An Evaluation of Rural School Consolidation:

The Case of

Nelsonville-York City School District

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CHAPTER ONE

Background

The education of children is vital for the success and prosperity of a society. There are differing views concerning what type of education a child needs to become a productive citizen. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, various strategies have been used to provide the nation's children with knowledge and skills needed for their adult life. The idea of consolidation of schools to improve education has been controversial throughout this time. Most research up until the 1970's advocated school consolidation as a means to improve education and reduce financial costs. However since the 1970s studies have shown that consolidation of schools may not be the answer to ensuring student achievement and economic efficiency (Sell, Leistritz, & Thompson, 1996).

The consolidation movement reaches back to the mid 1880s. The idea was that larger schools could provide additional educational opportunities that small schools could not. The one room school houses which served various grade levels being taught by one teacher lacked the needed instructional level to adequately educate a youngster (Reynolds, 1999). The rural schools were mostly targeted in this movement as the enrollments were lower.

There were different philosophies about the role of education for youngsters in the beginning of the consolidation movement. Those in rural farming communities viewed formal education as something nice but not necessary for all. Most households recognized the value of farming in maintaining the family's livelihood within the community. Parents often recognized which children might "take to schooling" and

which ones might not (Reynolds, 1999, p. 12). Those who did not were encouraged to be productive citizens by continuing to work and run the farms. Parents were more likely to accept sending their sons/daughter to high school in a larger school if they felt the child possessed the intelligence to succeed in a profession.

In the late 19th century, consolidation of schools was motivated by a variety of influences including political, economic and social (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005). Each of these influences impacted the course education would take. From a political standpoint, leaders were concerned that education was not meeting the standards found in other countries and this made the United States' schools less competitive (Reynolds, 1999). Using Germany's educational system as an example, reformers wanted schools to follow business and management concepts found in the industrial movement. Leaders advocated that schools could provide social order for the community and society by imitating the ideas of the "bureaucratic factory model" (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005, p. 106). The use of this model would enable schools to be efficient and provide social values and skills for children to develop into productive members of society (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005). Larger schools would meet these needs as these would be more efficient and economical and provide the best model for success (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2006).

There was concern that small rural schools were not equipped to carry out this model of education for a number of reasons (Reynolds, 1999). First, the enrollment numbers were quite low. Second, teachers and community members involved in the administration of the school were not adequately trained for their responsibilities. Third, the farming community had limited economic resources to invest in the educational system.

Consolidation of schools began to be viewed as a method to overcome the obstacles to better education. Important developments in this era that impacted consolidation were the invention of the automobile and paving of roads. Available transportation enabled students to travel further and decreased the need for many of the one room school houses (Bard et al., 2006).

While consolidation appeared to be a remedy to the educational problems, rural communities were ambivalent about this movement. Community members recognized that consolidation could increase the quality of education for their children by allowing for more educational opportunities. Likewise, interaction with others outside of their own community enabled social growth and exposure. On the other hand, there were concerns about loss of local control, erosion of the community's values and loss of community identification and prosperity (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005).

Despite concerns about consolidation, the movement proceeded. It is estimated that at the turn of the century, there were over 125,000 school districts. By 1938, the number of school districts had decreased to 119,000 and in 1975 there were just over 16,000 school districts. The largest decline in the number of school districts occurred between 1939 and 1973 (Killeen & Sipple, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

The education of children is vital in ensuring both an individual's and society's success. Throughout the last two centuries, educational leaders have labored over making the educational system the most effective, efficient and economical it can be. Following the industrial model, consolidation of schools has been identified as a means

of achieving these objectives. However in the last four decades, questions have arisen as to whether consolidation of schools is the answer. Proponents of consolidation believe that larger schools are able to provide more curricular opportunities, higher student achievement, increased teacher retention, and satisfaction and greater extracurricular activities. Opponents claim all of these things can be offered and achieved in the small school while also maintaining local control and community values.

This Master's Research Project will examine the literature available on the effects and outcomes of school consolidation. In addition, this paper will explore the consolidation process and outcome of the current Nelsonville-York City School District.

Research Questions

- 1. Does school consolidation improve student achievement?
- 2. Does school consolidation improve curriculum opportunities?
- 3. Does school consolidation save money?
- 4. What impact does school consolidation have on teacher satisfaction and retention?
- 5. What impact does school consolidation have on community involvement and economics?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine whether school consolidation provides a better avenue for the education of students. The positive and negatives will be compared

in an effort to ascertain what strategies lead to improved education and development of students as well as the community.

Limitations

A limitation with the study is that there is no clear cut answer as the research does not definitively illustrate that one perspective is superior to the other. In addition, this master's research project explores the consolidation of one specific school district, the Nelsonville-York City School District, which may well not be typical of consolidation in other districts.

Definition of Terms

- 1. *Consolidation* the process of dissolving or reorganizing one or more schools/schools districts into one new unit (Killeen & Sipple, 2000).
- 2. *Vacated Community* Those communities which lost students through consolidation (Killeen & Sipple, 2000).
- 3. *Host Community* Those communities which gained students through consolidation (Killeen & Sipple, 2000).
- 4. *Small School* According to the U.S. Department of Education, "small rural schools" are those schools that are eligible to participate in the <u>Small Rural School Achievement (SRSA) program</u>. SRSA includes districts with average daily attendance of fewer than 600 students, or districts in which all schools are located in counties with a population density of fewer than 10 persons per square mile, AND all schools served by the districts are located in a rural area with a

school locale code of 7 or 8. The locale code is the designation of whether a school is deemed rural. Codes 7 and 8 are rural designations.

Methodology

The information for this research paper was obtained from various sources. A search for information concerning school consolidation was undertaken by using *Info Tree*, a search engine at the Ohio University Alden Library. Books written about school consolidation were located. To obtain history of the consolidation of the Nelsonville-York City School District, archived articles from three local newspapers, *The Athens Messenger, The Logan Daily* and *The Nelsonville Tribune* were obtained and reviewed. Additionally, interviews with previous administrators, teachers and students from the earlier Nelsonville School District and the York School District were conducted.

