first consolidation law was passed in 1901 resulting in 80 school district consolidations (Martinez & Snider, 2001).

Although funding for public schools became more of a state obligation during the early 20th century, Kansas was one of the last states to provide funding for schools when it enacted the State Aid or School Equalization Act of 1937. This established the state"s first sales tax, and a portion of the two-cent tax was allocated for state aid to schools, which was intended to help school districts of little fiscal means and provide funding for elementary schools across the state. In 1938-39, 84% of the total school districts in Kansas were one teacher one room schools, yet those schools were only educating 19% of the state"s school children (Spencer, 2004). It was believed no amount of funding could adequately apply equal education to all Kansas school children without extensive reorganization. The greatest strength of the one room school eventually became its greatest weakness.

Kansas attempted to find answers to the question of education quality and cost through piecemeal local and legislative action. In the 1930"s, Kansas ranked third in the nation in the number of school districts and had one of the lowest pupil-to-teacher ratios of any state resulting in an unusually high cost per pupil. During this period, the Kansas State Department of Education scrutinized the number of districts in which five or fewer students were being served. The School Equalization Law of 1937 cut state aid to schools with fewer than twelve students and abolished state funding to schools with fewer than four students (Spencer, 2004). This forced some districts to unify with nearby surrounding districts in the hopes that funding could be stretched. In 1945, the legislators passed School Reorganization Act that created county committees who were granted full authority to reorganize the elementary school district system of each of their counties. While the Reorganization Act of 1945 significantly reduced the number of elementary schools, the issue of consolidating the common high schools still needed to be addressed. To accomplish this, the state took a broader view of educational consolidation. Yet, by 1947, the Kansas State Supreme Court declared the School Reorganization Act of 1945 unconstitutional. This was the first attempt at litigation to keep the one room schools and rural districts sovereign. Even so, the two-year period in which the School Reorganization Act was in effect resulted in a total of 3,042 district disorganizations. Of these, 84% were accomplished by orders of county reorganization committees (Davidson, 1961). This state supported funding for schools caused state attention to remain on the issue of district re-organization (Spencer, 2004).

During the time of the early to mid 1950"s, consolidation of rural schools in Kansas had already been an issue for more than fifty years; yet, a new problem had emerged. Not all Kansas schools were racially segregated in the 1950's, but after a Kansas Supreme Court ruling in 1954, districts were told to integrate schools and provide equal education opportunities to all children

(Brown v Topeka Board of Education, 1954). Even still, some districts drew school boundary lines in order to continue to segregate children. This case marked a time in Kansas' history where an emphasis on quality and equity for all was emerging. The legislature felt in order to accomplish greater equity and quality; a need to reduce the number of school districts in the state was inevitable.

In 1963, state legislators and the Attorney General believed the state needed to replace the large number of elementary, common, and rural high school districts with fewer comprehensive K-12 districts in order to provide quality education to all students. That same year, legislators drafted a unification law with the assistance of educators, the Attorney General, and other attorneys. It gave authority to the State Superintendent of Schools to approve every significant procedure involving the transformation of elementary, common, and rural high school districts into comprehensive K-12 districts. This reduced the number of districts from over 9,000 to 304 (Augenblick, Myers, & Silverstein, 2001). This law was later challenged all the way to the Kansas Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of forced consolidation (Tecumseh School District v Throckmorton, 1965). This Kansas Supreme Court ruling marked the beginning of massive statewide consolidation (LaPlante, 2005) and the beginning of the reorganization effort on a local scale that had a significant impact Kansas public schools. Tecumseh, a small community east of Topeka, was one of the many communities affected by the reorganization of school districts. They led a group of 148 individual school districts against the forced consolidation action.

Tecumseh School District v. Throckmorton

When the Kansas Legislature enacted The School Unification Law in 1963, it gave full authority to the State Superintendent of Schools, Adel Throckmorton, to carry out duties under the regulations of this act including the reorganization and unification of school districts into

comprehensive K-12 districts. The 148 plaintiffs located throughout many counties in the state challenged the constitutionality of chapter 393 of the law (Tecumseh School District v Throckmorton, 1965). The district court held this act to be constitutional and valid but the plaintiffs appealed to the Kansas Supreme Court. At the time of the enactment of the law, there were 1,843 public school districts of many different types but mainly common districts offering grades 1 to 8, high schools offering grades 9 to 12, and city school districts offering grades 1 to 12. Each of the high school districts overlapped several common districts. The School Unification Act would reorganize all of these separate and varying types of districts into unified school districts offering grades 1 to 12.

The districts primarily argued the statute provided unlawful authority and legislative power to the State Superintendent of Schools. Within this primary argument, the appellants also wanted to point out the following: a superintendent should not be provided authority to organize new public schools without consent of local school officials or local voters; the State Superintendent should not overrule the desire of voters on establishing new districts; and this authority was an exercise of legislative power and therefore the act was in violation of Article 2, Section 1 of the Kansas Constitution. The Kansas Supreme Court found the School Unification Act to be sufficiently clear and definitely valid. The district court did not err when entering judgment for the defendants and the district court judgment was affirmed (Tecumseh School District v Throckmorton, 1965).

Present Day Consolidation Issues in Kansas

The population of Kansas today is the smallest percentage of the total U.S. population since the earliest days of statehood. In 1980, the population of Kansas was 2.27 percent of the total U.S. population, and today Kansas" population is less than 1 percent of the total in the U.S.

During the 1980‟s, 80 counties lost population even though the state as a whole gained population. Twelve of these 80 counties lost more than 10% of their population since 1990. This typifies the urban migration occurring in the state even to the present day. Only 19 Kansas counties have grown at all in population since 1990, most of which are located throughout and adjacent to the larger cities including Kansas City and Wichita. The population growth of Kansas has also slowed significantly from 8.5% in the 1990‟s to less than 2% in the 2000‟s (Kansas Association of School Boards, 2009).

Currently in Kansas, 31 of 105 counties have six persons or fewer per square mile. These counties are home to only 3.7 percent of the state‟s population, yet house 48 of the state‟s 347 high schools, roughly 14%. These population changes, along with increased expectations for student achievement, are causing Kansas school district administrators to examine expenditures and look for ways to continue to provide quality educational programs. School districts are exploring opportunities to work cooperatively with each other to maximize operational efficiencies. As a school district‟s enrollment continues to decline a local board of education may consider cooperative agreements or possible consolidation with another school district in order to continue to provide a quality education program for students, which is provided for in state statutes.

In Kansas, state statute K.S.A. 72-8701 was enacted in 1964, and allows the boards of education of two or more local school districts to enter into agreements to form a new consolidated school district. Any agreement to consolidate must be approved by the Kansas State Board of Education and be approved at a special election conducted in the school districts that will comprise the consolidated unified school district (Consolidation of School Districts, Kansas, 1964). Beginning in 2002, the Kansas legislature provided financial incentives for school district

consolidation and for those districts that chose to disorganize and transfer all of their territory to another school district. These incentives allow for the joining districts to combine their individual budgets for up to five years. The 2004 legislative session amended K.S.A. 72-8701 to clarify that it is legal for a board of education considering consolidation to discuss and vote on an agreement to consolidate at a meeting outside their own district. Subsequent to the local boards adopting a resolution, the Kansas State Board of Education and local voters must approve the consolidation event (Kansas Association of School Boards, 2009).

The Kansas legislature provided these incentives in the hope districts with declining enrollments approaching 200 students or less would consider consolidation with another district. The consolidation dialogue and debate largely focuses on two areas: perceived increased financial efficiencies and enhanced educational opportunities for students. Very little consideration is given to the effects school consolidation has on communities that lose their schools. Less consideration is given to the families and students who end up being forced to conform to the consolidation requirements laid before them.

Discussions regarding school consolidation have once again emerged as a solution to the increasing budget woes the State of Kansas is facing due to the recession of 2008. Legislators have spoken about how the current number of school districts does not make sense when the number of students the state educates is considered. Presently, the catalyst for the discussion again seems to focus largely on school funding issues (Koranda, 2009). There has been little dialogue about educational advantages in the current consolidation debate. This time around, the reason for the debate is purely financial. The state is currently experiencing the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression and the dust bowl (Tallman, 2009). While some argue that reducing administration costs associated with consolidation would be enough of a reduction,

others assert these kinds of savings are a drop in the bucket. To obtain real savings through consolidation, some Kansans argue that closing schools entirely are the only way to save real dollars (Koranda, 2009).

Schools have resorted to litigation to restore cuts in funding over the past several years. The Montoy v Kansas lawsuit filed in 1999 resulted in the State Supreme Court issuing an order for the state to appropriately fund education or it would effectively shut down the schools (Kiernan, 2008). In January 2006, the Kansas Legislative Post Audit (LPA) commissioned by the state legislature, conducted a study to determine the cost to educate Kansas kids to state and federal standards. The legislature, in an effort to have the case dismissed, agreed to fund education as indicated by the study. In the summer of 2008, the LPA updated this study to show the costs for the next few years. This updated study showed Kansas schools needed an additional 386 million dollars. Funding has not kept up to the LPA"s suggestions. Since 2006, after the Montoy v Kansas lawsuit was settled, Kansas school districts have seen four rounds of educational budget cuts resulting in a reduction in funding of 167.6 million dollars (Robb, 2009). The continued lack of funding and disregard for the Kansas" Supreme Court mandate has fueled the fire for schools to bring another lawsuit. Presently there are nearly 100 school districts that have joined a coalition to fund public education, as the constitution requires. For some of these districts, the threat of consolidation is the motivating factor to join.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 explains the research design and methodology used in the study and discusses the elements of a qualitative case study as well as the epistemological perspective of social constructionism. The chapter subsequently provides the background detail of the research site of Spring Valley, KS. The chapter closes with an explanation of the researcher"s position relative to the study.

Methodology

The researcher conducted the study using qualitative case study methods grounded in a naturalistic inquiry approach from a social constructionist perspective. The use of qualitative research methods provided opportunity to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction (Creswell, 2007). While there are well-designed philosophical rationales and theoretical underpinnings to qualitative inquiry, the practical applications came down to a few very basic and simple ideas: pay attention, listen and watch, be open, think about what I heard and saw, document systematically, and apply what I learned (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative Case Study

The qualitative case study involves researching the dynamics of an issue or single entity explored through one or more cases within a bounded system or single setting (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Tellis, 1997). Case studies typically combine data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires, and observations (Eisenhardt, 1989). Case studies contain multiple perspectives. I considered not just the voice and perspective of the individuals involved, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them (Tellis, 1997). The parallels between the definition of qualitative case study, the theoretical framework of social

capital, and the epistemological position of social constructionism allowed for the stories of the individuals to come through during the inquiry process.

Naturalistic inquiry, a form of qualitative research, is conducted in a natural setting because context is so heavily implicated in meaning. Such a contextual inquiry demands a human presence to garner an overall feel of not only the people being studied, but also the place. Methods used in naturalistic inquiry typically include interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues, and other similar methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The openness of naturalistic inquiry permitted me to be especially sensitive to the differing perspectives of various stakeholders. This allowed for the collection of data and the reporting of findings with multiple perspectives clearly in mind (Patton, 1990).

The naturalistic approach to research identifies reality as that which is constructed by individuals and their place and not as an objective ideal universal to all (Crotty, 1998). Once in the field, the inquirer uses purposive sampling, inductive analysis of the data, development of grounded theory, and projection of next steps in an ever emerging design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). The nature of this particular study was to look into human perceptions of the issue of school consolidation on a sending community and how it had impacted them, their community, their families, and their children and grandchildren. As a result, naturalistic inquiry allowed me to handle the varied social and behavioral realities required in this case study. I conducted the qualitative case study from a social constructionist perspective. A section follows that explains this in further detail.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism means that humans construct meaning as they engage with the world around them. It is the view that knowledge and subsequent reality are dependent upon

human practices embedded in the interaction between and among other human beings in an essentially social context (Crotty, 1998). This epistemological position aligned with my approach to studying a clearly human social problem and allowed for an open-ended conclusion dependent on human responses to the inquiry. Because of the overwhelming social context that surrounds an event like transitioning from a community school to a consolidated high school and its impact on communities, families, and individual students, I attempted to approach the line of inquiry without any preconceptions or pre-meditated conclusions. I hope this has allowed for a more authentic portrayal of reality co-constructed with the participants.

At its core, social constructionist inquiry is concerned with defining the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live. The terms by which the world is understood does not come by an induction process or building and testing hypotheses. Instead, the personal experiences themselves provide meaning (Gergen, 1985). For this study, this epistemological position blended into a cohesive bond with naturalistic inquiry and qualitative research methods. The sending community of Spring Valley, KS in USD 650, Brookfield Public Schools, served as the site for the study. A full description of the research site is included in Chapter 4.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary gatherer of information and as such, could optimize the data gathering process by utilizing his or her connections in the research location that may have been previously established (Merriam, 1998). I worked in Brookfield Public Schools USD 650 for eleven years (1998 – 2009) in various administrative positions including high school assistant principal / athletic director; Farmington Charter / Brookfield Middle School Principal; and District Curriculum Director. My wife taught in the Spring Valley

School for eight years (2001 – 2009), and my children attended the Spring Valley School. Some citizens, parents, and students involved in the study were acquaintances of me and my family. Some students in the study had my wife as a teacher earlier in their academic careers. This positionality may have served both as an asset to the research process and a liability. Because some level of trust had been formed during the past eleven years among participants, greater depth of conversation in the focus groups and potential interviews may have been attainable. Conversely, prior familiarity with me and my family may have prevented participants from being totally forthcoming in their responses.

I brought both an insider and outsider perspective to the study. I was an insider for eleven years. Yet, during the actual study, I was employed by another district and was no longer working for USD 650. This allowed me the opportunity to have greater access to data as a former insider. As a recent outsider, this may have enabled the participants to be more candid in their responses thereby enriching the data with potentially greater levels of honesty and depth of understanding that may otherwise have not been attainable had I still been working as an administrator within USD 650.

I had worked with the administrative team and board of education in USD 650 for several years prior to my departure and prior to gathering the data for this study. My emotional connections to them proved challenging for me as I analyzed the data and prepared my findings, conclusions, and implications. Surely, some of the participants" responses could have been directed at my leadership during my time in the district, yet, it felt from time to time that my recent outsider perspective enabled them to utilize me as a sounding board for their current dissatisfaction with district administration and board of education. These colleagues, with whom I had worked for several years, were now a part of my research project and were spoken about in

often negative tones. This made the findings, conclusions, and implications delicate to write. In the end, I determined the voices of the participants needed to be heard regardless of the content of their statements, which in essence, was a core purpose of my study. Spring Valley voices should be heard.

I was interested in this study because of the inherent challenges that exist when communities consolidate schools. Resistance to consolidation efforts from the "sending community" is common and could be lasting. Disconnect from the receiving community could also have appeared in the form of negative communication and resistance to cooperation between them. It was my intent to better understand if this perceived disconnect existed between Brookfield and Spring Valley and if so, to identify the underlying causes. Gathering data through qualitative means provided the participants with the opportunity to share their stories about this issue and may offer solutions to help serve as the bridge to greater unification in Brookfield USD 650, and could be transferrable to other districts throughout rural America.

Data Collection

For this study, I conducted an extensive review of documents and archival records, attended a board meeting, facilitated four focus groups, and conducted seven key informant interviews. The study involved a total of 35 participants. The following sections describe the data collection methods used for this qualitative case study. Data for this study were collected between February and July, 2010.

Document Review and Public Meeting

I attended a public board meeting and reviewed various archival documents relative to the study. I audio recorded the public comment portion of the board meeting that was dedicated to allowing patrons from USD 650, and particularly Spring Valley, to share their thoughts about

the possible closure of the Spring Valley school. Document analysis included Spring Valley and Brookfield board of education agendas and minutes, historical Board of Education letters to the public, public letters to the editor of the local newspaper, and newspaper articles during the time period of 1961-1968, which was the period of consolidation. By reviewing the documents associated with the community of Spring Valley and the consolidated school district, a broader perspective of the participants" emotions and therefore, a greater opportunity to describe these emotions, emerged. Using documentary material as data is not much different from using interviews or observations. The data collection from documents was guided by questions, educated hunches, and emerging findings (Merriam, 1998).

Patton referred to field work as the study of a event in a naturalistic setting (1990). He went on to describe a study"s document review as a particularly rich source of information. This study left a paper trail that I followed and used to increase knowledge and understanding about Spring Valley"s position as a sending community. This was especially helpful when attempting to understand the consolidation event of the Spring Valley School district in 1960"s. Documents fit the criteria of using data rich in description in a naturalist manner. They are inductive with the process of making meaning constructed by those who produced them or used them. Documents are the narrative means to the people who created them and present a qualitative approach that can add significantly to the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Participants and Sampling

Four focus groups and several key informant interviews were planned for this study. At its conclusion, I facilitated four focus groups and conducted seven key informant interviews. The focus groups ranged in size from 6 – 8 persons. A total of 35 participants were part of the sampling process.

Focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalizes on communication among research participants in order to generate responses. They explicitly use group interaction as part of the method which encourages participants to talk to one another (Kitzinger, 1995). They can be employed in multiple ways and are effective at determining the perceptions, feelings, and thinking of people about issues, products services, or opportunities (Krueger & Casey, 2000). For qualitative researchers, focus groups are group interviews that are structured to foster talk among the participants about particular issues. They often consist of 6 – 10 people and led by a facilitator, or researcher. When general topics are being explored, this type of interview process is particularly useful. People that come together in this fashion often stimulate conversation from a variety of perspectives so the researcher can learn the ranges of views (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The community aspect associated with this particular research study of school consolidation lead to the importance of conducting focus groups due to the social context that was interwoven throughout the problem and research design. The idea behind the focus group method is group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that may be less easily accessible in a one-to-one interview (Kitzinger, 1995).

Participants were chosen based on their connections to the community of Spring Valley. These groups were representative of a cross selection of people of varying socioeconomic indicators. An attempt was made to obtain an equal number of male and female participants throughout the study; however, it was more important for this study to select participants who fit the timeline and location of their schooling. It was less important, though not unimportant, for this study to select participants based on certain socioeconomic factors or makeup of the family structure. The sampling for this study included representatives from pre-consolidation and post consolidation days of the community of Spring Valley. The sampling strategy was to utilize key

persons, with whom I was already familiar as a result of previously working in the district, to serve as the first point of contact. Through these first contacts, I obtained names of persons that fit the criteria of the sampling outlined below to participate in one of four focus groups. Questions for all focus groups are located in Appendix A.

Focus Group 1 consisted of 6 persons who graduated from Spring Valley High School prior to consolidation with Burr Ridge in 1966. This group was lifelong citizens of the Spring Valley community. This group of people was asked to share their experiences about what it was like prior, during, and after the consolidation occurred. Because they were students prior to consolidation, they had a unique perspective on how that event affected the community. This group of participants bridged the past and the present.

Focus Group 2 consisted of 6 parents who had children in the Brookfield Public School system. The rationale for gaining perspectives from this group was to garner responses from parents, some of who experienced attendance themselves in the consolidated high school. They also had children that attended Spring Valley Elementary and Brookfield High. This group‟s stories were important to ascertain if student perspectives of attendance in a consolidated school changed from one generation to the next. They also brought a parental perspective to the discussion, which helped inform the research if students shared their parents‟ perspectives about attending Brookfield High school.

Focus Group 3 consisted of 8 Spring Valley students presently attending Brookfield High School. These students attended Spring Valley Elementary throughout their educational careers and have lived in the community area their entire lives. These students were able to share perspectives on what it was like to attend a consolidated high school outside of their hometown

community of Spring Valley. They helped to validate or dispute claims from the former groups of the experiences of attending the consolidated high school in Brookfield.

Focus Group 4 consisted of 8 students in 7th and 8th grade at Spring Valley Elementary. These students have attended the Spring Valley School throughout their educational careers and were approaching the transition to Brookfield High School as 9th graders. Their perspectives were important to better understand the thoughts that students had about their time in Spring Valley and their excitement, fear, and understanding of what schooling would be like at Brookfield High School.

Interviews consist of one-on-one reciprocal conversation guided by the research questions from which the interview questions originate. The main purpose of the interview process is to ascertain what is on the participant's mind. Interviewing becomes necessary when we need greater insight than what an observation or document review can provide. For this study, interviewing was used to collect data from a number of people representing a broad range of perspectives and ideas (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, it was a means to greater confidentiality for certain participants. Focus groups involve several people together at one time while the one-on-one interview is more discrete and a participant may feel greater freedom to share more candidly.

The key informant interview participants were selected based on their connection to the community of Spring Valley, their status as a perceived leader in the community, and knowledge of the history of the consolidation events involving Spring Valley. I also chose these people because of their perspective on the affect consolidation had on them individually, their families, and the community. Four women and three men participated. Two of the men and two of the women had leadership positions in the Spring Valley community. The other man was a former

superintendent in USD 651. The remaining women were chosen because they had children, presently or formerly, who attended Spring Valley Elementary and Brookfield High School. Interview questions are located in Appendix A.

The purpose of this study was to attempt to understand how consolidation affected the students, families, and community members of Spring Valley who sent their students to a consolidated high school located in Brookfield. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples selected purposefully. The power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. The core purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases and participants who will illuminate the questions under study (Patton, 1990).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials in order to determine findings. Analysis involved working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns. Data interpretation referred to developing ideas about the findings and relating them to the literature and broader concerns and concepts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For a qualitative case study, data analysis consists of making a detailed description of the case and its settings. In the case of chronological events, of which this particular case study is an example, analyzing the multiple sources of data occurred in the chronological sequence of events to determine evidence for each step or phase in the evolution of the study (Creswell, 2007).

FileMaker Pro was the computer program used to store and manage the data. FileMaker Pro was an effective means of managing the data. Qualitative computer programs have been available since the late 1980's and have become more refined and helpful in computerizing the process of analyzing text and image data. In using FileMaker Pro, I identified a text segment or image segment, assigned a code label, and then searched through the database for all text segments that had the same code label. In this process I, not the computer program, did the coding and categorizing (Creswell, 2007). Data were compressed and linked together in a narrative that conveyed the meaning I derived from studying the data and the context in which it was derived. Description of this sort is an important component of all forms of qualitative research but it should not be the only level of analysis. Category construction moved beyond basic description where the challenge was to construct categories or themes that captured some recurring pattern (Merriam, 1998). Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, my knowledge and position, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves.

Categories and themes emerged from units of data. A unit of data is any meaningful segment of data that can be as small as a word a participant uses to describe a feeling or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident. A unit must meet two criteria. It should reveal information relevant to the study and stimulate the researcher to think beyond the particular bit of information. Secondly, the unit should be able to stand by itself by being interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understand of the context in which the inquiry is carried out (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research Quality

Qualitative methodology requires the researcher to establish credibility, maintain a high ethical standard, and ensure reliability of the data. My presence may have made a difference in how the research program and participants reacted. The fact that a study is being conducted may have created a "halo" effect so that participants performed in a different fashion than they might otherwise. These problems of reactivity are well documented in literature. For one to ensure researcher credibility and validity, the researcher must report any personal or professional information that may affect data collection, analysis, and interpretation negatively or positively (Patton, 1990).

Triangulation of data is crucially important in naturalistic studies. Triangulation simply means validating information from one source against at least one other source. No single item of information should ever be given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation is important to internal validity, as it is the indication that data will be collected through multiple sources. When triangulation occurs it comes to mean that many sources of data are better in a study than a single source because multiple sources lead to a fuller understanding of the event (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The data were triangulated through the use of multiple methods and participant groups, as well as from review of documents and the unitization of focus groups and interview transcripts.

For this particular study, all participants were provided full disclosure of the intent and purpose of the research and what their participation entailed. They were informed of any potentially harmful effects as well as the benefits they might realize for being a participating member. Additionally, the participants were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and at any time they were free to opt out of the study. All participants were required to

sign a permission form that articulated all of these issues to them. The consent form can be found in Appendix B. Participants who were not of age to provide for their own consent were required to sign an assent form following the signature of a consent form by their parent or legal guardian. Appendix C contains the Assent Form. While anonymity was not guaranteed, all data gathered were kept in strict confidentiality. Any audio and video recordings were destroyed once the transcription of data and subsequent report was completed (Merriam, 1998).

Concerns about validity and reliability are common to all forms of research. To mitigate these concerns, I utilized widely accepted techniques for qualitative methodology. The member checking process was used to hear comments that would allow for validation of my interpretation of the data and/or create continuous inquiry into unanswered questions. This process empowered participants at different levels and different paces. A unanimous voice of validation, while possible, was not the desired outcome. Instead, as with much good qualitative research, multiple interpretations of the data, findings, and conclusions were not only possible, but valued (Cho & Trent, 2009). Member checking allowed me to check with my sources the trustworthiness of what was found. It allowed the participants to review findings from the data analysis in order to confirm and challenge the accuracy of my work (Creswell, 2007; Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Federal regulations have been enacted to protect human subjects from harm when participating in any research project as subjects. Professional codes also deal with issues common to all social science research. These codes deal with weighing the costs and benefits of the research for the participants and safeguards are put in place to protect their rights and provide the for the utmost in ethical treatment (Merriam, 1998). I conducted this study as outlined. This was documented in the study itself and this dissertation was provided to the participants.

CHAPTER 4

SPRING VALLEY: HISTORY AND PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

This chapter tells the story of Spring Valley's history with school consolidation gleaned from historical documents, and interviews and focus group with citizens. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with 35 persons directly involved in the Spring Valley school consolidations with Burr Ridge and/or Brookfield including citizens who graduated from Spring Valley High School and still residing in Spring Valley, other Spring Valley patrons, and current Spring Valley parents and students. Additionally, an observation was conducted at a board of education public meeting on February 15, 2010 containing several presentations from Spring Valley patrons relative to the consideration of further district consolidation, including the possibility of closure of the Spring Valley K-8 School. Other patrons from throughout the district commented at this public meeting on various topics relative to the tough budget decisions the district leadership and board of education were considering. Documents were also reviewed pertaining to the history of the Spring Valley school consolidation involving the consolidated districts.

This chapter will begin with a description of Spring Valley and its place in the consolidated district. It is followed with a description and perceptions of the effects consolidation had on the community and people of Spring Valley. Following a look at the history of consolidation and its effects on the community, the chapter will take a look into the benefits of community schools as articulated through the voices and observations of the citizens, parents, and students of Spring Valley. Finally, the chapter will look into the perceived barriers that prevented unification among the sending and receiving communities in USD 650.

Spring Valley, KS in Brookfield USD 650

Brookfield Public Schools USD 650 is a rural consolidated district located in southeastern Roberts County and a small portion of northwest Savoy County. The district consists of the communities of Spring Valley, Brookfield, Farmington, Collinsville, and the southernmost portion of Huntley. The unified district has elementary schools in each of its communities with the exception of Huntley. The communities of Spring Valley, Farmington, and Collinsville have K-8 schools serving the local populations of students. Brookfield has a K-6 elementary, a 7-8 middle school, and the consolidated high school that served all of the consolidated communities" students in grades 9-12. The community of Spring Valley is the sending community that lost its high school following the spring of 1966 and was the focus of this study. I studied the impact school consolidation had on a local sending community, the parents who sent their students to the consolidated high school in Brookfield, and the Spring Valley students who attended Brookfield High School. The community of Spring Valley met these criteria since their students left their local community school and entered Brookfield High School in the 9th grade.

Spring Valley is a community of 853 residents located on the K-101 corridor between Wichita and Huntley, KS. The community is largely agricultural and has seen little business expansion since 1995. Several housing developments in the community are in their infant stages. A few homes dot the landscape in these developments with most of the new homeowners commuting to either Wichita or Huntley for work. A new library and K-8 school were built in the late 1990"s with the hope of attracting additional families to the Spring Valley area.

During the past six years, a major effort has been undertaken to improve the infrastructure of the community. Electrical improvements, water rights, improved sewer services,

and improved access to city parks has helped the community prepare for growth in the future.

The community has a farmers" co-op, bank, tire store, and a variety store. There are no

restaurants, gas stations, or grocery stores. The community has attempted to sustain a local

recreational program but so few students participate that many travel to nearby communities for

this purpose. Still, Spring Valley has a city park, a swimming pool, ball diamonds, and a city

library that is modern and well stocked with written material as well as computers for access to

the digital world. A vibrant community center exists where much of the senior citizen population

gathers for Monday lunches and Friday night bingo.

The Mayor reminded the community members in his State of the Community report of

2009 (Somers, 2009) that when rural communities lose their schools, grocery store, and gas

station the picture is being painted of a community in decline. These circumstances had all been

a part of Spring Valley"s past and continues in the present.

Spring Valley Has Experienced Difficulty with Consolidation over the Years

The history of consolidation concerning the community of Spring Valley has taken many

twists and turns. Initially, Spring Valley was interested in a five-district consolidation that

included the communities of Spring Valley, Bartlett, Harrisburg, Burr Ridge, and Savoy. When

an agreement between these communities could not be reached, Spring Valley and Burr Ridge

consolidated with each other. As a result of the data gathered throughout this study, it was

apparent participants had a general understanding of the consolidation history of Spring Valley,

particularly the long time citizens, parents, and adult key informants.

Forced Consolidation and the Original Five Community Plan

In 1961, the state of Kansas was addressing the need to force mass consolidation of

school districts. Legislative action in Topeka and several studies by outside entities, including

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the Kansas State Department of Public Instruction (Reida & Miller, 1961), were making their case for mass statewide school consolidation. This prompted the Spring Valley Board of Education to seize control of their impending destiny.

Historical documents indicated several meetings occurred during this time with Spring Valley patrons and surrounding communities to determine the best course of action to take. Letters from the Spring Valley Consolidation Steering Committee and the local Board of Education to the newspaper painted a picture for the need to become proactive.

> We think that if the proposed consolidation can be accomplished, we can get the combination of areas we desire, but if we don"t, we may in future years have consolidation carried on by some outside body in an arbitrary fashion which might be much less attractive to us (Spring Valley Steering Committee Letter to Patrons, 1961).
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> We dislike the idea of having our boys and girls getting their high school education outside of Spring Valley, but we can also see that unification would give them many advantages in securing a better education. If our unification is just a matter of time, we feel that Spring Valley should work this problem out for themselves instead of waiting for the state to push us where they want us (Spring Valley Board of Education Letter to Patrons, 1962).

Communities involved in these discussions were Spring Valley, Burr Ridge, Bartlett, Harrisburg, and Savoy. At least two surveys of the Spring Valley patrons were conducted between the years 1961 and 1962. The first survey results showed Spring Valley patrons favored consolidation with all five communities resulting in maintaining elementary schools in each of these communities and building a new consolidated high school in a centralized location

approximately 12 miles northeast of Spring Valley and 5 miles southwest of Harrisburg. Locating the centralized high school in the country ultimately became a point of contention among the communities. To illustrate, a Spring Valley board member at the time expressed a general understanding of the animosity surrounding the original consolidation plans.

> They started working with five towns and the five schools. Everything was going really well until the night they sat down to talk about where they would put this high school. Harrisburg made it really clear that the high school would be in their town and the other four towns thought, "No it isn"t!" Then that kinda broke down. Savoy went on their own, Harrisburg and Bartlett went together, and Spring Valley and Burr Ridge went together. And so it kinda split into those three.

A quote from a Spring Valley Board of Education letter to patrons in 1962 illuminated the tension between the communities:

> We do not have good roads in this area. Harrisburg wants the high school near their city limits and school officials are doubtful if they would vote for a building located in the country. The Bartlett and Burr Ridge school boards seem to be in favor of unification. The Savoy school board has stated that they do not intend to join the other four schools in unification unless circumstances force them to it.

No community wanted to give up anything. They preferred keeping their own high schools and all of the district land to themselves. A person from Spring Valley who served on the original consolidated board with Burr Ridge at that time continued,

> Everybody wanted something out of it and didn"t want to give up a dime. They didn"t want to give up one square mile, one student; nobody was willing to give up anything.

And it didn't make any difference you know…we were that way from Spring Valley you know. We didn't go offering anything. And so it was real difficult.

An unwillingness to reach compromise on consolidation among the five different communities proved too difficult to overcome. With the five-community unification idea losing momentum, the Spring Valley Board of Education turned its focus on unifying with one other community. It was perceived unifying with one community would be a simpler task than trying to get multiple communities to agree. The Spring Valley board then looked at the town of Brookfield to the west, and shared their plan in a 1962 letter to the public,

The Brookfield School Board is planning for a new high school now that would probably be located along the north or east side of their town. The same building should be built for less money at Brookfield because of the city services (water, sewer, fire protection, etc.) that would be available. We will soon have an excellent road between Spring Valley and Brookfield which will cut travel distance to about 7 miles. It also seems apparent that it would be easier to work out an agreement with one school rather than four.

Representatives from the Spring Valley Board of Education met with the board from Brookfield in 1962. A Spring Valley board member at the time of this meeting recently shared, "Brookfield was not interested in accepting Spring Valley into their school district. They felt they had the students and the financial means to be able to continue on their own." The inquiry failed to resonate with the Brookfield Board of Education. With Brookfield feeling secure in their present state and not wanting to add other communities, Spring Valley again would consider Burr Ridge in an effort to see what kind of future they could make together as a consolidated district.