Organization

Chapter One includes the background of school consolidation, statement of the problem, research questions, purpose and significance of the study, limitations, definition of terms, and methodology. Chapter Two is a review of the literature concerning school consolidation, its financial impact, the academic success of students, extracurricular opportunities, the effects on teachers, the effects on curriculum, the effects on the community and strategies for successful consolidation. Chapter Three reviews the history and process of the consolidation in 1967 of what is now the Nelsonville-York City School District. Chapter Four includes a summary of

the current literature, a review of and responses to the research questions and recommendations for future research regarding school consolidation.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Why consolidate?

The issue of consolidation of schools has been discussed and evaluated for many years. Even after all of this, a definitive answer as to whether school consolidation improves the education of today's students has not been established (Plucker, Spradlin, Magaro, Chien, & Zapf, 2007). The literature outlines both positive and negative points for school consolidation. However the one point that must be most strongly considered in this question is what is best for student achievement and success (Sell et al., 1996).

School districts are a very important aspect of the community. The decision to consolidate schools is influenced by a number of factors. Generally financial reasons are the biggest driving force in the consideration of consolidation (Russo, 2006). Other factors include declining enrollment, obsolete facilities, decreasing funding, minimal staff and resources, and state mandates (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005; Killeen & Sipple, 2000). Proponents cite an increase in educational opportunities thus increasing student achievement, a reduction in administrative staff and a better use of facilities as desired outcomes of consolidation (Plucker et al., 2007). In addition, the school serves as a major social entity in the community. Community members such as parents, politicians and business leaders influence and provide support for the school. The input and concerns of these stakeholders need to be valued and attended to in the process of determining if consolidation is best.

Financial Impact

The decision to consolidate is most frequently influenced by financial issues. The state of the economy of the country challenges all to make the most of the financial resources available. Schools have to do this while tending to the needs of the students and at the same time answer to parents, the community and state agencies. Many educational leaders and legislators at the local, state and national level view consolidation as a means to cut costs and save money.

Declining enrollments in schools leads to under utilization of buildings.

Buildings which are only half full or in poor repair can be a financial drain as they continue to require inefficient utilities, expensive insurance, and constant upkeep.

Districts try to rid themselves of unnecessary facilities. The idea of Economy of Scale is "the notion that school districts may decrease their production costs by increasing the size and administrative operation of their facilities, an idea born from 18th century industrial development"(Killeen & Sipple, 2000, p. 5). This theory then looks to improve the financial condition of the school. Consolidation is one option to accomplish this.

To understand the feasibility of consolidation being a financial benefit, it is imperative to do a thorough review of the costs before beginning the project. Careful consideration of building usage, utilities and maintenance costs help frame the picture. In 2002, years after the massive rural school consolidations in West Virginia, Clacy Williams, Director of the School Building Authority, stated that no money was saved by the taxpayers. In fact, the cost of utilities and maintenance was higher than what the state paid prior to consolidation (Purcell & Shackelford, 2005).

Administration costs are generally expected to be reduced in a consolidation project. As students merge into fewer buildings, it is assumed that the number of administrators such as principals needed will be less. However, some of the research has shown that the cost of administrators has actually increased. Usually there is a reduction of one or two superintendents depending on the number of schools merging. However, administrators in middle management and specialized staff often increase due to discipline issues and an increase in student alienation (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Plucker et al., 2007; Purcell & Shackelford, 2005).

One of the largest administrative costs for a school is transportation. Over the last ten years, schools have experienced a dramatic increase in the cost of transportation secondary to rising gasoline prices among other influences. With the exception of the 1950, between 1930 and 1980 the number of students being transported by school buses has consistently increased. Since 1980 a plateau has been reached. By the turn of the century, approximately 60% of all students were being bused to school (Killeen & Sipple, 2000).

The cost of school transportation is closely aligned with the number of students being transported. However, the increase in transportation expenditures exceeds the growth in student enrollment and those being bused (Killeen & Sipple, 2000). In the 1994 school year, the average enrollment in small non-metro school districts was 1,260 students. Urban schools averaged 22,686 in the same year. Despite the large discrepancy in enrollments, the small school districts spent twice as much money on transportation than the urban schools. Transportation costs accounted for 4% of the total budget for

small school districts. In contrast, only 2.4% of the total urban school district money was spent on transportation (Killeen & Sipple, 2000).

In addition to actual transportation costs, there are other issues which impact rural areas more than non-rural schools. As small rural schools consolidate, boundaries of the district enlarge. This leads to longer distances to schools for some children. Length of time on the bus to and from school has frequently been cited as one of the most negative aspects of consolidation (Killeen & Sipple, 2000; Sell et al., 1996). Issues such as sleep deprivation as students leave for school so early in the morning to lack of study time in the evening due to of arriving home late prompt concern (Purcell & Shackelford, 2005). Safety aspects such as prolonged exposure to fumes from diesel fuel and potential violence on the bus during the long rides also spark concern (Purcell & Shackelford, 2005).

With the hope of saving money through school consolidation, many have been disappointed that the decision has not had this desired effect. Much more consideration beyond cost saving must be given to determine if consolidation between schools is best.

Curriculum

While financial considerations are frequently motivators for consolidation, academic opportunity is the probably the next most noted reason (Russo, 2006). The basic premise is that a larger school can provide a broader curriculum than a small school (Self, 2001).

In the early days of the one-room school house, the education of the children took a different path than today. Students were only there to learn the very basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. These basics augmented their real education of farming and other

day-to-day chores needed to survive and thrive in their small community (Reynolds, 2001).

In the 1930s, money was scarce for schools and education. Some schools had difficulty paying teacher salaries as property taxes fell due to the depression. Reading was emphasized during this time and many new literary books were written. This included the famous Dick and Jane books, the first Dr. Seuss books, and the Nancy Drew mysteries (Ganzel, 2003).

Changes in education were seen in the 1940s with War World II being the catalyst for these changes. The education systems were identified as unorganized, underfunded, and inefficient. Educational leaders began the process of bringing standardization and professionalism to schools throughout the nation. These ideals often forced rural schools to consolidate in order to meet this goal (Ganzel, 2003).

Since the 1950's, increased emphasis has been placed on Advance Placement classes to prepare students planning to go to college (Hampel, 2002). Offering these higher level classes has been difficult in smaller schools where mostly basic classes were being taught. While this is not as important at the elementary grade levels, classes at the secondary level need more academic differentiation. Students begin to choose career interests and look for classes that will provide them with the knowledge to continue their career or educational path after high school.

It is difficult to offer the Advance Placement classes if enrollment is small. A report by James Conant in 1959 stated that a high school must have at least 400 students in order to provide Advance Placement classes in math, science and foreign language. Similarly, classes such as calculus, advanced foreign languages and physics should only

be offered if there are enough high level students (Hampel, 2002) However, in a large study of high schools in New York with enrollments of below 100 to over 3,000, researchers found that larger schools do not guarantee diversified educational offerings. Many of the large schools did not offer classes such as calculus or physics. The study also emphasized the fact that high schools of 400 students can provide strong and advanced curricula that are comparable to larger school settings (Fowler & Walberg, 1991). Post consolidation surveys of teachers, students and parents of smaller schools that consolidated with another small school have found a broader curriculum as a positive resulting from the move even though the enrollment still classified the school as small (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005; Self, 2001).

Academic Success

Student achievement is one of the benchmarks for a school's success. Educators and legislators have voiced concern that small schools are unable to provide the academic opportunities that will best foster academic success. These small schools often do not have the resources to expose students to anything more than the basics. Students cannot be divided in terms of ability and therefore may not be challenged to reach their potential (Hampel, 2002). The push for consolidation up into the 1970's led to larger schools that would in turn lead to more academic opportunities for students. It was believed that larger schools had larger buildings and therefore would be able to offer more diverse educational experiences.

While there has been no definitive answer to what size school is best for student achievement, research has shown that school sizes of 300-500 and smaller classroom size, especially in elementary school, provide an environment that is conductive for

learning. Couple this with qualified teachers and stimulating curricula, small schools can achieve high academic success. However, much of the research on student achievement has found no difference in achievements between small schools and large schools. Other research findings, however, indicate that small schools actually show higher levels of student achievement than large schools (Plucker et al., 2007). The size of the school also has been found to have an effect on test scores as a large school size has been associated with lower scores. Smaller elementary schools tended to increase learning especially for black students and those in lower socioeconomic status (Fowler & Walberg, 1991).

A number of factors contribute to findings that small schools have higher student achievement. Some of the reasons behind this may be that in large schools there is less participation by teachers and administrators in decision-making, less parent-teacher interaction, more time needed for discipline problems and less human contact (Plucker et al., 2007). The National Rural Education Association (NREA) looked at student academic performance as well as other measures after West Virginia undertook a major consolidation project. Its findings were that small class sizes lend themselves to more teacher-student interaction and better communication with parents which further improves student performance (Purcell & Shackelford, 2005).

While research shows that small schools do provide high academic success, post consolidation surveys and studies present a mixed picture. North Dakota eliminated 22 school districts between 1989 and 1994. Surveys following the consolidation indicated that teachers and parents felt consolidation did increase student achievement through having more resources and opportunities for academic growth (Sell et al., 1996). Increased academic opportunities were also cited by superintendents as a positive

outcome of consolidation (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005). On the other hand, a review of a consolidation project in Ohio in 1992 found differing results. Teachers interviewed one year and eight years after consolidation felt that student performance had not improved as a result to consolidation (Self, 2001).

Extracurricular Opportunities

Beyond the academic aspects of education, social, physical and cultural developments are important achievements during the school years. Extracurricular activities provide opportunities for students to develop and master these skills. Since many of the extracurricular activities are more geared toward the secondary school level, this age group tends to profit more in the consolidation (Self, 2001).

One of the arguments for consolidation of schools is that students will have more activities to choose from in which they can participate. However, studies have not shown this to be consistently true (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Purcell & Shackelford, 2005). In the consolidation of neighboring schools, some schools have indeed been able to provide more opportunities for extracurricular programs. The actual participation in the programs varies. Studies have shown a decline in student participation after the consolidation of schools (Bard et al., 2006). Students feel alienated as they try to blend with other peers who may have differing socioeconomic status or cultural influences (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Purcell & Shackelford, 2005). As the number of students increases, there is more competition. Some students become discouraged and give up. The manning theory maintains that in small schools, students participate more in these types of activities and thus are more socially integrated with their peers and better behaved (Haller, 1992).

Effects on Teachers

Students are not the only people deeply affected by the decision to consolidate. Consolidation presents many issues for teachers. Studies have examined teacher satisfaction and retention in large schools versus small schools. Advocates of consolidation maintain that bigger schools offer teachers many more advantages than small schools (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005). Larger buildings have better equipped classrooms that offer more opportunities for creative instruction, such as team teaching. Teachers feel more professionally stable as the economic status of the school district improves, which translates into salary increases and enhanced benefits. Consequently, teacher retention and satisfaction increases (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005). Additionally, in larger schools, teachers believe they have more support from their peers. Larger schools typically have several teachers within a department which allows them to share and work together on teaching strategies (Self, 2002). However, some teachers in very large schools report that they feel alone as the school is so large they do not see their peers. Furthermore, the personal life of teachers is somewhat less conspicuous within the community when the community and school are larger (Hampel, 2002). On the other hand, studies have shown that teacher satisfaction increases in a small school environment. One of the reasons for this is smaller class sizes and more student-teacher interaction (Bard et al., 2006).

Regarding teacher satisfaction, studies show mixed results. However, teacher satisfaction is very much aligned with teacher retention and thus is very important to administrators and boards of education (Purcell & Shackelford, 2005). In the course of a consolidation project, one drawback for teachers is that layoffs may be necessary. This

can be very upsetting and difficult and leave bad feelings within the affected communities. The new school board is faced with the task of developing new contracts for the teachers, including salaries and benefits. Incorporating what each district had or did not have before and what the district can now afford can be quite a feat (Russo, 2006).