Burr Ridge to the north became aware of Spring Valley‟s efforts for potential

consolidation with Brookfield. Superintendent Varner from Burr Ridge and Superintendent

McCarroll from Spring Valley reopened the consolidation dialogue. Subsequently, the two

districts decided to consolidate with their first year of unification beginning in the fall of 1966.

As part of the agreement, Spring Valley would send their high school students in 9-12 grades to

Burr Ridge, and Burr Ridge would send their 7th and 8th grade students to Spring Valley. Each

community would keep their kindergarten through 6th graders in their respective community

schools. Superintendent McCarroll agreed to step down to take a job in the Burroughs District to

the northwest leaving Superintendent Varner in charge of the newly consolidated Burr Ridge-

Spring Valley district.

The Spring Valley and Burr Ridge Consolidation

The Spring Valley District and the Burr Ridge District, which were 11 miles apart,

decided to consolidate with their first year of unification beginning in the fall of 1966. As part of

the agreement, Spring Valley would send their high school students in 9-12 grades to Burr

Ridge, and Burr Ridge would send their 7th and 8th grade students to Spring Valley. Each

community would keep its kindergarten through 6th graders in their respective community

schools. The new Spring Valley / Burr Ridge school district was set up with a board

representative of three districts and an at large position. Two of the three districts were the

communities of Burr Ridge and Spring Valley respectively. The third district was the area

between the two communities, referred to as the "center" board district.

Almost immediately, in August of 1966, the first year of the newly unified Burr Ridge-

Spring Valley school district, the new board faced a very challenging event. Harold Varner, the

new consolidated district‟s superintendent, the former superintendent at Burr Ridge who

assumed an active role in bringing the two communities together, decided to take the Brookfield superintendency in August of the very first year. This increased the consternation of the citizens of Spring Valley surrounding an already delicate consolidation with Burr Ridge. An original board member familiar with the superintendency change described his emotion of the last minute move by the Burr Ridge Superintendent to Brookfield.

> Well about the first of August [he] wants to break his contract. He‟s got a chance to go to Brookfield, and…. Oh, my gosh! You know…bringing us together is gonna be a job in itself and he went to Brookfield that fall! And we never did get a good superintendent I don‟t think. I never thought there was a strong superintendent the whole time we was with Burr Ridge. We had about three different ones.

Two months into the consolidation with Burr Ridge, Spring Valley patrons found themselves in a new district without a strong leader. The board had to find a superintendent quickly as the school year was upon them. The result was not optimal. The new leader had little background of the challenges that these communities and districts had gone through over the past several years. Without strong leadership, the consolidation faced even greater challenges.

A renewed hope sprang from the idea that a new junior-senior high school built between the two communities would be a great opportunity to shorten the distance of travel for their students and offer a new facility to enhance academic learning. This proposed school would be built directly in the middle of the communities of Spring Valley and Burr Ridge at the 5.5 mile mark. Meetings occurred, plans were drawn, and a bond issue was set for November 5, 1968. The results of the bond election were not what the patrons of Spring Valley had wanted. While Spring Valley passed the election to build the new school, the patrons of Burr Ridge said no. Following the no vote from Burr Ridge, a vast majority of the Spring Valley participants viewed

the consolidation with Burr Ridge acrimoniously, including this Spring Valley citizen, who had this to say about the town‟s consolidation with Burr Ridge,

> My brothers and sisters were still in school then and they attended at Burr Ridge high school. It was very contentious as far as I remember. People were very unhappy with it. I know they didn‟t like going all the way out of town clear to their school. They wanted to stay in their own school. It was very contentious and eventually they redid it and consolidated with Brookfield instead of with Burr Ridge. It‟s not a pleasant situation.

Burr Ridge preferred to maintain the high school in its own community forcing the Spring Valley students to continue to travel 11 miles to attend. "They hate the way the Burr Ridge situation turned out only because Burr Ridge did not agree to building the school halfway between the towns," reflected one Spring Valley citizen. This event marked the beginning of a time where representatives from the three board districts would experience difficulties working together. These difficulties would split the board, and eventually led to the dissolution of the Spring Valley-Burr Ridge district.

The two representatives from the Spring Valley district experienced a divide happening within the board. Rather quickly, the newly consolidated board turned into a split board with members from Burr Ridge and the center district teaming up and forming a "voting bloc" on many issues that seemed to favor Burr Ridge. This resulted in the two representatives from Spring Valley voting in the minority on most decisions. "Whenever there was a vote, the two from Burr Ridge would vote with the two from the center," stated one of the original Spring Valley board members. This voting bloc created a sense of hopelessness from the two Spring Valley board representatives. One of them recalled, "And you know when I was driving home that night [from the board meeting], we said there wasn‟t much sense in us going up there, you

know." The feeling of being left out of key discussions on how best to consolidate Spring Valley and Burr Ridge permeated the conversations among the Spring Valley participants.

From the beginning, Spring Valley"s consolidation with Burr Ridge was tenuous at best. Three significant events occurred early on that damaged the new relationship beyond repair: first, the Burr Ridge superintendent, who was leading the consolidated effort for the two communities, left in August of the first year to take the superintendency in the neighboring Brookfield school district; secondly, Burr Ridge was unwilling to build a high school in between the two communities; and thirdly, the voting bloc that formed a coalition against the two Spring Valley board representatives ultimately sealed the doomed fate of the Spring Valley / Burr Ridge consolidation. As a result, Spring Valley would attempt to bridge again with their former superintendent during the initial consolidation, Harold Varner. Knowing Varner was the new superintendent of the Brookfield district and his prior willingness to consolidate with Spring Valley while at Burr Ridge, the Spring Valley board representatives of the Burr Ridge-Spring Valley district met with him in the hopes that Brookfield would reconsider their position of consolidation. Mr. Varner agreed to take it to the Brookfield board for approval. The Brookfield School Board did approve the consolidation and Spring Valley became a member of Brookfield Public Schools USD 650 in 1968. Unfortunately, history has proved their hope of a positive consolidation with Brookfield yielded many of the same negative feelings.

Consolidation has Hurt the Sending Community of Spring Valley

There was a strong perception from the participants in the study that a successful school correlated to a successful community. Conversely, if a school closes down, so does the community. As stated above, Spring Valley struggled to maintain existing businesses or in attracting new business to town following the closure of its high school. In that regard, the

community is typical of many rural communities throughout the Midwest. Mt Hope patrons generally felt consolidation had hurt their community, yet many still believed their community had one advantage other communities did not have: a major highway connecting Spring Valley to Wichita and only 20 minutes separating them.

Faith in the K-101 Corridor Project

Spring Valley citizens placed a great deal of faith in a program called the K-101 Corridor Project, which is a coalition of member communities, including Spring Valley, looking to attract businesses along the four-lane state highway between Wichita and Huntley. Without a viable school in the community, Spring Valley citizens and parents overwhelmingly felt their community would suffer even more and hurt their chances of turning their fortunes around. At a USD 650 board meeting held on February 15, 2010, a leader in the K-101 coalition group explained their purpose,

> [The] association was formed 4 years ago to bring orderly and efficient development along the corridor from Massey to South Huntley. We've implemented the plan and now we are moving into marketing the corridor and we are upgrading our website. And one of the major components of that website is for quality of life.

This person further explained how important education was for quality of life,

> I can tell you that at the top of the list on quality of life is education. And anytime you reduce the educational opportunities in a community or in the surrounding community, it just degrades the opportunities for communities like Spring Valley specifically to attract people to their community.

Evidence of the lifeline connection between school and community came out in many of the interview and focus group transcripts. In speaking to the board of education, the K-101 Coalition representative concluded,

> Schools are the heartbeat of any community. In the case of Spring Valley, it is the most important item in recruiting new residences and even small businesses to that community. And I would hope that you would be a partner in retaining that heartbeat.

Because of Spring Valley's location near Wichita, all respondents who spoke about the advantages of the community's position did so with confidence.

It was a commonly held belief by the participants of this study that Spring Valley would eventually benefit from Wichita's growth to the north and west. Much hope was pinned to the success of the K-101 corridor project "Because Spring Valley's growing, nobody else in the district is," exuded a key informant. It is a point that several participants made. They agreed the growth, although minimal over the past several years, would come from Wichita. A community leader affirmed, "We've had twelve houses built since 2004. We currently have two houses under construction that have six children. If we can hang on we're gonna see some influx and we think there'll be more all the time." Regarding the advantages of the new highway, he continued,

> I keep going back to that K-101 corridor that's opened up and the school district owns – owns is not the exact word – but it certainly controls three-fourths of that corridor. And for them not to realize, for the school district not to realize how valuable that is… and potential – it's a great potential that they have – is a bit again short sighted. I think we're unique. I think we're very unique because of our location with that K-101 corridor. Other communities don't have that.

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An area leader of the K-101 corridor project confirmed, "They [Spring Valley] were the first community in the last two years along the corridor to establish what we would call a neighborhood revitalization program of which USD 650 was a part of. This is working." Clearly, the patrons of Spring Valley felt their location was advantageous to keeping a school. Even so, the people from Spring Valley felt past consolidation had taken a toll on the relationships within their own community and with Brookfield.

School Closings Believed to Have Reversed Spring Valley's Growth Potential

Spring Valley experienced a stop in their growth during the initial consolidation with Burr Ridge in the 1960"s. Spring Valley citizens had fond memories of their community"s growth potential and existing business climate before the forced closure of their high school. They believed this potential for continued growth was stymied by the forced removal of their high school prior to the Burr Ridge consolidation. The recent push to close the elementary school prompted study participants to recall those times, as evidenced in this response from a Spring Valley citizen,

> From the city standpoint, prior to consolidation with Burr Ridge we had housing, houses going up right and left, building houses, four, five, six houses a year and they were just being sold, bam, bam, bam! And then, since we consolidated with Burr Ridge, I think we went eight or ten years and didn't have a new house built. At that time, we had lots of stores in town, lots of growth and it just stagnated us terrible.

Later, this citizen shifted his responses to the recent discussions involving closing the Spring Valley School. He reiterated his perspective about how devastating it would be on the community to close their school. In a domino like progression, the closure of the school would close Spring Valley. Closure of Spring Valley would close USD 650. He continued,

Looking at it from the city's perspective, you could close Spring Valley [and] save 600,000 dollars in this process. [But] you're going to kill the city of Spring Valley. I think, in essence, you would put a big hit or kill toward USD 650.

Others pointed to the economic loss that would result from closing a school and how this loss would negate any potential financial gain. They wished others could step back and see this issue from a broader, economic perspective. A community leader shared his opinion about the negative implications to Spring Valley if their school closed. He believed these negative consequences could potentially affect the entire district. "Just closing because of sheer numbers, I think that's short sighted – not looking at the big picture. That's a short term solution," he said. Another patron shared how the loss of a single teacher would have an exponentially downward affect on Spring Valley,

When you start cutting teachers, you're destroying her career. You are losing a Sunday school teacher, a tutor, a friend, a neighbor. The hairdresser will lose a customer. The gas station will lose that tank of gas each week. The grocery store will lose a bag of groceries each week. The city will have one more empty house and decreased tax base, which the remainder of us have to pick up with the increase in taxes.

During an individual interview, another parent shared the effect closing the school would have on the community in the long term,

I have learned a great deal about how some of those things can really impact, like property values. And you know, I do a lot with the new people that come into town, getting them, you know, acquainted with what"s happening in our community and so if we were to lose that I fear what that might do to, um, to the future growth of our community.

Patrons believe the current lack of a high school has negatively affected Spring Valley. Although a K-8 school still resides in the community, "families don"t move here because their kids, when they get to high school, are gonna have to go to another town. And I know people who have moved to Brookfield instead of Spring Valley because the school is there," opined a community leader. Many participants felt strongly that the short-term gains of further consolidation, if any, would be largely offset by a declining community and local economy.

School consolidation and / or closing a school ignites passion in many that reside in sending communities. One could sense this in a patron"s plea to the board of education at a community-wide board meeting when he earnestly said,

> I have friends from all over the state. They come from communities that lost their schools. And it is a death sentence for a community. And you guys have way more power than you guys think you have. Spring Valley's head is on the chopping block. And you guys really have the key to whether that community lives or dies.

Equally as passionate, a parent checked her use of a strong adjective during an interview while describing the effects of closing a school, "You know devastation is a very strong word. It"s a very strong word. Um, but I think it would devastate our community if we were to lose that school."

Recent Push for more Consolidation has Facilitated Dissention between Spring Valley and

Brookfield

Over the past few years, discussion surrounding the further consolidation of schools within USD 650 has created a firestorm of responses from Spring Valley. About three years ago, in spring of 2008, the board of education looked into the possibility of bringing the 7th and 8th grade students from Collinsville and Spring Valley to Brookfield Middle School. In 2010, when

budget cuts were threatening public school districts" financial viability across the state, considerations were given to closing Spring Valley School altogether. The threat that they could lose a portion or all of their school left Spring Valley patrons feeling vulnerable and defensive bringing forth painful emotions and reopening old wounds. Most felt that whatever fraction of a school-community that existed between Spring Valley and Brookfield before had been irreparably harmed. A parent shared, "Our school district should be a community. We have a lot of dissent in our community right now." "The problem is it"s a unified school district and they don"t think of it as a unified school district," believed one citizen. Spring Valley participants all shared animosity towards Brookfield because of this recent turn of events. It appeared these discussions about closing the Spring Valley Elementary School created an even greater divide between the sending and receiving communities.

Spring Valley Feels Unwanted in the District by Brookfield

> I'm gonna be real frank. I think people of Spring Valley think that the Brookfield people think we're bastard step-children. You go to Brookfield… you don't feel welcome at any… at most school events. I don't feel welcome anyway. Mainly I noticed it when my kids went from Spring Valley Grade School to Brookfield High School.

The bluntness of the preceding quote by a key informant who has assumed leadership roles in Spring Valley throughout his life illustrates the hard feelings that still exist toward the community of Brookfield. These two communities, joined as a consolidated school district and located a mere 6 miles apart, are separated by the very painful experience of consolidation. A long time Spring Valley citizen recollected about the past consolidation in light of the new threat of closing Spring Valley School,

When this consolidation first came about I was told by a board member [who] adamantly

said they do not want the Spring Valley kids for their [school] children. All they want is

our tax money. And they were very adamant about it and I think it holds true today.

Often, when a person did not experience first-hand the consolidation with Brookfield that took

place in 1968, they still knew the stories and how much pain and dissension it caused. A parent

shared her recollection of the Spring Valley / Brookfield consolidation by stating,

I also remember hearing stories of the friction that it was causing with the community

and the parents and some of the students that also got into that mix of the division

between. I do remember hearing stories of how that created a lot of concern and a lot of

discord among the communities, which I just hate. I just hate that.

The participants from Spring Valley shared how to this day they do not feel welcome in

Brookfield. They even segregate themselves at ball games. One citizen shared this feeling of

separation,

The way Brookfield has treated this community I have never felt at home in Brookfield. I

can go to Brookfield and no one talks to me. And you can go to basketball games over

there and have kids playing on the basketball team and you have the Brookfield people

and you got the Spring Valley people.

Most Spring Valley participants of this study generally felt as this gentleman did, "I don"t think

Brookfield people have any love lost toward Spring Valley people." A similar statement was

made by this person who reflected, "You know we are never going to be involved with

Brookfield because they don"t want us involved. They don"t ask us to be involved with them for

school activities. They just don"t think about us."

The relationship between Spring Valley and Brookfield was viewed as worse than the former relationship with Burr Ridge. To illustrate, one citizen said, "When we went with Burr Ridge, the people with the two communities were closer than the people of Spring Valley and Brookfield are today." Others clarified by saying the kids were closer in the former consolidation with Burr Ridge but the adults still were not very close. In a focus group, one remarked, "The kids were …the parents weren"t," which was followed by another who echoed the previous comment with, "The kids were real close at Burr Ridge but the parents weren"t." At times, patrons used comparisons with other communities to place Brookfield in a negative light.

The sending community of Spring Valley clearly communicated negative feelings about Brookfield. These negative perceptions were often created by a feeling of being left out of recent discussions involving consolidation issues and/or the threat of closing their community school. Many parents interviewed for this study shared how they felt a clear divide between the Brookfield parents and the Spring Valley parents. Even though they all have kids on the same teams or in the same classes a separation of the people from Spring Valley and Brookfield was distinct as this parent indicated,

> So I think that the division is very clear. When you get there, you may have a student in
>
> high school, but you"re still not a Brookfield person. You are a Spring Valley person
>
> that"s come to Brookfield. And that"s challenging. That"s very challenging for me.

She went on to explain how Spring Valley parents feel a stigma attached to them from the Brookfield parents because of where they are from. This perception was quite negative as evidenced by her comments,

> I mean, I"ve actually heard people say this, that "we are second class citizens," and "what
>
> do we think we"re doing coming over there," and "just white trash." I mean, I"ve heard it

all and that‟s very hurtful. And so you come with that baggage whether the baggage is

your own or not. You already come with the baggage because you‟re not looked upon as

the same as them. And that‟s very difficult. That‟s very hard. That is very hard.