Effects on the Community

The school is a very important part of the community and often defines the community. Homebuyers frequently use the strength or lack of the school system in determining whether to buy in a particular location (Sell et al., 1996). Communities become known as the "football or basketball" community if their teams excel. Fear of losing the community's individual identity is a major source of resistance to consolidation (Bard et al., 2006).

Small communities view their school as the heart and soul of the community. They feel that due to their smallness they are able to impart and sustain the moral values in the students of the area. Everyone knows everyone and families look to each other for support. Likewise, without influence outside of the community, children will not be subjected to the culture and the vices beyond their domain (Hampel, 2002).

Consolidation can also affect the industry of the area. In some cases, the loss of industry with resultant loss of an adequate tax base may be one of the precipitating factors in the consolidation process (Sell et al., 1996). In other instances, consolidation may lead to loss of economy after the closure of a school. A post consolidation study in North Dakota in which several schools were consolidated indicated that there was a decrease in retail sales and business after consolidation. Members from the vacated

community found this more than the host community. One reason behind this economic setback is that parents often shop while their children participate in activities at school and thus spend their money in the host community (Sell et al., 1996). Another area of loss of economy is that the school district is often one of the largest employers within a community. With the loss of the school and merging with another, the loss of employment for community members has a detrimental impact (Bard et al., 2006).

One of the most feared effects of consolidation by the community is the loss of local control (Sell et al., 1996). This is particularly true of the vacated community. Frequently a smaller school may consolidate with a larger school. The study in North Dakota found that the population from the vacated community tended to be older, retired, less educated and of low socioeconomic status (Sell et al., 1996). The vacated community was less likely to support consolidation. It also feared lack of representation on the school board, that its students and values would be less accepted in the host school, and a mass departure of residents due to the closure of the school and loss of industry (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005).

In some consolidation processes, physical buildings are used in both communities involved in the consolidation. The elementary school may remain open in one community while the other community will house junior and high schools (Sell et al., 1996). This option tends to help both school districts feel there is still a part of the school within their locale.

Attitudes of community members from the host and vacated schools were evaluated after several school consolidations took place in North Dakota. The findings indicated similarities and differences between the vacated and host communities (Sell et

al., 1996). In terms of community involvement, the vacated community often feels more strongly that there has been a decrease in the amount of community involvement after consolidation. In one study, however, the members of the community did not specifically state that consolidation was the cause of this change; however, they felt their quality of life had decreased (Sell et al., 1996). Still both host and vacated community members felt that the students benefited both academically and socially from the consolidations.

Strategies for Successful Consolidation

Consolidation of schools is motivated by various concerns. While academic achievement is one of the motivators, most generally the one number motivator is financial issues (Russo, 2006). The idea of whether to consolidate also is prompted from differing sources (Russo, 2006). In some cases, superintendents and boards of education determine that the school district is not capable of maintaining its independence while providing an adequate level of education. Issues include being able to meet the financial obligations of the district as well as make available what is in the best interest of the students. Consolidation then becomes an alternative in order for small schools to become more efficient with resources and thus improve academic achievement (Self, 2002). In other cases, state legislators enact laws pertaining to guidelines schools must meet or obtain in order to remain an independent school. Many of these guidelines focus on the number of students within the district (Bailey & Preston, 2007). The perception is that schools with low enrollment are not able to offer the types of experiences, academic classes and other opportunities that would be possible in a larger school. Additionally, as buildings and facilities deteriorate and schools do not have the financial resources to upgrade, states offer money as an incentive to consolidate (Hughes, 2003).

An alternative to consolidation is presented by Deborah Meier in her concept of a school within a school. Meier is a strong advocate for the effectiveness of the small schools in the education system (Meier, 2002). As research has shown, small schools present many advantages to successful education. The concept of smallness is the prominent factor in Meier's philosophy. Additional components of this educational system are autonomy and choice (Meier, 2004).

The school within a school utilizes the large buildings erected during the earlier era of consolidation. In one of these large school buildings there are several independent schools. Since the schools are in close proximity to each other, resources can be shared in order to provide a variety of curriculum opportunities. Classes such as music, art, home economics, and industrial arts are examples (Meier, 2002).

By breaking the large schools down into small schools, many positive outcomes are seen. The teacher to student ratio is lower which enables teachers to interact and get to know their students well. As the relationship develops between the teacher and student, respect grows for one another. Also, small schools lend themselves to an increase in safety and decrease in violence (Meier, 1996).

Organization should be simplistic. Schools try to avoid bureaucracy and instead promote autonomy and self governance among the staff. Central offices are generally small in number. Faculty are accountable to themselves as well as each other.

Additionally, staff are accountable to parents and the community (Meier, 1996; Meier 2002). Lastly, these small schools allow for choice. Parents and students have a choice as to what school their child would excel in. This choice can lead to a feeling of

belonging to the student. Parental involvement increases as parents find themselves a part of the school (Meier, 2004).

Small schools have shown high academic achievement, higher graduation rates, lower drop-out rates, and a higher sense of community. The school within a school model can provide these positive outcomes (Dewees, 2000).

As mentioned previously, there are many positives and negatives to consolidation. In order to improve the likelihood that merging school districts will be successful, much thought and preparation is needed.

The main responsibility for the consolidation process is in the hands of the superintendents and the school boards (Self, 2001). The most important aspect in the process is planning (Hughes, 2003). A comprehensive study should be undertaken by administrators even before the decision for or against consolidation is made. The study should include information on operational costs such as maintenance, utilities, transportation and supplies. An evaluation of the cost of staffing, including salaries and benefits and whether there will be any differences in the various schools, should be reviewed. Enrollment trends, cost per pupil and tax base information is knowledge community members may not be aware of. If a task force of some type is to be used, it is important that the group is diversified in order to have representation across the districts.