Parents shared a common perception that Brookfield not only had done little to make parents and

kids from Spring Valley feel welcome, Brookfield looked down upon Spring Valley. All agreed

when one of them characterized Brookfield as unwelcoming, "So it‟s not like Brookfield is

standing over there with their arms open saying „oh, send us your kids. We‟re gonna take good

care of them.‟" Another followed that by saying,

You know, I heard it when I got here. "You know, you‟re from Spring Valley, your kids

aren‟t going to play sports in Brookfield because the people there won‟t let the kids in

Spring Valley play."

While this parent did not necessarily believe Spring Valley kids were not given a fair shot when

it came to sports participation, he did have concerns that recent conversations about closing

Spring Valley School could trigger an unwelcome bias towards Spring Valley kids. "I don‟t

believe that. I still don‟t believe that. But it does take a little more effort [from our kids]

probably. And these kind of concerns are gonna be fueled again by all this kinda stuff that‟s

come up."

Spring Valley students also felt slighted at times while at Brookfield High School.

Several indicated feeling they had not been treated fairly when it came to playing time on sports

teams. "It‟s no secret that coaches have favorites. When I came here and I played basketball, I

felt like the coaches were more focused on the Brookfield people," revealed one high school

student. Another student interjected, "There was times, games, where I never got to get in at all."

When prompted by a fellow student about his opinions on the matter, another student replied,

Freshman year I hardly got to play. Sophomore year was even worse. There was games where I didn't get to play at all. I just think they have favorites and they already have it in their mind who's gonna play. And it's already the people that went to Brookfield.

Several Spring Valley citizens concurred with the parent and kids‟ views that some barriers existed for Spring Valley students when it came to a fair chance at participation in sports and fine arts performance. They believed coaches played favorites to the Brookfield kids. "You know it has never been fair," opined one citizen. Another agreed, "Oh no!" The first continued, "In music, in athletics. If you have a basketball player in Brookfield and one in Spring Valley and they are equal, I guarantee you the one in Brookfield will play. And if you have a musician, same thing." Another concurred with this person‟s opinions and added another by saying, "Academics, same thing. If they are equal it leans towards Brookfield."

Many of those interviewed felt the most recent consolidation push has taken a very personal and hurtful turn. A Spring Valley parent shared comments she heard from Brookfield people about how Spring Valley was being selfish for not wanting to close their school and how this selfishness would lead to Brookfield teachers losing their jobs resulting in overall greater harm to the district,

And so now everybody's feelings are hurt, you know. There's been so much name calling and that over here [about how] we're very selfish and we don't care about students. If we cared about students we would close the school down to allow the other kids to have more opportunities.

Another Spring Valley parent shared a similar experience she had from Brookfield, "The teachers are writing, „You know, if it weren‟t for Spring Valley, we would all save our jobs. Spring Valley is too selfish. They don‟t want to close the school!‟" In addition to the parents, the

personal nature of the recent consolidation issue left some citizens feeling left out once again much like the previous consolidation with Burr Ridge. Speaking generally about the Brookfield community, this person said, "They"ve already pushed us out, basically. They"ve already made us feel like second class citizens." Another followed by saying, "I think we"ve felt that way for a long time," which was followed by this comment from yet another citizen, "But more so now. Their true feelings are coming out. I"ve had enough." Feelings of hurt were summed up by a parent, who emotionally said, "There is a rift now that will never, ever, ever mend! There is such a wedge that will never, ever… I honestly do not see how it would heal."

Brookfield Wants all Schools in the "Center" of the District

The feeling of Brookfield as the big school dictating consolidation – or the "center vs. the outside," as several participants referred to it, was a point of contention among them, particularly the parents who said, "It"s like Brookfield"s the prima donna. I mean that"s the way they always seem to me." Another parent, speaking on the issue of Brookfield"s perceived control of the district stated, "They give the appearance that they have no concern for the outlying communities. That it"s only about the center." Expanding on the perception that the outlying communities are viewed negatively by Brookfield, a parent pointedly expressed, "Spring Valley was obviously the last step child to be taken into the district." Another parent supported that statement by following, "That explains a lot." When asked to clarify the term "step child," the first parent replied, "Not just a step child, a red headed step child." Looking for confirmation from the group, the parent went on to accuse, "You guys were all thinking it." Even students shared their disdain with the perception of Brookfield controlling the outlying schools. For example, one student said, "It's just "cause they are the main school in the district, they think they can do a lot more things." When asked to define the main school, the students responded in

unison, "The high school." Another student expanded on the group"s response with, "Yeah, because we have all these middle schools, but just one high school."

While consolidation has negatively affected the relationship between Spring Valley and Brookfield, the relationship between Spring Valley and another neighboring community is perceived positively because it has not been tainted by the influence of school consolidation. A citizen offered this comparison, "I feel much more at home going to Aledo. I can go to Aledo down to Little Bears [Bar and Grill], have steak, and I"ll have twenty people come over and visit with me." Another responded, "Spring Valley and Aledo have a much stronger relationship than Spring Valley and Brookfield." Adults and students alike shared a favorable opinion of the neighboring community with no consolidation history with Spring Valley. One even cited the growth potential from this other community and compared it to Brookfield by saying, "I don"t think Brookfield as a town has a lot to offer more than Spring Valley. Growth is going to hit Spring Valley before it will hit Brookfield." Another followed up by saying, "Drive south of Spring Valley five miles and look at all the houses. Drive any way from Brookfield and see if you can find anything going up." Efforts to minimize Brookfield"s perceived power in the school district were often articulated in comparisons Spring Valley participants made between Brookfield and other surrounding communities outside of the district. It appeared these comparisons were made to explain how easy and beneficial a move away from Brookfield would be for Spring Valley.

Spring Valley participants in the study felt hard feelings extended beyond Spring Valley to other sending communities in the district that had similar experiences with Brookfield. "Oh yeah, and I think you'll see the same thing if you went to Collinsville or Farmington," a citizen stated. Several comments were made indicting Brookfield as a town does not value its outlying

communities. "They only think of it as Brookfield is the high school," commented one student. An older citizen exclaimed the one-sidedness of Brookfield"s approach to consolidation,

> It was brought up that Spring Valley students – 7th and 8th grade – should go to Brookfield, or whatever grades they chose. But you"ve not heard anything about Brookfield students being transported to Spring Valley. That was a NO! NO! NO!

Generally, Spring Valley people feel strongly they have not been heard when it comes to issues of consolidation with Brookfield, past and present. This feeling of being left out of the conversation or being made to feel like "second class citizens" was a concern not unique to them. In fact, one shared, "I think that"s a problem everywhere…the big school always thinks they can control." It is the perceived controlling nature of the center school – in this case, Brookfield – that fosters tremendous ill will among consolidated schools and communities. A board member at a community meeting shared his concern about how personal and divisive the recent consolidation discussions had become when he orated,

> What I fear the most at this point is no matter what we do, what we wind up doing – which something is inevitable… we"re gonna have to do something – that the people on one side are gonna be very angry at the people on the other side of the issue and vice versa, no matter what we decide. And that to me is the worst thing that could happen to the district.

The Spring Valley consolidation process, past and present, has been an ongoing challenge for the community. Consolidation had clearly left a wound over the years that when recently reopened, created tremendous pain, anger, and distrust.

Activities Play a Significant Role for Communities, Students, and Families

While challenges existed for students transitioning to Brookfield High School from Spring Valley, obviously, some successes occurred as well. This was very apparent when students spoke about the key role activities‟ participation played in their ability to make new friendships. School activities were looked at as a critical component to students fitting into their new surroundings, as well as parents and community members feeling a greater connection to Brookfield.

The district‟s activities program at Spring Valley Elementary and Brookfield High School was seen as a significant mechanism that connected communities to their schools and connected the communities with each other. Additionally, the Spring Valley people participating in this study repeatedly stated how important the elementary school was to the present and future viability of their community. Numerous comments were shared regarding how a smaller community-school environment created a family-like atmosphere in Spring Valley where everyone looked out for each other and ultimately helped with learning. Activities were seen as a way to help create this family type environment. Spring Valley parents spoke at length about the value of the activities program in the 7th and 8th grades for their children. They believed moving these students to Brookfield would diminish their opportunities to participate and take away from this family type atmosphere. Once the student reaches high school, parents had mixed emotions about the athletic and activities programs. While they shared some concern about fair opportunities to participate as this research pointed out earlier, they still related many stories about how these activities were vital in helping them form connections to Brookfield and sustained a sense of pride as a parent and family.

Activities and Athletics Fostered Connections between Families, Schools, and Communities

School activities offered by Spring Valley and Brookfield High were both seen as beneficial to all as a way to build school-community pride and bridge connections between Spring Valley and Brookfield. A few parents and their children had success making this connection to Brookfield via the activities programs. Just getting a chance or an opportunity was something they wanted, "A chance at basketball, music, band, whatever. Chances to participate are important," stated one key informant. At a community-wide board meeting, a parent stated how important school activities were in their choosing the Brookfield School District over other area districts. Their family was looking for outstanding academic opportunities, which she believed Brookfield provided. Additionally, she said,

> We chose Brookfield because of all of the things you had to offer. You had art in the
> elementary school. You had music daily in the elementary school. PE. You had so much
> to offer. That's why we chose to come here.

"And although [activities] are very secondary to, um, education, I do think extracurricular things are also very important," opined another parent during a focus group, "and I think if you don"t get a chance to do some of those things, that can be very tough." Participants kept referring back to the benefits of school activities and shared their stories as though activities were the heartbeat of the school district, local communities, and schools. Activities were also seen as a key component to building connections between parents and their children, as this informant articulated,

> But it"s a great thing. You know on Saturday morning then, you can talk about, you
> know, "Man, did you see that great shot somebody made?" Or, "Boy, I thought we were
> going to lose that one and then all of the sudden it turned." You know, it just gives a good

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conversation, a good common ground for you and your kid. I think that"s one of the best

things that kids, families could do.

Parents saw involving their children in activities as a way to make strong connections with the

school, regardless of whether the school was in Spring Valley or Brookfield. A mother

elaborated on her own experiences in raising her children and how their transition to Brookfield

High School was eased by their involvement in activities,

> You know, [my husband] and I involved them in basketball games away from here. They
>
> took music lessons. They were in maybe some organizations. I also probably branched
>
> them out into other things. So they had probably a good background of experiences there.

Even when her children were not involved in a particular activity, there was great value in them

going to the game together. She continued,

> I"m pretty big on them being involved when they went to high school. And you know, I
>
> think there"s no better activity for parents than that Friday night football game. I mean, I
>
> think that ought to be the family activity we all should go to. And I did, even though my
>
> kids weren"t playing. Um, I just think it makes a great family activity.

In spite of previous sentiments about the deep divisions between the two communities,

Spring Valley parents who got involved through school activities with their children found it

easier to make connections to Brookfield parents and the high school. Being involved in the

Booster Club and taking tickets at games were a couple of examples of how connections were

made by a mother who said, "[I was in the] Booster Club. And although those always sat on a

night that I always had a meeting, we still did things like take tickets, you know, be involved in

some of those other kinds of things." This particular parent knew that having good interpersonal

skills and not being afraid to go out there and make new friends was also important to making inroads with Brookfield families.

> I think for me, I'm a people person, so I like to seek out people. Say hey, "I don't know you, I understand you're so-and-so's mom or so-and-so's dad. I'm the parent of so-and-so." And that's kind of how I tried to get into those circles. So they got to know us a little bit on a deeper level and we got to know them and that was very enjoyable.

Other parents spoke about how activities made a big difference for their children, as it helped them facilitate the transition from Spring Valley to Brookfield High. It was important to these parents for their children to be involved in activities and they shared many stories of how they benefited from them. As one mother said about her son, "He was involved and so he went over [to Brookfield High], knowing a lot of people there already. So it was no big deal for that transition." With a little effort, it appeared parents from Spring Valley who chose to be involved, could be, which made the transition to Brookfield High easier for them and their children. Additionally, Spring Valley kids who got involved in school athletics and activities indicated this was a difference maker for them in improving relationships and building bridges to Brookfield High School.

Several students spoke about how important school activities were to their success as a student. They also acknowledged involvement in activities helped in their transition from being a Spring Valley Mustang to a Brookfield Wildcat. Students saw the benefit of getting together for sports and other activities and how helpful that was in creating new acquaintances and building school pride. The transition to high school was eased because, as this student said, "If you go to like basketball camp and like Brookfield camps, you can get to know the teachers." Others commented on how staying active in school helped in other ways. "It kind of keeps you out of

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trouble after school," said one. "It gets you to know more people," said another. Students continued to expand on the things Spring Valley and Brookfield do together. "In the summer, they're having a lot of camps so that we can know more people," added a student.

Students were not as pessimistic about consolidation because they felt activities could bridge many of the gaps that might exist because of it. They also enjoyed the fact that Brookfield High School teams participated in sports and activities at Spring Valley, "We have people from Brookfield coming for little kids basketball games over here at Spring Valley," said a student. "And quiz bowl here," said another. "We have really nice baseball fields," commented a student, "And the volleyball team comes in the gym," stated another with pride in her voice. Students from Spring Valley did not believe everything occurred in the center of the district, as the parents and older citizens had stated. Brookfield had come to their town for various events to participate and they saw this as a real positive.

Athletic and Activity Participation was more Important than Competitiveness

Study participants believed the more school activities in which one was involved, the easier the transition from Spring Valley to Brookfield. Because participation in activities was perceived to be critical to enhancing student and adult connections in the school community of Spring Valley and Brookfield, competitiveness in athletics and activities took a back seat to opportunities to be involved and participate. Spring Valley people believed the initiative to blend district 7th and 8th grades together was done for the purpose of enhancing competiveness of the district"s sports programs. If this effort was implemented to simply improve the level of competition and the overall athletic program, as many believed the core mission of such an effort was, it would be accomplished at the expense of participation numbers. The smaller Spring Valley environment created a "safe" place where kids could participate without feeling

overmatched or intimidated by large numbers of participants and the competitive nature of sport. One key informant from Spring Valley, whose children attended Spring Valley K-8 and Brookfield High School and are now grown, expressed concern about the attempt by Brookfield to alter this arrangement,

> I think [Brookfield people] look at what happens here [with participation] and they think it would happen there. But I"m pretty positive it wouldn"t happen. Some of the kids who go out for basketball [at Spring Valley] even will surprise me. I"m thinking, "Oh my goodness, I have not seen what looks like skills to me." But we always encourage them to go out. And I think it"s because it is just safe and they think it would be fun and they try. And that is the one thing that I would hate to lose.

Some also believed keeping the middle school students in Spring Valley instead of shipping them off to Brookfield allowed for increased student participation in both buildings. Conversely, if Spring Valley middle school students were moved to Brookfield in a consolidation effort, overall participation numbers would go down. This was explained by one former parent, whose children attended Spring Valley K-8 and Brookfield High,

> Now we may get them to go out for basketball here, but that"s because it"s small and the expectations aren"t as great. And [students] kinda know they"ll have half of a chance. If they have to start out at Brookfield where it"s bigger, I"m pretty positive they"re not going to go out. They"re going to think, "Nope, I Brookfield"t played enough. I"m not good enough. There is no need to try."

A parent of a current 7th grader confirmed that her daughter likely would not participate in athletics should the 7th and 8th grades be sent to Brookfield Middle. This mother believed her daughter is not considered a strong athlete or one that loves to play sports. She plays because

Spring Valley is a safe and comfortable place to participate with her friends. "She"s been out for volleyball. She"s been out for basketball. She"s been out for track," said the mother about her daughter. She continued,

> She"s already telling me if they go to middle school [in Brookfield] she"s not going out for track or basketball. And I asked her why and she goes, "Why?" She said, "I"m not particularly fond of either sport," and the only reason she"s going out is because her friends are.

A current Spring Valley parent felt cut policies, which remove some students from participating on a team due to lack of athletic skill, may have to be brought back into consideration if several students are combined on one team through consolidation. She was not sure what the number would be where too many kids equal less of an opportunity,

> But I also think that middle school is a good time to be involved in other activities and if you get a large mass of students, you may be looking at, you"re gonna have to cut. You can try out but chances are you may, unless you are a phenomenal athlete, you may not make that team.

Many students also believed fewer Spring Valley kids would participate in middle school athletics if the sports teams from the sending communities were all combined with Brookfield. A student agreed, "I think the only problem if they do consolidate it with the sports and everything, there'll probably be less [Spring Valley] kids that go out." Another student concurred,

> I just think if we consolidate the sports, there'll probably be less people that go out than they think because they'll be scared because probably the competition will be a little tougher to try to get a spot on the team.