Public meetings are critical. The meetings should be an opportunity for all to share input and concerns while still maintaining order. Presenting the information and asking for ideas for solutions or outlining options enables community members to feel they are a part of the process. Listening becomes an integral part of these meetings as

they allow people to voice their concerns and opinions. Ultimately, the final decision will still rest with the powers to be (Self, 2001).

Consolidation can be traumatic for staff also. The superintendent should meet early on with the staff affected by the plan. It is important that staff hear the information from the administration rather than the community or media (Russo, 2006). This is especially important to those staff member who may lose their jobs through the consolidation.

The superintendent needs to be very visible within the community during this time. Appearances at civic organizations are an excellent way to reach community members. Presenting the facts and dispelling rumors is necessary when there is such a volatile issue facing everyone (Hughes, 2003). Consolidation is an emotional topic that impacts everyone in the community. Planning, communicating and involving the community are the keys to successful consolidation (Self, 2001).

Summary

The tide regarding consolidation has shifted throughout the decades, yet a consensus about whether consolidation improves the education of the young people has not emerged.

Academic success is one of the main goals of a consolidation of schools. Small schools have been found to provide for high academic success when other influences such as stimulating curricula and good teachers are present. The teacher/pupil ratio is smaller which lends itself to more interaction between teachers, students and parents. A small school atmosphere has found to be particularly better for minority students and those in low socioeconomic status.

Studies have shown that academic achievement did increase in some cases after consolidation. This generally was seen when two small schools merged yet remained fairly small. In these schools, there was an increase in learning opportunities for students after consolidation.

Academic success in larger schools has been hindered by higher dropout rates and lower test scores (Bard et al., 2006). Student achievement decreases due to factors such as large class sizes, less interaction with teachers and a lower rate of parental involvement.

The majority of the time, the driving force behind for consolidation is financial. School districts having to deal with outdated facilities which may not be safe and limited financial resources find there is no other recourse but consolidation. Decreasing enrollments and loss or lack of industry lead to less funding from the state as well as the local community in the form of taxes. Yet careful consideration needs to be given to the costs that will result from consolidation. Transportation is one of the largest expenses. In sparely populated rural areas, these expenses can quickly extinguish any cost saving that was anticipated.

The increase in opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities has been shown to be a positive outcome of consolidation. The problem exists in that frequently students do not take part in these opportunities because they do not feeling a part of the group/school, the long distance between the school and home and increased competition.

In terms of teacher satisfaction, there are differing views as to whether teachers are more satisfied in small schools versus large schools. While teachers in large schools have more peers within the school, they comment that they may not see them as much as

they would like. This decreases the interaction between the teachers. Teachers in small schools like the increased in interaction with their students and parents but generally lack the opportunity to network with peers about teaching strategies.

Teacher retention is an important aspect of a successful school. Both small and large schools feel components of their respective size increase teacher retention. Small schools propose teacher retention is increased due to a greater sense of community and more interaction between teacher and students. Large schools cite more peer support, better facilities and higher salaries as impacting teacher retention.

Curriculum is under much scrutiny today. This started in the 1950s after Sputnik and the Cold War. The political philosophy at the time was that schools needed to educate students in a manner that would allow them to contribute to the well being of the nation and be more internationally competitive (Bard, et al., 2006). There is concern that small schools are unable to provide the Advanced Placement classes their students need to be able to compete at the college level. Likewise, it is not cost effective to provide a class in which only a few students participate. Consolidation may lead to more Advanced Placement classes.

The community and its school district greatly influence each other. The identity of the community is tied closely to that of the school. The school not only provides for the academic needs of the children of the community but is the social hub as well. There is a fear of losing local control when a school is merged with another. This is a very important aspect that needs to be addressed in a consolidation process.

Consolidation of schools can be a positive move for students and the community.

It is vital that strategies are used by the superintendent and boards of education to

enhance the success of this difficult undertaking. Planning and communication with parents, staff and members of the community are crucial.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORY OF NELSONVILLE-YORK CONSOLIDATION

Ohio has a long history of school consolidation. In 1913, S.K. Mardis, a state school inspector, wrote a letter which was included in the Fifty-Eighth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools to the Governor of the State of Ohio. The letter reported, "The rural schools are greatly in poor condition to meet present demands... Many of the small schools should be abolished..." (Self, 2001, p. 6). Following this report, the legislature ordered a survey of Ohio schools. The survey concluded that there were too many small schools in the state, which are expensive and ineffective. A further recommendation was that "consolidation and centralization should be encouraged whenever possible" (Self, 2001, p. 6).

At the end of the 1914 school year, there were 2,674 school districts in Ohio. In 1915, many one-room schools within counties began to merge. Counties developed county boards of education to manage the consolidated schools. This pattern of consolidation continued and by 1925 the number of one-room schools had decreased from 9,400 to 5,500. Following the stock market crash in 1929, school districts experienced increased financial problems. The Ohio Department of Education intervened and withdrew state funds for any school with less than 14 students (Self, 2001).

The consolidations continued and by the end of the 1935 school year and 1940 school year there were 1,986 school districts and 1,696 districts respectively. To further the consolidation movement, the legislature passed Ohio House Bill 128. This bill gave authority to counties to develop a committee to study the organization of the school

district within their locale. In addition, the legislature authorized the creation of the Ohio School Survey Committee to study consolidation. Following this probe, a recommendation was made that all school districts should provide 12 grades in the school by July 1, 1959. This led to a decline in school districts to 984 by the 1959 school year (Self, 2001).

There was a wave of consolidation in the 1960s. The State Board of Education largely influenced these consolidations (Brasington, 2003). Higher and stricter standards developed by the Board of Education left small inefficient schools unable to meet the requirements set forth. By the 1973 school year, only 617 school districts were left in Ohio (Self, 2001).

Following the trend of consolidation in Ohio, the Ohio University Center for Educational Service administered a survey in 1961. The survey entitled "A Survey of All Public Schools in Athens County" recommended two high schools for Athens County and the development of two school districts in the county from the then 12 of 13 districts in the county ("Survey Report," 1961). District A would include Nelsonville, York, Chauncey-Dover, Glouster and Trimble school districts. The second, District B, would include Athens, The Plains, Albany, Ames-Bern, Rome-Canaan, Shade and Waterloo districts. The high school for District A would be the York High School and the District B high school would be in Athens ("Survey Report," 1961).