Combining all middle school students into one school was not in the best interest of increasing or maintaining activity participation numbers, and several people interviewed for this study made this point.

Spring Valley people participating in this research felt that activity participation was a big benefit to students, families, and communities. To do anything that may jeopardize that would be harmful, "And they build that self confidence which is so important at that young age, as we all know." "So it"s not as quite as big of a struggle or goal or whatever when they get to high school," stated another. These parents believed that Spring Valley students received benefits such as improved self-confidence, enhanced student relationships, and better life skills from participating in activities.

Parents appreciated the district"s efforts to blend students from all communities together via the athletic and activity programs. Opportunities such as a 3rd grade Field Day, District-wide Band and Choir performances, and summer sports camps and recreation leagues provided opportunities for students from the different communities to make connections to one another. A parent affirmed by saying,

> I think the kids that are involved in activities here and then continue to be involved in activities at the high school level… I think that helps. Our community as junior high kids, the Farmington, Collinsville, Spring Valley kids get to know each other through sports and quiz bowl. And so they go to Brookfield and they already know most of the kids over there.

The parents wanted the school district to become more active in taking a leadership role to utilize activities as a way to bring unity to the school district. Though there were a few exceptions, Spring Valley people believed that participation trumped competiveness and the way to make

this happen was to be certain community schools remained in order that school activities could continue to be an integral part of each community school.

Small Town Community Schools are Important

USD 650 made a commitment to community schools several years ago when it passed two bond issues in a few short years to build new buildings in Spring Valley and Collinsville. The first bond issue to build a new K-8 center in Spring Valley was approved by voters on April 4, 1995. The second bond issue to build the Collinsville K-8 center passed with voter approval on February 1, 1999. These bonds also allowed for the building of additional classrooms at Brookfield. Decisions made then reflected a continued commitment to community schools especially from sending communities. Participants felt the small town community school was an integral part of their family. Many respondents argued their community school contributed to greater learning opportunities for all students because of relationships that were built and smaller class sizes. Finally, the participants believed Spring Valley students were well prepared to make the transition to Brookfield High School.

Small Town Community Schools are Considered Extended Family

Participants rarely defined community without mentioning their school. Many defined community in a similar way to this citizen who said,

> Community for me is being able to walk down the street and see somebody you know and talk with them. You're really comfortable with your kids walking across town to see somebody. Your kids can walk to school. They can ride their bike to school. That's community. And that's one [reason] people move to town, because of our school and community.

A Spring Valley parent also included school in his definition of community. One could sense the concern in his voice about the lack of community in the school district in the last sentence of his quote,

> Community takes on so many different meanings ,,cause your community can be the community you live in, it can be your church community. A community can be your work community. A community can be your military people that you deal with. The school can be a community. Everything is. Everything you are a part of is. Our school district should be a community.

Adults continued the dialogue about what they value about living in a small town with a community school. As one citizen began,

> The ones who are in a situation such as we have, you know, kids can walk to school from kindergarten up to 8th grade. And they can walk home and uh the parents know for this time at least we don't have to, we don't have a lot of pressure on us.

Students and adults alike shared common beliefs about what community is and the benefits of a small community. The previous quote epitomizes the value of community schools in a very subtle way. This person equated less stress to greater enjoyment of life for families and students of small community schools. He referred to the "pressure" that would likely result in sending students away to a larger school in another community. One got the sense that community was not just a place, but a way of life sought by many who experienced heightened relationships as a result.

The district"s commitment to community schools was an idea not lost on those from Spring Valley. They reminded the board and community of this commitment at a community-

wide meeting held on February 15, 2010 when applause broke out following this comment by a Spring Valley citizen,

> When the school was built at Spring Valley, we had a study committee which explored whether to build a K-6 facility, a K-8 facility, or to not build a new facility and bus to other places in the district. It was studied at length. At that time it was agreed upon by the district, by the people clear from Collinsville clear back to Spring Valley, that community schools are important in a district our size. The schools we have in our communities are community schools.

A parent took his turn at the microphone during this community meeting and shared how positive his experience in a K-8 community school was. Even though several school districts are seeing the benefits of K-8 schools and constructing new ones, he shared concern USD 650 was considering moving away from this structure.

> For me, that was a big issue ,,cause I know the benefits of going through a K-8 school. I think statewide we have seen the benefits of moving to K-8 schools so it is kinda weird we are moving the other way.

Many related throughout the study how important their school was to their education and community. Whether the stories came from students, parents, or citizens, all shared the value of keeping their community school.

Students valued relationships when it came to their definitions of community. They spoke often about the people who are involved in their lives, whether from the Spring Valley city limits or not, when they talked about community. This student included a comparison of large and small towns. Smaller towns made her feel as though closer relationships were likely to be developed. "Like, if you have a community bigger than what we have, it"s not gonna be as close

of a relationship because there's so many people. So, like I really do believe that our community is just a giant family." Others agreed that a small community allows everyone to know everybody, which builds community through relationships. A student elaborated,

Um, I think a community is like a big family. You do things together. You can kinda spend time together. Um, you get to know one another and, I don't know, you are just like a big family. Like in our community, everybody knows everybody. If you don't know them...

Another student in the focus group completed the thought, "Shame on you." The students clearly perked up when asked about their definition of community. Explanations continued to come back to people and relationships.

Community is a safe place where students felt supported. School athletics were again brought up as this student defined, "Um, I think it"s a place where you can feel safe and other people can support you at different sports events or uh, different places. Everyone just helps everyone out. I mean you just know everyone." Quick responses followed as another piped up, "A place where you can get involved and um, you do things together." "It really is a big family," repeated another. "You help each other out through anything pretty much," shared a student who obviously valued relationships. Several agreed saying, "Yeah." When asked if their community is one big family, many replied, "Yeah." Except for Spring Valley, said one student, "It"s a little big family," which created laughter throughout the room.

Students spoke often about the family-type atmosphere that existed because of the smallness of Spring Valley School and how the family looked out for each other. "There"s not too many kids so most of the people, like when you"re in a class, you"re friends with everyone," explained a middle school student. They also associated knowing everybody in class to that of

bringing everyone together in a similar likeness of familiarity. "Everybody"s always the same," shared an additional middle school student. "Everyone knows someone else ‚cause they"re all friends," exuded a third. Students indicated a small school like Spring Valley is like brushing your teeth in the morning. That is, it is just the way things ought to be. "It"s just like a small school. It"s nice to be a small school. A lot of people"s just way too much for me," confirmed a middle school student who valued the small school experience. Another continued, "It"s just a lot of fun." It was clear that having the small school located in their own community allowed for enhanced involvement of the parents and families in the school. Teachers and parents both spoke about how important that relationship was to the education process and that the small community school certainly provided for that.

Small Schools Provide a Good Learning Environment

Most participants believed the smallness of the school had much to do with the family type atmosphere that exists in the Spring Valley community and school. Others mentioned how small schools increase the likelihood of student participation in school activities. Additionally, small schools, according to the participants in this study, were important for academic reasons as well. Some cited how small class sizes equated to better learning opportunities because teachers knew their students and families. The small school allowed for greater dialogue between teacher and family thereby staving off potential risk factors that sometimes prohibited optimal learning. As one key informant suggested,

> You know, in larger situations, you don't know anybody. You become the one lost in the crowd, so to speak. There's less interpersonal relationship building and you don't know your student as well. And there's just all kinds of factors there that I think are extremely important.

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Many parents agreed. This mother continued,

> I don't know that the classes would be huge [if we consolidated], maybe by what we're
>
> used to. I don't think they're gonna be 30 in a classroom. But, you've got all these kids –
>
> below kids – that are going to fall through the cracks. We catch them because we're small
>
> and everybody in the building knows who they are.

"Everybody does," confirmed another. "And we watch out for them," continued another parent.

She added,

> If you go to consolidate all these 7th and 8th graders, classes are gonna be bigger. Those
>
> teachers are not going to be as familiar with those kids moving up because they are
>
> coming from a whole different building. And that's been one of our big topics is what
>
> about all these kids that are going to fall through the cracks because they are going to be
>
> in a bigger building, bigger classroom.

Parents saw the value of small schools where every student was known, and would not be

allowed to "fall through the cracks."

The closeness of the school to where families resided included the benefit of parents

allowing their children to walk while they remained nearby. Another person thought close

proximity led to enhanced learning for students by building relationships among adults and kids.

"There are friends and neighbors as a support network to help that child. And once you have

close relationships, the child can help child." Spring Valley contains other learning benefits for

kids that expand beyond the school. The community library is a place kids congregate to

continue their learning once the school doors close. A key informant continued,

> You know, look at our little library in our community. It's amazing the number of
>
> students who learn there. Reading books or working on a computer. There are several

students there to the closing time, you see. So that's all of that too. That all works for the

betterment of [kids], especially those at risk kids.

"And it is about the students. It is," shared another parent at a community meeting. "But it's also

about the community that those students live in and what that brings to their lives," he continued.

"It brings a lot. And everybody is striving for that community in today's world." A parent of a

Spring Valley student spoke at length at a community meeting with the board of education about

the importance of small schools and maintaining the level of funding it takes to ensure that all

public schools, not just Spring Valley, receive adequate funding. He believed smaller schools

were a great benefit to student learning. "The idea of small classrooms is ideal for proper one-on-

one learning," he stated. "To add more students to the classrooms would lessen the teachers'

abilities to instill within our youth the knowledge needed for them to prosper and grow." A

teacher at the Spring Valley School also experienced firsthand the benefit of smaller schools. She

stated, "Well, you know I think there are great things we do for them now, in that we have them

in smaller classes so we"re really able to work with them." This teacher understood the

importance of small class sizes through experience and research. She added,

> Research shows that small class … has a whole lot to do with the student progress and
>
> what they do. So when we start talking about getting them too big and not being able to
>
> keep them small, that worries me a lot.

Parents agreed that smaller schools benefited their kids. They felt a connection to the school and

teachers they believed would not exist if their students were enrolled in a larger school. Any

change to this was not thought of well. "I would think we all, we all like it as it is. And we don"t

want to change. We all want to keep our building small, and our classrooms small," a mother

pleaded. Parents also gave some credence to consolidation offering more things to students, but they felt this benefit was more than offset by the negative implications of increased class sizes.

Parents also spoke about the strong schools in Brookfield as a compliment to the overall outstanding academics in USD 650. Their message was not one of disdain for the schools of Brookfield. Rather, their point was to emphasize how important the small school was to them in Spring Valley. This mother who had students attend schools in Spring Valley and Brookfield clarified,

> I mean, not that Brookfield isn"t as well qualified, but then your classes grow bigger. You"re not as individualized as you are in smaller classes. And maybe that"s why we have all these excellent reports because, um, of our smaller, smaller classes. … I think it made all the difference in the world.

Parents attributed Spring Valley"s excellent academic achievement to the small class sizes and personal instruction. Parents and citizens spoke repeatedly of the educational advantages of attending Spring Valley School. Particularly, they spoke about how the smaller school and small class sizes helped their kids learn better.

High school students shared very similar experiences. They had the added perspective of what life at Brookfield High School was about after attending Spring Valley. Most agreed their time at Spring Valley was a very valuable experience that enhanced their learning and preparation for Brookfield High School. Students responded very favorably when asked about their schooling in Spring Valley and how this equipped them for high school. One student began, "Going to Spring Valley was a lot of fun and more one on one with the teachers." "Yeah, I agree on that too," said another. "Student to teacher ratio is good in Spring Valley," shared a third. Another commented on the low teacher-pupil ratio and the benefits of that arrangement. "I mean,

it wasn't as high as it would be in like Brookfield, or in like a Wichita school," they said. "So I feel like I learned more than, um, some of the other schools." "When I got here," related another student, "I felt like I was a little more prepared." Spring Valley kids felt their educational experience well prepared them for high school. Spring Valley students seemed to make new friendships once they became established in the high school setting. This student summarized,

> I think it"s probably more you, you don't get, you Brookfield't learned how to just do things on your own without help from your peers or teachers cause you're, you pretty much have to learn to do things on your own. And as a Junior/Senior, you realize that now and that's, that's a lot easier for ya to just go through day to day.

The fact Spring Valley students were sending students had little effect on their connection and success to the receiving high school.

Students from Spring Valley Transition well to the Consolidated High School

Students reflected on their initial anxiety in transitioning to the high school from Spring Valley but echoed once they built relationships there, life was good. One senior girl confirmed this by saying,

> I was really scared. Like, I was like so nervous. This is gonna sound really stupid, but I was so nervous it was like hard for me to eat lunch. My nerves were just going. It was crazy. I didn"t like it. But now, I"m content with it. It"s perfectly fine.

Another high school student pondered how she was never nervous about coming to the high school. She was ready to go to her new school, "I was ready for high school. I was ready to get to a bigger school. The student who first spoke reasoned, "You were friends with a lot of kids in my class." "Yeah," responded the second. "So I can understand that," restated the first recalling once again how important relationships were to the transition from Spring Valley to Brookfield High.

"It was a little scary at first. But once you started getting friends that go to Brookfield it makes it easier," affirmed another student. Several students spoke up about the topic. Said one,

> Well, yeah, it was hard like the first, you know, couple months. I don't know. But, you just, you have your Spring Valley friends and they get friends so then you start getting some friends and you know. And then you are fine.

The Spring Valley students developed new friendships with students from Brookfield and the other sending communities. "You definitely completely branch out," a student explained. Developing new friendships often meant leaving behind childhood friendships from Spring Valley Elementary. Another student expanded, "Like typically, I don't talk to maybe half of my Spring Valley class anymore. Like, I mean I talk with [my friend from Spring Valley] like daily. It's just like I don't have classes with them anymore or…" Another student completed the thought with, "You grow apart." "Yeah, you do. You just definitely grow apart cause you find other people. You don't have a limited selection anymore," she finished. "And it's not like you don't like them," said a different student. "You're finding people more like you that you don't have to settle for less," expressed another about new friendships that were created when he arrived at Brookfield. The students seemed to be able to adjust fine to making new friends in the high school. One continued, "And you just get closer with them and they're pretty much your family after that. It's like your brother going out and painting the town red with them." This student summarized the conversation by saying, "But I can honestly say my best friend came from Brookfield."

When middle school students were asked what helps them when they go to Brookfield High School, several of them agreed with this student who responded, "Know some people." They repeated this when asked about some of the advantages of going to Brookfield High

School. "You'll know people there," said one middle school student. "You'll get to know the teachers," said another. A third student was thankful to have a family connection at the high school, "And if you have older siblings, it'll be nice to go to school with them so they can show you around and stuff like that." There was a strong sense that relationships – both student to student and student to teacher – were important to the middle school students as they thought about transitioning to the high school. Clearly, building a prior connection to kids from other towns helped Spring Valley students to make a successful transition.

When adults were asked to discuss the transition Spring Valley kids make when they leave their community school for Brookfield High School, most concurred with this parent when he said, "I think the kids are very resilient and they will adapt to whatever happens, whatever they need to." He further explained it relative to his own kids,

> My two kids, um, I don't think they have major problems with it because they've been involved with a lot of these other kids. They already know a lot of kids over there. And so it's not this huge change that a lot of the kids were going through several years ago because they didn't even know anybody over there.

One key informant believed Spring Valley students did just fine when they arrived at Brookfield High. She remembered her own children's experiences with different groups of friends at Spring Valley and Brookfield and reflected, "They got along well but once they got to Brookfield, their friends totally switched. They developed a whole new circle of friends." She went on to explain, "I don't think they do view that negatively. You know, my kids looked very favorably [toward their schooling]. They loved school. They liked school at Brookfield and they did well." Her belief was that her own kids were no different than typical Spring Valley kids as she continued,

And I picked up on that, for the most part, on all of the kids. All of the kids I think will
concur with that. They very much value their Spring Valley experience but they usually
like Brookfield too when they get there.

Adults and students from Spring Valley agreed there were benefits to attending the
community school and Brookfield High School. They had the opportunity during their more
formative years to go to school in a small setting in their own community that was very much
like family. When they transitioned to the high school in Brookfield, they formed new bonds
with friends from Brookfield and the other district communities, which broadened their sphere of
relationships.

District Leadership Does Not Represent Spring Valley's Best Interests

Several participants expressed the belief that people in leadership positions throughout
the district did not represent Spring Valley's best interests. Further, they viewed the talk about
closing of their local community school as a knee jerk reaction to save money and improve the
middle school's athletic competitiveness by combining them under one roof in Brookfield. The
participants of this study overwhelmingly rejected this notion and felt animosity toward some
board members and district leadership as a result. They projected the divide between the
communities of Spring Valley and Brookfield was wider now than at any time previously; yet,
instead of separating the district further with more negativity, the participants offered alternative
ideas to build unity and communication between the sending communities and Brookfield.