The survey outlined that having two high schools would allow for a more comprehensive high school curriculum. Schools would be able to provide both college preparation classes as well as vocational classes. Even with the additional class opportunities, fewer high school teachers would be needed and money could be used for

additional services such as guidance counseling and expanded library services ("School Thoughts," 1962).

In 1962, the Nelsonville Board of Education and the Glouster Board of Education requested a study by the State Board of Education to evaluate how the schools could provide a better education for the students. There were concerns about how to deal with the new mandates in the State Minimum High School Standards that were expected to take place soon. The new standards would include that a high school have an enrollment of no less than 500 students. In the proposed District A, Nelsonville had the largest high school enrollment with 351 students enrolled ("School Thoughts,"1962).

During the next several years, various studies and ideas were explored. The administration of the Nelsonville and York school districts asked for a study by the State Board of Education regarding the proposition of the consolidation of these two schools. Nelsonville was a city school district and York, which was made up of the communities of Buchtel, Kimberly, Doanville, Carbon Hill and Murray City, was part of the Athens County School District. In May of 1966, on the recommendation of E.E. Holt, the Ohio school chief, the State Board of Education approved the consolidation of the Nelsonville and York school districts ("Nelsonville-York Merger Gets," 1966). The consolidation proposal was to be put before the voters on the November ballot and if passed, would take effect on January 1, 1967. The district would be run as a city school district and not be part of the Athens County district. Estimated enrollment would be 1,203 in Kindergarten and grades 1-6 housed in four school buildings, 516 in grades 7-9 and 468 in grades 10-12 ("Nelsonville-York Merger Gets," 1966). The merger of the two schools would still constitute the school as a "small school" as defined by the U.S. Department of

Education. Under current requirements, a small school must have an enrollment of 600 or less or have a population density of fewer than 10 persons per square mile, AND be designated rural (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Today, Nelsonville-York City School District remains in this category.

As noted in the literature review, the success of a school consolidation project involves much planning and the support of the involved communities. The research has also suggested that having a school in each community is important to the identity of the community. Thus boards of education and superintendents have the task of communicating information and eliciting the cooperation and support of the people in their communities. Leading the way would be Jack Hillyer, Superintendent of York Local School, and Lloyd Gray, Superintendent of Nelsonville City School. Mr. Hillyer started his career in education as a teacher in 1949 in Murray City, Ohio. After several years, Mr. Hillyer found his true calling, school administration. He served as Executive Head of the Five Points School District in southwestern Ohio before returning to York Local School District to become superintendent in 1963 (Wyatt, 2009). Mr. Gray began his teaching career in a one-room school in Noble County in Ohio and served as principal at Mount Sterling before moving to Nelsonville. He became superintendent of Nelsonville City School District in 1950 ("Former School," 1997).

The Boards of Education and the superintendents organized committees of community members to help with the dissemination of information and encourage support of the proposal among community members ("Committee Will," 1966). A statement made by the joint boards in the end of September 1966 stated: "We believe we cannot delay longer this important step of joining these two school districts together. The

boards of education and school administration are united in promoting the consolidation. We are giving the educational interests of the children in our communities top priority in initiating this proposal" ("Committee Will," 1966, p. 2).

Various venues were utilized to disperse information and enlist community support. On October 3, 1966, the first of four public meetings was held. These meetings were televised on Nelsonville's local television cable. Citizenshad the opportunity to call in questions that were answered by a panel of participants. The participants included school board members, city council members, representatives of both athletic boosters, coaches, prominent business leaders and clergy. These people were proponents of the consolidation ("TV Series," 1966).

Superintendent Lloyd Gray explained the creation of committees to support the merger. The committees were to canvass the various communities to discuss the advantages of the consolidation. Several important issues were outlined in this first meeting. All the existing elementary schools would remain open. These included schools in Nelsonville, Poston, Buchtel and Murray City. All students in grades 7-9 would attend junior high in the old Nelsonville high school building. Students in grades 10-12 would attend the old York high school ("Proposed Nelsonville-York," 1966).

Giving the respective communities a sense of local control and representation. the new Board of Education would be made up of five members appointed by the State Board of Education. Two members would come from one district and three from the other ("Proposed Nelsonville-York," 1966). Both superintendents would be retained, one in the capacity of superintendent and one as assistant superintendent ("York, Nelsonville," 1966).

Committee members attended local civic organizations in all the communities to enlist support. At these meetings, the public was informed about the educational advantages of the merger. The major advantages included an expanded junior high program that included foreign languages, guidance services, special education, industrial arts, home economics and sports programs. In the high school, courses such as art, speech, debate, special education, guidance services, journalism and additional foreign language classes would be offered. Several new sports would be available to students as well in which to participate. Another expected advantage was that all teachers would be teaching in their area of specialization ("Nelsonville-York Merger Benefits," 1966). The elementary schools would have access to art education, special education, guidance services and testing programs (Geary, 1966).

While the emphasis of the consolidation was on improved educational opportunities, there were certainly financial reasons for the merger as well. York School District, comprised of several very small communities, received the majority of its taxes from the Poston Power Plant, part of Columbus and Southern Ohio Electric Company. York had recently constructed a new high school building in Buchtel. However, there was still a large debt for the school. Nelsonville maintained two buildings, an elementary school and a building that housed the junior high and high school. The junior high/high school building was quite old. While the total millage for York in 1966 was 19.7 mills for Nelsonville it was was 21.9. One of the major concerns of residents was the possibility of an increase in taxes. Authorities allayed these concerns by informing residents that the anticipated increase would be approximately 1½ cents per day in property taxes ("Nelsonville-York Merger Finances," 1966).

Transportation costs are frequently cited as one of the biggest deterrents to consolidation. The cost of transportation was a concern of many voters in the two districts. The majority of Nelsonville students lived within the boundaries of the city and many walked to school. York School District was much more spread out, encompassing parts of two counties. The superintendents believed that no additional buses would be necessary for transportation of students but did state they would probably ask the Division of Pupil Transportation in the State Department of Education to assist with establishing bus routes ("Consolidation Requires," 1996).

After several community meetings, numerous civic and school organizations publicly endorsed consolidation. However, the majority of these endorsements were from organizations in Nelsonville. Those pledging their support included the Nelsonville City Council, the Nelsonville Lions Club, St. Andrews Catholic Women's Club, Nelsonville and York Parent/Teacher Associations and the Nelsonville Athletic Association ("2 Nelsonville," 1966; "School Consolidation," 1966).

On November 8, 1966, by a vote of 1,680 to 1,108, 60.3% of the voters in the Nelsonville City School District and the York Local School District approved the consolidation of the two schools. The breakdown of voting clearly showed who was for and who was against the merger. Nelsonville residents voted 1,191 to 461 in favor. On the York side, numbers were quite different with 489 in favor and 647 voting against the merger ("Nelsonville-York Consolidation," 1966).

At the schools' respective board meetings in November, nominations were made from each Board of Education for the new consolidated board of education. The nominations were to be be sent to the State Board of Education who would appoint the members ("Two Nelsonville," 1966; "York Board," 1966). Those appointed were: Roland Pierce and Richard Hubbard from Nelsonville and Eugene Edwards, Robert Bentley and John Mullins from York ("School Board," 1966). Roland Pierce, age 51, was a graduate of Nelsonville High School and serving his second term on the school board. A mail carrier in Nelsonville, he served in World War II and was involved in many civic organizations in Nelsonville. Also a graduate of Nelsonville High School was 32-year-old Richard Hubbard who would become the President of the new school board. Mr. Hubbard was Executive Vice President of The Peoples Bank Company in Nelsonville and a prominent leader in the community. Eugene Edwards, age 37, was owner of the Nelsonville Television Cable Service, the company that televised the public meetings. He was serving his third term on the York school board. Robert Bentley, age 47, was a WWII veteran and operated a strawberry farm in York Township. Finally John Mullins, age 37, was a principal of the Albany school after serving as a teacher for 15 years. He was active in Boy Scouts and local, state and national teacher associations ("Five Board," 1966).

The business of the new Nelsonville-York City School District started December 16, 1966 instead of the earlier projected date of January 1, 1967. The earlier date allowed for additional funding becoming available if the consolidation was completed before the beginning of the new regular calendar year ("School Study," 1966). However, both schools continued as separate entities until the end of the 1967 school year.

At the first Nelsonville-York School Board meeting on January 3, 1967,, Jack Hillyer was named as the new district superintendent and Lloyd Gray was named assistant superintendent. This was one of the few easy decisions by the board as Mr.

Gray requested the assistant superintendent position since he planned to retire in two years ("Hillyer Named," 1967).

A decision that proved to be very difficult was that of choosing school colors and a mascot. Nelsonville's colors were scarlet and gray with the Greyhound as their mascot. York had the colors of blue and gold with a mascot of Bruin, which is a bear. The students in the high school grades were invited to nominate colors and mascot names that would go to a selection committee for final choices. The final three choices were: blue and gray Rebels; red, white and blue Patriots; and green and white Trojans. In early February 1967, the senior high students of both schools voted again and the blue and gray Rebels won ("Nelsonville-York Students," 1967). Unfortunately by early March, a petition was circulated to rescind both the colors and the mascot. Unhappy parents and students found the mascot "rebels" to have a negative meaning and the colors of blue and gray to be dull ("Pass Petitions," 1967). Athletic and band boosters voiced concern that the colors would not be flashy enough and that several thousand dollars would go into outfitting the groups. Another argument was that there was little public discussion prior to the vote and students did not have sufficient time to consider all ramifications of their choices ("School Colors," 1967). At the March school board meeting, the board authorized a second vote on this issue. This time all students in both districts would vote ("Nelsonville-York School," 1967). The vote took place in early April and red, white and blue were chosen as the school colors and Patriots as the school mascot ("Pupils Pick," 1967). In reaction to this, students from York protested in front of their school saying the board had gone back on its decision to let the high school students choose. The problem definitely caused a division between the two schools and communities. In

the hope of establishing harmony between both, the school board called a special meeting on April 13, 1967. At this meeting, the board rescinded all previous decisions on the colors and mascot. With the assistance of the Nelsonville and York student council presidents, brown and white were chosen as the school colors and Buckeyes as the mascot. The board further decided there would be no more discussion on the matter and this compromise was made to improve community and school relationships ("Rebels? No!," 1967).

In the midst of all this controversy, student council groups from both schools met to determine ways to best integrate students when the next school year started ("Student Councils," 1967). Cheerleading tryouts for the next year were took place. Cheerleaders were told one of their tasks, in addition to promoting school spirit, was to be ambassadors to other students, athletes and rival schools (C. Lash, personal communication, May 15, 2010). The band booster and the athletic booster groups from each school began meeting in order to establish goals for the upcoming year. Cooperation between community members involved in the booster groups was very important in bringing harmony and collaboration between the schools ("Combined Band," 1967; "Nelsonville, York," 1967).

Amidst this devisive issue, the school board was busy establishing curriculum expansions, making teacher assignments and hiring teachers where needed ("Curriculum Improved," 1967). Changes in the elementary schools included the addition of vocal and instrumental music. Grades 4, 5, and 6 would be departmentalized which allowed teachers to teach in their area of major training. Plans were also being made for elementary students to receive additional physical fitness instruction weekly. Foreign language classes were being incorporated into the junior high program as well as home

economics and industrial arts ("New Teaching," 1964). In the high school, advanced math and science classes and additional foreign language offerings were being instituted. The administrative staff worked diligently to place existing teachers in their areas of expertise while evaluating what vacancies needed to be filled ("More Subject," 1967; "New Teaching," 1967).