District Leadership Looked upon as a Key Element in Spring Valley's Successes or Failures

Throughout the study, the adults spoke about district leadership. From historical
references during the initial consolidation event with Burr Ridge in the 1960's to the present
time, they viewed leadership as a key element in either bringing a consolidated district together,

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or separating it out further. Historically, the citizens of the community remembered how district leadership, and particularly the Burr Ridge superintendent at that time, forged the original consolidation between Burr Ridge and Spring Valley. This event was seen as a mandate by the state and therefore, hard feelings were directed at the state and not the superintendent who was viewed as simply carrying out the mandate. The Spring Valley/Burr Ridge consolidation was eventually derailed and one of the causes was attributed to Harold Varner, the appointed superintendent. Varner abruptly left to become superintendent at Brookfield in August of that first year of consolidation.

When Spring Valley sought to separate from the Burr Ridge district and pursued joining the Brookfield district, they did so because of the familiarity with Varner, the former superintendent of Burr Ridge, who helped consolidate Burr Ridge and Spring Valley. Spring Valley leaders of the day felt the Brookfield superintendent would be more welcoming because of his familiarity with them.

District leadership and the boards of education then and now were often referred to as the point of change – for the good, and the bad. Participants often placed their confidence, or lack thereof, at the feet of the district administration and board of education. Spring Valley patrons viewed them as the catalyst of change and holding all of the power that would determine the fate of their school and community. The recent talk of closing Spring Valley had triggered a plethora of emotions from a group that developed great sensitivity to that over the years. A key informant from Spring Valley said they had lost confidence in the board and district leadership. She explained,

Right now, it's becoming very emotional, uh, feeling very unfair. As I said, I think

[Spring Valley people] feel very targeted; that they're the hit list; that there are other

options but no one seems to ever look at those options. They just always want to close this school, you know. And I think on the whole, a lot of what people are beginning to feel here is they're kind of losing their confidence in like the school, in like USD 650.

The people of Spring Valley had begun to lose confidence and trust in the leadership of the district. This led to dissention. Dissention led to hurt, anger, and feelings of hopelessness.

The division had begun because of the recent consolidation talk that began in the spring of 2008. How information was presented seemed to be a point of contention among the Spring Valley people. At that time, discussions centered on how best to bring together the 7th and 8th grade students under one roof in Brookfield. This was not met favorably by the Spring Valley community,

> And I think it goes back to, you know in terms of the current thing, I think it goes back to the way, the way things were presented, in the very beginning pertaining to consolidation, you know, when it was the 7th and 8th grade issue. And the PowerPoint [from the district leadership] was brought to, uh, certain homes at Spring Valley and it just set the wrong tone, you know.

Others also recalled the revival of the consolidation debate and how negatively it was received. "I know two years ago when we went through the consolidation thing for the 7th and 8th and it was going to come over here [Brookfield]," a parent commented at a board meeting, "and you know, for me, that was a big issue 'cause I know the benefits of going through a K-8 school." During a focus group, some parents spoke about the unveiling of the recent consolidation plan to Spring Valley patrons. Memories of the leadership's effort to consolidate two years before led to great discourse and divisiveness from the Spring Valley community. This father explained,

I feel it is an extreme lack of direction being provided in this whole process that we are

currently involved in by the administration to not direct this in a positive way. It has just

been allowed to go in a very unpositive fashion to get to where we are currently. So

we've got a tremendous amount of division between not just Spring Valley and

Brookfield, but Collinsville. There's been a tremendous amount of division being

developed within the district.

Another parent offered his opinion,

That goes back two or three years ago when we had this consolidation study and the uh,

the board agreed at that time – I mean there was overwhelming evidence that with the

study that was conducted and the study group that was put together that Saturday – that

consolidation is not in the best interest of this district. Going forward, the administration

at that point in time should endorse that and that should have been the direction.

District and board leadership was a point of concern from the Spring Valley adults. They felt

they had not been listened to. When studies were conducted, the data was ignored, according to

their perceptions, and divisiveness and resentment was the result. A parent recalled a comment

from an administrator he believed clarified the point of leadership not listening or paying

attention to their own studies,

He stated that, "We are gonna recommend to the board that consolidation is not to take

place at this point in time based on the evidence that's been gathered. However, that

leaves the door wide open for future consolidation efforts." So to me that's a lack of

leadership. That type of comment should never have been made.

It was the perception of the Spring Valley adults that district leadership and board of education

was not interested in listening to the concerns of Spring Valley people. They were not involved,

they believed, from the outset of the conversations to bring all 7th and 8th graders together in Brookfield. This parent elaborated,

> That was the biggest issue that came out of the consolidation of the 7th and 8th graders two years ago, was instead of spending time trying to build a consensus to build some better facilities at Brookfield for the high school we spent, all we did was drive a stake between the district to divide it dealing with the consolidation. Nobody wanted it.

"And it was all presented," remembered another parent, "and I know some of us were posing questions, „what about this," and „what about this."" However, in her perception, the board and district leadership would not listen to her, "And I think that was kind of, at least for me, that was the start on digging my heels in, you know." "And we all did," agreed another parent, "and we all got really defensive because they came in with a preconceived agenda and a total lack of respect for this learning center and the staff here."

All the talk of building closure evoked emotional responses and created a wedge between Spring Valley citizens and district leadership. So much so that several people echoed what this person said when asked if this wedge would create fallout from the Spring Valley parents and community,

> Oh, definitely. We're trying to figure out. Do we want to go to Aledo or do we wanna go to Massey? A lot of our parents drive to Wichita every day. It'd be easy to drop our kids off in Massey or send them to Granville. They have some new schools, you know. Who's gonna take us? What's the easiest way to get our kids out of Brookfield and into another school district?

If it was inevitable that Spring Valley would not have a school someday, the parents and citizens both agreed they would seek a school in a community other than Brookfield. When asked why, most responded as this person did,

> I think it was the way the whole thing was approached. If it would have been approached different, oh it would be so easy to just go ahead and say, "We're already in the school district, let's send our kids there." But there's been a lot of name calling. I don't know how that wedge will ever, ever [be removed]. And it was definitely done at the top. I mean, the superintendent and the board.

People personalized and internalized the message from district leadership about closing the Spring Valley School. It was a message that brought about pain, anger, and frustration. It was clear in the interviews and focus groups the leadership"s effort in 2008 to consolidate 7th and 8th grades had reopened an old wound that had not yet healed. This complicated matters to try to build consensus for the more recent effort to close the Spring Valley School. As this person summarized, "It seems like every time we turn around, [our school"s] threatened and we have to go to bat for it."

Spring Valley people repeatedly said they had not been listened to or involved in the initial discussions about what the district could do to save money or consolidate school buildings. They further believed it was intentional by the leadership and board to exclude them, even to the point of making decisions secretly. If leadership exhibited more openness and a willingness to involve and listen to the Spring Valley parents and patrons, they believed greater cooperation and consensus might have been attainable. One parent shared this notion,

> I think transparency would have gone a long ways. Transparency would have gone a long ways to all of this. You know, if you have a problem and you see a red light coming up

down the road, you need to let people know there's a red light coming up down the road.

That obviously didn't happen the way it should have happened.

The perception of secrecy was examined by another parent who said,

It seems like there were a lot of – I don't know if you want to call them backroom deals –
but it sounds like they mapped out on a bar napkin, you know, the future, and that's not
the way it should be done. And you want buy in, you've got to get people on board. And
that's a tough thing to fix later and I think that's where they're gonna have problems with
it.

Another parent suggested openness as one possible solution and further explained the
ramifications of secrecy,

So they've got to do something, and they've got to be open about it, they can't be hiding
it because they get found. I mean, you find out what the truth is, your credibility is gone
and without credibility how can you lead?

There was almost a "conspiracy theory" perception from the Spring Valley adult participants. As
discussed earlier, this may be due to the periodic emergence of discussions that revolve around
moving some students to Brookfield or closing altogether Spring Valley's school. Trust of the
board of education had clearly eroded for this parent who said, "Yeah, and about that ‚behind
closed doors,"because, I mean stories come out and things are never discussed at meetings,
public meetings, you know." Another parent seemed to lay the blame for a perceived lack of
transparency with the superintendent. "The problems we have, it starts at the top," he
conjectured. "It starts at the top and you know, I think there is just gonna come a time when the
public is gonna say, ‚We are sick and tired of this. We're ready for some change.'" "Well they

already are," added another parent. "They"re saying it now." Yet another concluded, "They"re not saying it loud enough maybe."

Spring Valley had been through a lot of transition regarding consolidation and closure over the past 40 years. It appeared they had linked the fate of their school and community to the board of education and district leadership"s decision making during that time. The recent turn of events surrounding the possible closure of their school only served to place the leadership in an even greater critical eye. "What tears down a community is the wedge that the administration and the board have caused here „cause now we don't want to be part of the Brookfield community. We want out of that," shared a key informant whose children had attended the Spring Valley and Brookfield High Schools. Without strong unifying leadership, many began to lose faith in the district as a whole. While many respondents only spoke about the most recent events that had triggered these negative emotions, some reflected on a time when they felt the leadership and board of education were much more inclusive of the entire district.

More openness and a welcoming attitude from the leadership were missed by these participants. "There's been a certain, in my opinion, there's been a significant drop in the relationship building if you will," commented a key informant, "and you see it kind of evolving down through the administration as well, the other levels of administration as a result." While he was careful to not be unjustly critical of individuals, he did believe that it was helpful to have an administration that made Spring Valley feel welcome – made them feel like a welcome neighbor. Yet, he confided, "I think that it"s, I don't know, just not quite as open as previous administrations may have been. That's just my perception. And it might have been just the way the relationships evolved too, you know." He was careful not to lay too much blame on the administration as he continued, "It doesn't mean anything bad it just means it's not open."

Others agreed there was a time when Spring Valley felt more supported and welcomed by the leadership in Brookfield. Along the way, the big picture approach of valuing the entire district had been diminished and the focus was more on the center of the district – Brookfield – as this parent believed,

> We had moved from a leadership position that had realized, in my view, that he needed to develop the support of the entire district – and bring that support in from the outlying communities to be able to support the entire district – to moving completely away from that. You know at least in our opinion, in my opinion, that they give the appearance that they have no concern for the outlying communities. That it"s only about the center.

Expanding on this belief, another parent remembered feeling more unified as a district at one time, "but I felt like the leadership got pushed off in a direction that we just began to throw away all the unity building that had taken place over the last several years. We just threw it out the window."

Some believed damage had been done to a degree that repair was not possible with the current leadership. "We"ve taken the unity that had begun to develop and really improve upon the district and we"ve turned it back several years," was this parent"s opinion, "and caused an issue here that regardless of what we do with this, will never be repaired with the current administration we have in place." Yet, another key informant from Spring Valley felt that intense emotions and negativity that happened because of the recent budget cuts that were ruling the day. If the situation and time were different, more rational thought might have emerged. She reasonably suggested, "Right at the moment, due to budget cuts, what [Spring Valley people are] thinking right now, I would say, might not be how they would think under a more rational situation." Stress of closing schools and damaging their community had taken its toll on the

people of Spring Valley. Yet, hope could still be heard in their voices when the talk turned to unifying the district.

Building Unity is Important in a Consolidated District

Spring Valley‟s relationship with Brookfield – and the long time superintendent who had remained in Brookfield for many years following his abrupt departure from Burr Ridge – was more palatable during the 20 year period subsequent to their split with Burr Ridge. Yet, USD 650 was never viewed by the Spring Valley participants in this study as a truly "unified district" until a new superintendent arrived in the early 1990‟s. It was during this time the Spring Valley people spoke of unification with Brookfield. They spoke very fondly about this superintendent because of what they saw as his commitment to building a more unified district, "and so I think [he] did an outstanding job at realizing the dynamics of the situation and worked to try to foster that unity within the district which we hadn‟t had before," clarified one parent. Under his leadership, a recommitment to community schools emerged and the Spring Valley people felt invigorated and included. "To me, that was just huge," exclaimed a parent. "You know we want this building to be a part of your community," he reflected the superintendent saying. "I‟ll never forget that."

Unity was perceived to be blossoming again in the form of a unified board of education and new K-8 buildings, which were constructed in 1995 and 1999, in two of the sending communities – Spring Valley and Collinsville respectively. This former superintendent, during this time of professed unification, recollected, "When I came here the board had already said to me during the interview, ‚We need to do something. We are pretty committed to doing something building-wise at Spring Valley. That‟s the biggest need right now.‟" He remembered the board having a goal of building a new school in Spring Valley because the current facility at

that time was inadequate and severely outdated. Continuing with the story about that interview with the board, he responded to them,

> "If you want the best for your kids, and remember, those are your kids at school over there [at Spring Valley], that are at school in Farmington, that are in school out at Collinsville," and in those days, Elburn, you know, "those are all your kids." I don't know if it made a difference or not but that's the way I approached it at least.

This former superintendent perceived a somewhat divided board when he arrived in the early 1990's. The divide was not because of dissention, he believed, but more the result of "deferring" opinions and solutions to board members who represented specific areas of the district. He explained,

> I had great board members back in those days, but they sort of deferred, and that was my first issue. Something would come up and it would be a Spring Valley issue – I think there were two Spring Valley board members at that time – and the rest of the guys would just sit back and defer to whatever [the Spring Valley board members] thought. I spent a lot of time talking to them about, "this is one school district and it doesn't make any difference where you live within this district. What goes on at the extreme other end of the district is very important to you and you have a responsibility to those kids as well as you do to the ones where you live." And I think we finally kinda pulled the board sort of together.

It was important to have a unified board of education in order to take a leadership message of district unification to the public. During this superintendent's tenure, the message of unification was heard by Spring Valley patrons who remembered a feeling of inclusion for perhaps the first time as a sending community.

The adults from Spring Valley looked back at the time of the 1990‟s with fond memories of new buildings and a unified district. Several explained the affect it had on them, as one mother of graduated Spring Valley students remembered, "When we did both these two bond issues, I do think the district had come a long way." She continued,

I can remember [the former superintendent], because he even got my attention in the meeting. He said, "Obviously your own attendance center is important and we understand that but you need to think about the whole district. You know, you should want USD 650 to be a school district that you‟re proud of all your attendance centers. And that you have quality education going on everywhere."

She continued with how Spring Valley patrons came to believe in the "our kids and our district" philosophy championed by the board and superintendent during that time,

I think [the superintendent] did make a lot of us start to think on a wider scope, that obviously you want your own school, and you want it nice, or you want good education, but you should want to be a part of it. This is a big district. You should want to be proud of the whole district.

When asked to reflect on how the district got to the point of pulling for each other and being more unified, she explained,

I‟m not sure how we got it, other than maybe just the superintendent taking the lead, telling us, "You need to think about your whole district. You need to be proud of it from east to west." I think we need to get back on that.

This former superintendent spoke about how Spring Valley patrons not only believed in the "our kids and our district" philosophy, they put it into practice,

When we got into the building construction stuff – we did that early on at Spring Valley –

I felt good about the Spring Valley people. They reached out pretty much to everyone in

the district and as a result, the entire district voted pretty strongly in favor of that. And

also the Spring Valley people went a step further than Brookfield and the rest of the

school district did. When we ran a bond issue for the Collinsville building, there were

Spring Valley people out there at public meetings. I think every public meeting we had

regarding the Collinsville school building there were Spring Valley people that made the

effort to go and their comments were, "When we needed help with our building, you

supported us and we"re here to support you." So I think [the district] started coming

together over those issues. But truthfully, the Spring Valley people made that first move,

that first big move, to lend support to someone else in the district and it didn"t come from

the west side of the district, it came from the east side.

District-wide support got behind the two bond issues for new buildings in Spring Valley and

Collinsville. The bond election also added new classroom space to Brookfield Elementary and

High School as well as a new all-weather track at Brookfield. All of the communities received

some benefit from the bond issue and bringing it all together for patrons to support proved

challenging. "I just know as far as that aspect, he did do a pretty tremendous thing with getting

two bond issues passed here," stated a key informant about the former superintendent. "With two

new buildings and that kind of thing, that"s pretty major." There was a feeling of community

building at that time. Of course, the economy was much better than at the time the participants

were interviewed for this study. Yet, hope reigned. Conversations about building a school

community district-wide were prevalent, as this person recalled,

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Had I not had great conversations with [the district leadership] in terms of this idea of

building our district through community, and those previous administrations seeing that

as paramount in the discussions, I wouldn't feel so strongly about this concept of building

communities rather than tearing down communities.

People remembered feeling a sense of responsibility several years ago after hearing the message

from the board and superintendent to expand their thinking to include all kids; not just the kids in

a particular community. "I just remember thinking, „You know that is right. I need to think past

Spring Valley,‟" a person pointedly recalled. This type of thinking led to unity throughout the

district, which was clearly enhanced by a progressive occasion of building new facilities in most

of the district‟s communities. She elaborated,

I think we all think a little bit about Brookfield because our kids are going there

eventually, but then I thought, "I need to be thinking past that. I need to be thinking about

what‟s happening to kids at Farmington, what‟s happening with kids at Collinsville, and

that," because, I want to be part of a district that‟s excellent in every way.

Spring Valley people believed that broadening the perspective of the district – seeing the

communities as "our communities" and the kids as "our kids" was important in rebuilding the

unity they believed previously existed.

Several ideas emerged from the participants of the study about how to build unity in their

school district. Having been through a period in the recent past where unity was elevated, many

reflected on that time and constructed new ways in which togetherness as a district could be

achieved. "I think I would work on the overall concept of trying to build camaraderie –

community spirit – within the district somehow, some way," dreamed a Spring Valley patron.

"Everybody has accepted the fact and they're very comfortable with the education that they're

getting throughout the district," he continued, "and certainly the students who go through the high school. So that's an accepted thing." Many believed that bringing students from all the communities together for more school events and activities would build unity. This has been attempted with some degree of success over the past couple of years according to this board member, who said,

> And I think we took a big step a couple years, a couple of years ago to get away from what we had talked about, consolidating. But we started some programs that were interactive between communities and I think we did a good job of starting to bring the communities together.

Others agreed that this was a good thing and it had been attempted with some success over the years. "I think the district, believe it or not, has made some pretty good strides in the last 20 years in bringing these kids together, through mass band, mass choir, quiz bowl, things like that."

Students also valued the opportunity to meet other students during open houses, orientations, and similar events. Several shared how positive the freshman orientation was to making connections to the high school, as this freshman exuded,

> I was just thankful we had the day where it was just freshman because if we didn't, I'd probably be, like, lost. Afterwards, like I knew friends from Brookfield and stuff so like, I knew other people. So that was nice. I was nervous, but it got better.

An older student recalled, "Yeah, I think that was a good day too. [My friend] and I came to represent STUCO [student council] and we showed them around and played games and stuff." Another concurred, "I'm kinda glad we did that ‚cause I knew other people then and we kinda got introduced and stuff." Adults also believed this idea should be expanded to include parents from the outlying communities. High school football coaches had begun a youth league recently.

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Two sports in the Brookfield district have organized with players involving Brookfield and Spring Valley. Spring Valley parents are also coaching alongside Brookfield coaches. This was seen as a way to bring kids and parents together from all of the district"s communities. This parent explained,

> With the number of people that have jumped on board in terms of trying to help out in the athletic endeavors. We've got coaches. We've got people that have jumped up and they"re coaching 3rd and 4th graders all the way up to junior high, both basketball and football. We're seeing the same thing in baseball. In fact, it's been suggested that even maybe we could create some district summer ball and play those games, make a real effort at playing those games, in the different communities.

There was hope from some participants that efforts to unite the district would eventually pay off. Yet, more effort and support towards unity needed to be received, they believed, from the leadership of the school district and all communities.

Participants felt district leadership and community leadership needed to get together and think of ways to build unity throughout the broader school community. It was not just the responsibility of the schools but the entire school community including each of the towns and rural areas throughout the school district. It was explained by one person this way,

> I think that the first step that I would do is try to, try to pull in some leaders from across the district to be a sounding board; to really work on values of our school. They need to have a group of, shall we say, 3-4 people from every community including the rural areas and make them a focus group on how that can be created.

A parent agreed with how important it was to get many people on board to make the district more unified. "You know, we should be working to make this district better and have the support

of everybody," because the danger of not doing so may exacerbate the environment of resentment, dissension, and lack of trust. Sending communities are most vulnerable to these emotions because, "Think about how it feels for the people that are leaving the comfort zone that they have already and coming to a place where they may not be well received," pleaded a parent who thoughtfully chose her words as she proceeded,

> I think the biggest thing I could tell people, and I would love to be able to stand up and say, "Somehow we've got to muddy the lines. We've got to get the lines muddied. The line in the sand has got to go away."

There was a sense that even though Spring Valley patrons were angry and upset over past and more recent talks of school consolidation, to the point of talking about seceding from the district, there was still hope in coming together as a unified district with Brookfield.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUMMARY

This chapter presents conclusions and implications constructed from the findings. It begins with a review of social capital theory. This is followed by a discussion of two conclusions derived from examining the findings through the lens of social capital theory, particularly the constructs of trust, bonding social capital and bridging social capital. The chapter concludes with implications of this study which extend beyond this particular research site. In summary, building trust among the sending and receiving communities in a consolidated district enhances the abilities of these communities to bridge with one another.

Conclusions

Over the years, opponents to the consolidation movement pointed to the detrimental effects it had on communities that lost their schools. Studies abound on the hardships that consolidation created, particularly for sending communities (Bennett, et al., 2009; LaPlante, 2005; Patterson, et al., 2005; Reynolds, 1999). Social capital was used as the theoretical framework to explain the findings. Trust is a critical component of social capital. When there was a lack of trust, Spring Valley tended to bond together to stave off the threat of further consolidation. When trust was elevated, Spring Valley bridged with the receiving communities of Burr Ridge and Brookfield. School activities were seen as a key piece to bridging social capital in this consolidated district.

Social Capital Theory Revisited

Putnam (2000) identified two distinct types of social capital that were relevant to this study: bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is internally generated within a particular group or smaller community. Bonding social capital provides a

sense of belonging and is critical to the sense of well-being of the members of families and groups and it fulfills immediate needs for belonging, love, emotional support, and solidarity (Terrion, 2006). Bridging social capital has also been referred to as generating "collective action" with another group. This allows for each group to draw upon the bonding capital that exists with the other (Putnam, 1995). Bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity from town to town in a consolidated district, which can increase unity in the district communities. Putnam (2000) argues communities that have an established norm of bonding and bridging social capital are most successful, thereby creating a great capacity for greater levels of human and physical capital.

Pierre Bourdieu's work with social capital (1983) is conceptually the piece with which communities relate when needing financial resources for improving their circumstances. Bourdieu focuses the benefits of social capital in a primarily economic sense. In order for communities to truly "get ahead," they need to form links with other bonded social capital communities. This link is referred to as "bridging" social capital. Without bridging, social circles are forever isolated and independent of each other (Lin, 2001). Bridging social capital allows for each group to draw upon the bonding capital that exists with the other. Social capital depends on two elements: trustworthiness of the social environment, which means that obligations will be repaid, and the actual extent of obligations held (Coleman, 1988). In a balanced social capital structure between sending and receiving communities, people from each community do things for each other resulting in balanced level of "credit" from which to draw for each community. When the credit appears out of balance for one community, the trustworthiness of the social environment deteriorates due to that community feeling they have given more than they have received.

While one form of social capital is valuable to certain individuals, it can be useless or perhaps even harmful for others (Coleman, 1988). It is important to understand the connection of Colman"s (1988) theory to consolidated school districts. In consolidated school districts, decisions that may be good for receiving communities, or the district at large, may not necessarily be good for sending communities. Coleman (1988) articulates when people leave a social structure, they and the social structure lose social capital. Students can lose social capital when being "sent" to another school. Additionally, in a consolidated district, this loss affects the sending community these students leave behind. Students who leave their community school to attend a consolidated school lose this "layer" of social capital because they leave behind their families and communities, which can negatively impact them, their families, and their communities. This is due to the greater volume of capital within these connections of people in receiving communities which allows for a greater opportunity for individuals within these groups to draw from this "capital credit." Receiving communities can generate, and therefore draw on, more capital than sending communities.

When a group"s capital is threatened, it tends to have the mindset to circle the wagons in the hope that the threat can be staved off by the collective efforts of the group (Putnam, 2000). This circling of the wagons has a propensity to increase bonding social capital within the community. Bonding social capital provides a sense of belonging and is critical to the sense of well-being of the members of families and groups and fulfils immediate needs for belonging, love, emotional support, and solidarity (Terrion, 2006). An overabundance of bonding social capital can be detrimental because of the opposition from members to bridge outwardly for help from beyond their bonded circle.

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Trust is essential to the full understanding of the importance of social capital. Gubbins and MacCurtain (2008) looked at three types of trust: deterrence-based trust, knowledge-based trust, and identification-based trust. Deterrence-based trust is based on consistency of behavior and punishments or rewards for that behavior. Knowledge-based trust is grounded in the other's predictability. It stems from knowing the other party well enough to actually be able to predict their actions. Identification-based trust is based on identification with another's desires and intentions. This form of trust is founded in mutual understanding and empathy. Spring Valley people lacked deterrent-based and knowledge-based trust. They referred to an inconsistent pattern of behavior and a lack of knowing what Brookfield was attempting to do next. Full fruition of the two other types of trust – deterrence-based trust and knowledge-based trust – allow for identification-based trust to be realized (Gubbins & MacCurtain, 2008).

Spring Valley is a Tightly Bonded Community when there is a Lack of Trust

Whenever there was a threat to close a school or consolidate certain grade levels, the community of Spring Valley took a proactive approach to address the challenge. From the first consolidation event of the 1960's to the recent perceived threat to close their K-8 school, participants rallied the troops in support of their community and school. In the mid 1960's, following the no vote by the Burr Ridge patrons to build a new high school in between the communities, Spring Valley patrons bonded together in resistance to Burr Ridge and began to look elsewhere for an opportunity to consolidate. They found a tenuous partner in Brookfield USD 650, who finally agreed to consolidate with Spring Valley after rejecting their initial request. The partnership was tenuous because of the reluctance from Brookfield to openly welcome Spring Valley into their district. Over time, however, the consolidation was generally viewed as a favorable move by the Spring Valley people. They began to see the benefits of their

connection to Brookfield in the form of greater educational opportunities for their high school students compared to what they were able to provide in their much smaller high school prior to its closing. Although findings did indicate isolated instances of brief discontent from Spring Valley to Brookfield, the credit balance in the social structure between the communities was generally stable for a period of about twenty years.

The credit balance that provided a level of trust and bridging social capital from Spring Valley to Brookfield during this twenty year period was jeopardized in the spring of 2008 when the board of education and administration discussed bringing over the 7th and 8th grades from Spring Valley into Brookfield Middle School. Even more recently, discussions turned to the possibility of closing down the school entirely and bringing all students in grades K-8 from Spring Valley to Brookfield. The Spring Valley patrons perceived this to tilt the credit balance in Brookfield‟s favor to an unacceptable amount resulting in loss of trust and bridging social capital and ultimately increased their bonding social capital within their own community. Spring Valley stakeholders viewed consolidation efforts as a way to provide more opportunities for those that already had the most and took away opportunities from those that had the least.

Spring Valley felt Brookfield had received more than they had given and over time, this had diminished the level of trust that previously existed which negatively affected bridging social capital. When there is a lack of trust, this often affects a group‟s ability to bridge with another. Instead, they tend to bond very closely to keep perceived harm at arm‟s length. From the beginning of the Spring Valley consolidations, there has been an inconsistent level of trust. This negatively affected Spring Valley‟s ability to consistently bridge with Burr Ridge or Brookfield. They spoke about needing consistency and a commitment from Brookfield to keep their

community school open which would help increase these areas of trust. If these could be increased, it could be assumed this may allow Spring Valley increase their level of trust.

Spring Valley people shared a general lack of trust with the school district and receiving community of Brookfield. Spring Valley realized this and resisted when their existing capital was recently threatened. Spring Valley participants felt they had given up a tremendous amount of capital in the forms of economic capital (financial sustainability) and human capital (knowledge and education) during the original consolidations with Burr Ridge and Brookfield. They perceived to receive very little in return for their giving, which resulted in a loss of social capital. This loss of capital was articulated in the conversations about their declining community due to the high school being closed in the 1960‟s. They also spoke about sending their kids to Brookfield and the hardship that created for the community, families, and students. The simple loss of not hosting high school football or basketball games any longer in their own community resulted in a loss of social capital, or connections to the kids and the high school.

Board and community meetings became commonplace during the last few years in USD 650 surrounding discussions to either bring grades 7 and 8 or the entire Spring Valley school over to Brookfield. The threat of sending additional students or their entire student body to Brookfield, which would effectively close their school, intensified the bonding social capital of Spring Valley and Brookfield and damaged the bridging social capital that previously existed. Creating strong group loyalty associated with bonding social capital often creates antagonism toward outsiders. The "circle the wagons" phenomenon repeated as it did with Burr Ridge in the 1960‟s. Spring Valley bonded against further threats of consolidation and confronted district leadership and the community of Brookfield in the hope of saving their own school and

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community. In overwhelming numbers, they showed up at board of education meetings and community-wide meetings in solidarity.

During this time, Spring Valley and Brookfield resorted to negative comments and "name calling" toward the other, which further divided the communities and district. A group's tendency to bond during times of trial do not necessarily engender positive externalities (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988). These tactics further isolated the communities. They showed a tendency to bond with their like minded community groups to outduel the other so their own community would be victorious. While Spring Valley patrons and teachers were united in their effort against further consolidation and losing their school, a group representing Brookfield and the perceived district's best interests united in their effort to close down the Spring Valley School. Both communities saw potential losses through different causes and for different reasons. Spring Valley feared the loss of their school would further harm their already vulnerable community, but the participants also sensed that Brookfield feared they would lose jobs or programs because Spring Valley patrons were fighting to keep their school. These mutual perceptions further separated the communities.

This "success to the successful" perception was not unique to Spring Valley. Several studies suggest sending communities in consolidated districts believed they surrendered a significant amount of capital while receiving communities obtained great benefit (Bard, et al., 2008; Howley & Howley, 2006; Koranda, 2009; Peshkin, 1982). This unbalance created a lack of trust in the decision makers and in the receiving community in the consolidations with Burr Ridge and Brookfield. This is not a unique phenomenon, as perceived unbalance has also been problematic in other consolidated districts in Kansas (Patterson, et al., 2005), but trust is central to the full realization of the significance of social capital (Putnam, 2000).

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Spring Valley and Bridging Social Capital

Throughout Spring Valley's history of consolidation, there were brief moments where bridging social capital was exhibited. Many groups simultaneously bond along some social dimensions and bridge across others (Putnam, 2000). The Spring Valley community, which exhibited a tendency to bond in many ways throughout their nearly 50 year history with school consolidation, intensified their bonding when they felt threatened as a sending community. Yet, Spring Valley showed they were willing to connect with Burr Ridge and Brookfield when they were positioned to gain something positive for their own community. Examples of Spring Valley bridging to receive a benefit included the time a new high school was planned in between the towns of Spring Valley and Burr Ridge during the original consolidation and the new K-8 building in their own community during the consolidation with Brookfield. If a small community wishes to acquire new variations of capital, it must branch out to other communities, in order to retrieve it. This is the essence of bridging social capital in a consolidated district. While it appears the Spring Valley participants contradicted themselves as they shifted from pessimism to optimism, social capital theory supports this perceived contradiction.

Social capital is usually developed in pursuit of a particular goal or set of goals and not for its own sake (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). Though many indicated animosity toward Brookfield and district leaders because of the threat of losing their remaining school and declining trust, Spring Valley participants had a goal of maintaining great schools and communities. This created the desire to continue to try and connect with Brookfield again. People and groups seek better schools, community improvement, economic advantages, or some other good thing. Social capital is a means to those ends and not the focus or the aim of the group (Putnam & Feldstein). Spring Valley seemed to understand that regardless of the future of their

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school, it was inevitable that change would occur. "The long and the short of it is there are going to be changes no matter what," acknowledged a parent who realized change is inevitable. It was their goal that whatever change comes their way, the school and community's future could be sustained.

Spring Valley participants in this study did share a time when they were willing to bridge with Brookfield and the rest of the district communities. By combining the bonded social capital that exists in the communities of Spring Valley and Brookfield, greater and more diverse amounts are made available. In the mid 1990's, a new superintendent came to the district bringing a message of unification. He and the board at that time also embarked on a facilities improvement plan that included new buildings in Spring Valley and Collinsville and some new classrooms in Brookfield, along with a new seven-lane running track. Spring Valley was part of the first of two bond issues for a new K-8 community school. With Spring Valley scheduled to receive a big benefit, they quickly began bridging with the rest of the district in order that each community could draw on the collective capital of the group; in this case, property taxes. Spring Valley understood the concept of giving to receive, which is a fundamental component of social capital theory. Spring Valley became very proactive throughout the bond election campaigns lobbying community members not only in their own town for their new building, but becoming very proactive in the communities of Brookfield and Collinsville as well. Following the successful election that approved the new K-8 center in Spring Valley, they went to work again campaigning for the new building in Collinsville as well as the new classrooms and track in Brookfield. This resulted in a positive outcome for all of the communities, which, again, is the essence of bridging social capital.

Spring Valley participants in this study also looked to the school activities program as a point of pride in their community school and throughout the district. School activities are extra-curricular opportunities involving clubs, forensics, debate, drama, music, and sports programs, as well as academic competitions, grade level field trips, and fitness days. It appeared these types of activities acted as "bridging" components to bring students, parents, and communities together. The findings repeatedly showed Spring Valley people constructed a definition of success and connectedness using school activities as a core component. It was rare to define success without mentioning school activities in the same sentence. During interviews and focus groups, all participants were asked to define community. Inevitably, the conversation turned to school activities as they articulated their meaning of community and schools.

All participants in this study wove their stories in and around the school activities programs to make important points about the historical pride of Spring Valley, about the connectedness – or lack thereof – of parent support groups, and of student involvement and acceptance. These citizens also valued their athletic contributions to the Brookfield School District when consolidation with them first occurred. They mentioned how the Spring Valley athletes were vital to the early success of the consolidated high school. Parents used school activities to describe the varied levels of parent connectedness to Brookfield and the district high school. Generally, the more their students were involved in high school activities, the better connected the Spring Valley parents felt to other district parents, the Brookfield community, and the high school. Students also used school activities as a means to make connections and build relationships to other students from outside of their community when they transitioned to the high school. They also constructed a meaning of personal overall success equivalent to success in sports, clubs, arts, and other school activities.

Social capital for an individual or group can be enhanced through school activities (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Furstenberg, 2000; White & Gager, 2007). Spring Valley participants inadvertently made this connection throughout the research with their references to activity participation. Like many public school districts, Brookfield USD 650 attributed success of their schools to the success of their activity programs (Bennett, et al., 2009). These participants were quite clear about the importance of school activities to feelings of accomplishment, connectedness, and positive identity within and around their school-community. Bridging social capital was enhanced through the school activities, particularly from the perspective of the parents and students.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to understand the effect of school consolidation on citizens, parents, and students of a sending community. The findings in this study concurred with many other studies on the topic. School closures create tremendous pain and loss for communities that send their children away for educational services. Sending communities continue to resist or even resent the receiving community for their fate, even if the receiving communities were not ultimately responsible. Many rural advocates believe that a promising direction for revitalization and survival rests with the social capital that can be developed by building and sustaining strong linkages between community and school. Rural communities may have a head start in developing these linkages because schools have traditionally played a central role in the life of these communities (Miller, 1995). The link established between the Spring Valley community and their school was seen by the participants in this study as critical for continued enhancement of human capital and economic capital which are outcomes of increased social capital.

The findings in this study show that consolidated districts pose a challenge to district leadership and boards of education in achieving unification. Involving sending communities throughout the district planning processes, including further consolidation discussions, may help build trust and unity between sending and receiving communities and their patrons. Further, involving members of the sending community in the decision making processes about the consolidated district would serve to build trust due to the transparency of the issues and the collective good of the motives (Gubbins & MacCurtain, 2008). Research indicates that high levels of trust lead to high levels of bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). Ultimately, this bridging of social capital could enhance student learning (Coleman, 1988). There are great challenges to rural America''s schools and communities. It would benefit education if rural educational leadership would better understand where their communities have been in order to map out their journey into the future.

District Leadership Should Understand the History of Sending Communities

For leaders of consolidated districts, it is important to understand what the feeling of losing a school means to sending communities and how it affects their level of connection and involvement with the receiving community and the school district. The findings in this study indicated a lack of understanding of local history and culture by district leadership and the board of education which created resistance to consolidation from members of sending communities. The history had created a culture of anti-trust, resentment, and withdrawal from the district. This is not a unique situation to Spring Valley or USD 650. Studies abound on the difficulties inherent of sending communities in consolidated districts (Bard, et al., 2006; Funk & Bailey, 2000; Howley & Howley, 2006; Peshkin, 1982). The aim for district leaders and boards of education

should be to better understand these challenges which would help to bridge connections between sending and receiving communities.

Because Spring Valley had been through one painful consolidation event in the early 1960‟s, they were sensitive to further consolidation that would potentially harm their community and schools. Further, Spring Valley patrons showed a resolve to resist consolidation when they perceived to receive very little, if any, tangible benefit. While some leaders in the communities during the original consolidation with Burr Ridge came to the realization that maintaining a viable high school curriculum was nearly impossible with such small enrollment numbers, others truly believed they could still have a high school to this day. When the recent discussions of consolidation occurred, Spring Valley participants in this study pointed out district leadership and some board of education members did not have their best interests in mind when they considered closing their K-8 community school. Moreover, Spring Valley citizens and parents had developed a lack of trust in district leadership because of their perceived lack of involvement and understanding of their community‟s history and their desire for a viable future.

When threatened, Spring Valley bonded in solidarity to protect their schools over the years. Yet, the community understood they likely will have great difficulty making it on their own. Their history had shown when one avenue to bridge was severed, they looked another direction. Spring Valley has realized that to survive as a viable and progressive community, bridging connections to other groups or communities must occur. This was explained by their willingness to look to Brookfield following the fallout with Burr Ridge and their willingness to look to other neighbors over the recent dissention with Brookfield. Spring Valley understands they cannot make it on their own, so they will seek someone else with which to bridge. It may prove beneficial for district leadership to be intentional about bridging toward Spring Valley.

Involve Sending Communities in Decision-making to Enhance Bridging Social Capital

In times of tough decision making surrounding a consolidated school district's future, involving people from the sending communities in the decision making process would allow for enhanced trust and potential success. Effective communication can be difficult to attain in consolidated districts when different communities, cultures, and needs are continually intertwined. For this reason, leadership and boards of education in consolidated districts should make it a priority to establish open lines of communication throughout the district. Establishing some sort of district-wide site council representative of each of the communities might assist in bringing people from the different areas together to share ideas and generally engage in open communication. Often, these groups can be effective in assisting each community to see the bigger picture of the entire district.

Yet, simply involving patrons from a sending community in decisions regarding the future of the district will not necessarily eliminate all of the anxiety or resentment consolidation creates. Sending communities would be receptive to bridging with receiving communities when they see an intrinsic value in doing so. In other words, if patrons from a sending community stand to gain some form of capital (e.g. human or financial capital) as a result of bridging with the sending community, there exists a greater opportunity for such a connection to occur (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). This was the case with the Spring Valley community. When they were confident they would receive a new community K-8 school, they exhibited high levels of bridging social capital.

Spring Valley board members, during the original consolidation with Burr Ridge, felt betrayed or left out of the decision-making process when considerations for a new high school were being developed. The Spring Valley board representatives perceived a coup against them.

The result was a feeling of being left out of the conversation. Spring Valley's interests were not considered with the vote by Burr Ridge to build the new high school in that community. Subsequently, Spring Valley participants in this study felt left out of the recent conversation regarding the closure of their school. This is not unique. Sending communities in consolidated districts often feel left out of decisions. They perceive the power to have been taken away from them when a school, or all of their schools, have been closed (Patterson, et al., 2005).

It is important to understand that in many cases in consolidated districts, district leadership and sending and receiving communities want the same result: good schools and viable communities (Benton, 1992). To achieve this, district leadership and boards of education in rural consolidated districts should be intentional regarding the involvement of sending community representatives in the decision making of the future of the district.

Trust is a Critical Component of Bridging in Consolidated Districts

Trust is relative to the capital credit that exists (Coleman, 1988). If the credit balance between sending and receiving communities tips toward one, trust erodes. Trust can be elevated or restored in sending communities if they stand to gain some form of capital credit. When trust grows, the sending community has a greater tendency to bridge with the receiving community in a consolidated district. In essence, social capital is accrued from belonging as a member of a group. Without trust, social capital within and surrounding a group of people and their community can wear away.

To elicit trust from the receiving community, district leadership and boards of education should make an attempt to understand the history and culture of all communities, including receiving communities, in consolidated districts. This is a daunting task; yet, with the continued push for further consolidation of our public schools nation-wide, particularly in our rural areas,

this is a must for existing and potential leadership. Historical and cultural understanding can be achieved not only through reviewing documents, including the local newspaper, but by spending time in the senior citizens" centers, community centers, coffee shops, and other gathering places of rural communities and engaging in conversation. It is often the anecdotal data that is most helpful in these instances. Through the building of relationships by district leadership and boards of education with sending communities, bridging and bonding of social capital is enhanced (Putnam, 2000). With the enhancement of bridging and bonding social capital, student achievement can increase (Becker, 1993).

Summary

Trust is a critical component of bridging social capital. When trust is absent, bonding social capital occurs among individual groups and/or communities. When trust is elevated, bridging social capital is likely. Presently, Spring Valley is a tightly bonded community because of the perceived threat of further consolidation of certain grades levels in their community school or the loss of their school altogether. Implications from this study may apply to district leadership and boards of education throughout many instances of rural school consolidation. District leadership and boards of education should make attempts to understand the culture and history of the communities that make up their school district. They should also be intentional in soliciting input from sending communities about the direction of the district. Attention should be given to ensuring communication lines stay open for constant dialog between sending and receiving communities. Utilizing district-wide school activities may prove beneficial in enhancing bridging social capital in consolidated districts.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus Group 1: Citizen Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your understanding of school consolidation.

2. Describe your understanding of the USD 650 consolidation.

3. What is your perception of community members from Spring Valley regarding consolidation?

4. What is your perception of community members from Brookfield regarding consolidation?

5. Describe the events as you recall during the consolidation process of Spring Valley in the early 1960's.

6. What are your perceptions of the current Spring Valley parents regarding the consolidation with Brookfield?

7. What are your perceptions of the current Spring Valley students regarding the consolidation with Brookfield?

8. Describe the impact the loss of the local high school had on the people and community of Spring Valley?

9. Describe your perceptions on how personal and family relationships were affected during the time of consolidation?

10. Describe your perceptions on how personal and family relationships are affected currently as a result of consolidation?

11. What are your views of consolidation as a means to resolve school funding issues?

12. What are your views of consolidation as a means to enhance educational opportunities?

13. Define Community.

14. What other questions should I have asked you about the Spring Valley and Brookfield consolidation?

Focus Group 2: Parent Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your understanding of school consolidation.

2. Describe your understanding of the USD 650 consolidation.

3. What is your perception of community members from Spring Valley regarding consolidation?

4. What is your perception of community members from Brookfield regarding consolidation?

5. Describe the events as you understand them to be during the consolidation process of Spring Valley in the early 1960˝s.

6. What are your perceptions of the Spring Valley citizens (citizens as I have defined them for this study) regarding the consolidation with Brookfield?

7. What are your perceptions of the current Spring Valley students regarding the consolidation with Brookfield?

8. Describe the impact the loss of the local high school had on the people and community of Spring Valley?

9. Describe your perceptions on how personal and family relationships were affected during the time of consolidation?

10. Describe your perceptions on how personal and family relationships are affected currently as a result of consolidation?

11. What are your views of consolidation as a means to resolve school funding issues?

12. What are your views of consolidation as a means to enhance educational opportunities?

13. Define community.

14. What other questions should I have asked you about the Spring Valley and Brookfield consolidation?

Focus Group 3: High School Student Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your understanding of school consolidation.

2. Describe your understanding of the USD 650 consolidation.

3. Describe what it was like for you to attend Spring Valley Grade School.

4. Describe what it"s like for you to attend Brookfield High School.

5. What effect, if any, have you and your families experienced with your transition to Brookfield High School.

6. What do your parents think about regarding the consolidation with Brookfield?

7. What do the Spring Valley citizens (citizens as I have defined them for this study) think about regarding the consolidation with Brookfield?

8. What do you believe Brookfield thinks about regarding consolidation with Spring Valley?

9. Describe the challenges you face in going to high school in Brookfield.

10. Describe the advantages you receive by going to high school in Brookfield.

11. Define Community.

12. What other questions should I have asked you about the Spring Valley and Brookfield consolidation?

Focus Group 4: 7th and 8th Grade Student Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your understanding of school consolidation.

2. Describe your understanding of the USD 650 consolidation.

3. What is it like for you to attend Spring Valley Grade School?

4. What will it be like for you to attend Brookfield High School?

5. What do your parents think about regarding the consolidation with Brookfield?

6. What do the Spring Valley citizens (citizens as I have defined them for this study) think about regarding the consolidation with Brookfield?

7. What do you believe Brookfield thinks about regarding consolidation with Spring Valley?

8. Describe the challenges you will face in going to high school in Brookfield.

9. Describe the advantages of going to high school in Brookfield.

10. Define community.

11. What other questions should I have asked you about the Spring Valley and Brookfield consolidation?

Key Informant Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of school consolidation?

2. Describe the events as you recall them during the consolidation process of Spring Valley in the early 1960˚s.

3. What do community members from Spring Valley think about consolidation?

4. What do community members from Brookfield think about consolidation?

5. What do current Spring Valley parents think regarding the consolidation with Brookfield?

6. What are your perceptions of the current Spring Valley students regarding the consolidation with Brookfield?

7. Describe the impact the loss of the local high school had on the people and community of Spring Valley?

8. Describe your perceptions on how personal and family relationships were / are affected because of consolidation?

9. What are your views of consolidation as a means to resolve school funding issues?

10. What are your views of consolidation as a means to enhance educational opportunities?

11. If you could re-invent the Spring Valley / Brookfield Consolidation, what would that look like?

12. Define Community.

13. What other questions should I have asked you about the Spring Valley and Brookfield consolidation

CONSENT FORM

Department of Educational Leadership
Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142
316-978-3325

You are invited to participate in a study of the Spring Valley and Brookfield school consolidation. I am conducting this study as a student from the Wichita State University Educational Leadership Doctoral program. I am a past administrator for eleven years in the USD 650 district and current Superintendent in Hillsboro USD 651.

The purpose of this study is to attempt to understand how consolidation has impacted the students, families, and community members of Spring Valley that send their students to the consolidated high school in Brookfield. You have been chosen based on your connections to and a resident of the community of Spring Valley.

About 28-40 individuals are expected to participate in the study. Four focus groups consisting of about 7 – 10 persons will be conducted. Group 1 will consist of persons who graduated from Spring Valley High School prior to the original consolidation with Burr Ridge in 1966. This group is made up of lifelong citizens of the Spring Valley community. Group 2 will consist of 7 – 10 Spring Valley parents who currently have children in the Brookfield Public School system. These parents would have attended the K-8 Spring Valley grade school and then attended Brookfield High School. Group 3 consists of Spring Valley students presently attending Brookfield High School. These students will have attended Spring Valley Elementary throughout

their educational careers and have lived in the Spring Valley community area their entire lives. Group 4 will consist of students in 7th and 8th grade at Spring Valley Elementary. These students will have attended the Spring Valley School throughout their educational careers and are approaching the transition to Brookfield High School as 9th graders.

Each focus group will take approximately 45 - 60 minutes. All focus groups, with the exception of group three, which will be conducted at Brookfield High School, will occur in Spring Valley and will be scheduled at an agreed upon time that is convenient for participants. With your permission, the focus groups will be audio recorded so that an accurate transcript of the dialog will allow careful examination of your responses. The audio recording will be destroyed or deleted upon completion of the study. Only the researcher and peer analyzer of the data will have access to either the audio recordings or the transcripts. Potential individual interviews may ensue if the researcher and participants feel this will benefit the study.

You are encouraged to be open in your responses. This openness might result in feeling vulnerable throughout the study. To minimize these feelings, your identity will be kept confidential and potentially identifiable information will be removed from the transcript. If you participate, you may benefit from a deeper understanding of the school consolidation between Spring Valley and Brookfield. All participants may benefit from having an opportunity to be heard regarding their views of school consolidation. So that others might benefit from what we learn in Spring Valley, I plan to disseminate the results of this study through presentations at national conferences and publication in scholarly journals.

Any information obtained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. The final report will be presented to all stakeholders involved in the study as well as the leadership team and board of education of

USD 650. Potentially identifiable information will be removed from the document and subsequent presentations.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation. Your decision whether or not to participate will <u>not</u> affect your future relations with Wichita State University and/or your status with USD 650. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact me at: USD 651, 812 E. A Street, Hillsboro, KS, 67063, by phone at 620-947-3184, or by email at steve.noble@usd410.net. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, or by telephone at (316) 978-3285.

Thank you for your consideration,

Steve Noble

Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have voluntarily decided to participate. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

I agree to participate in the following activities for the Spring Valley school consolidation study:

_____Focus Group (with 7 – 10 people)

_____Individual Interview (if requested by the researcher)

_____   _____

Signature of Subject   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian   Date

(omit for subjects consenting for themselves)

APPENDIX C

ASSENT FORM

Department of Educational Leadership
Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142
316-978-3325

I have been informed that my parent(s) have given permission for me to participate, if I want to, in a study of the Spring Valley and Brookfield school consolidation. My participation in this project is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop my participation in this study at any time. If I choose not to participate, it will not affect me as a student in any way at either Spring Valley or Brookfield.

_____

Name   Date