August 28, 1967 marked the opening day of the Nelsonville-York City School District. Many students rode the bus for the first time as they set off for a different school building than they had previously attended. Approximately 1,600 students would be bused in the new district ("New Era," 1967). A new period began in these small communities, as the youngsters would now be presented with many more academic, social and athletic opportunities. In the junior and senior high schools, students from both former districts were now within one setting. Many new faces were seen and hopefully new friendships to be developed. The addition of more available sports and extracurricular offerings presented more opportunities beyond classes for students to meet and mingle ("New Era," 1967).

The Nelsonville-York School District is very much a part of a community's identity. In order to get a sense of the community response towards the consolidation of these two schools, I conducted interviews with parents, students and teachers who were involved in the merger. While most were pleased with the outcome of the consolidation, resentment and anger still are present 33 years later. When choosing whom to interview, it was surprising how difficult it was to find parents and teachers who were still in the area and in good health. Mr. Lowell Cole is a current resident of Nelsonville, having lived here for over 50 years. He had previously taught in the Nelsonville school system

for 25 years but in 1967 was the superintendent at Berne Union School District. From an educator and administrator perspective, Mr. Cole emphasized the importance of the school being a city school rather than a local school, allowing it more independence. While a local school district has its own board of education, it also falls under the jurisdiction of the county school board. As resilient as youngsters are, the students were quickly getting along and became "Buckeyes" together. As consolidations go, he felt the Nelsonville-York merger went well compared to others he had seen (L. Cole, personal communication, May 19, 2010).

Mr. Dave Boston was just completing his first year of teaching physical education at Nelsonville High School in 1967. He also was the football coach. He felt the consolidation offered the students many more academic opportunities, noting the increased number of college preparation classes. From his standpoint, the transition went smoothly as teachers worked well together (D. Boston, personal communication, June 4, 2010).

A parent from both school districts was asked about his opinion regarding the consolidation. Rodney Wilson from Murray City, part of the York district, remembered the consolidation as something "nobody liked" in his community. Murray City had consolidated with York in the early 1960's so this was the second time this community was losing its identity. In 1965, York tried to pass a levy for operating expenditures. Mr. Wilson campaigned hard for the levy to pass as he saw the possibility of another consolidation if the York district did not have adequate funding. The levy did fail. His fear was that Murray City and the York school district would lose their identity, and that the Nelsonville constituency, which was larger, would overtake the district. He said he

did understand the increased curriculum opportunities and overall the consolidation went smoothly. However there are still feelings of unfairness expressed by some of the previous York communities (R. Wilson, personal communication, June 4, 2010). Jane Pancake from Nelsonville recalls the poor condition of the Nelsonville junior and high school building. The building was close to being condemned. She said most of the people from Nelsonville were in favor of the merger. She had two children in school at the time. After the consolidation, the children, one in junior high and one in high school, did not have any difficulty connecting with other students. She and her husband were active in the band and athletic boosters. She said there was occasional friction but no major problems (J. Pancake, personal communication, June 5, 2010).

Libby Watkins, now a retired teacher and administrator, was the York High School student council president in the 1966 school year.. She remembers that this was a time in which many schools were consolidating due to financial problems. Positive outcomes as she saw them were a larger selection of courses and more competition in the classroom as there were more students in the class. Her English IV class had only three people in it. Likewise she reports that there would be more students to participate in the sports activities and as well as more activity opportunities. She cited the influx of new students to be a negative outcome for students who were shy. These students kept to themselves, did not participate as they had previously, had difficulty making friends and their grades suffered after the consolidation. As president of the student council, she was very involved in the selection process for the new school colors and mascot. This controversy seemed to pit the two communities against one another. In the end, the

decision was made behind closed doors with the two student council presidents and the school board (L. Watkins, personal communication, May 20, 2010).

Scott Coffman, from Nelsonville, was a sophomore the first year of the consolidation. He participated in sports and felt it helped him become more acquainted with the students from York. He recalls a group of adult men from Nelsonville who initiated a weekly "feed" for the football team. One of the main goals of this activity was to bring unity among the members of the team (S. Coffman, personal communication, June 2, 2010).

Another now retired teacher, Geraldine Bradley, had graduated from York a few years before the consolidation. She expressed concern that since Nelsonville was larger than all the small towns collectively making up the York district, many feared the identity of York would eventually disappear (G. Bradley, personal communication, May 4, 2010). Even today, much animosity and anger are heard in the football stands if the team is accidentally referred to as "Nelsonville" instead of "Nelsonville-York." (G. Bradley, personal communication, May 4, 2010; L. Watkins, personal communication, May 20, 2010).

While community meetings were held prior to the consolidation vote and after, some responded that the meetings generally ended in arguments and board members disregarding community input (G. Bradley, personal communication, May 4, 2010).

Many did not attend the meetings as they just accepted the fact that the consolidation was a "must" given the financial situation (L. Watkins, personal communication, May 20, 2010).

In the end, most agreed that the consolidation of the two schools resulted in improved educational opportunities for students, expanded athletic programs and increased social experiences. The merger also contributed to the financial stability of the school within the communities of both Nelsonville and York districts. While the majority of the members of both districts were cooperative from the beginning of the merger, both sides had a vocal group that kept issues stirred up. Students were much more receptive to a new sense of community than the adult members were. Unfortunately even today, some division continues.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The education of children is one of the most important functions of a society. To meet that end, leaders continually explore what is needed to provide students with the best education possible. Consolidation of schools has been one strategy to accomplish this goal. Educational leaders throughout time have debated the consolidation movement, which started in the mid 1880's. Over the course of a century, school consolidation has ridden a wave of favor and disfavor.

In the 1800's and early 1900's, most schooling took place in one-room school houses which were served by one teacher. This teacher would provide instruction to students of all ages in the community. Many times in the rural areas, education was secondary to the necessary work needing to be done on the farms. Political and educational leaders became concerned that small school environments were not sufficient to offer the students the experiences and opportunities necessary for an adequate education. Building upon the industrial model, consolidation of small schools into a larger school was believed to provide a broader curriculum and more opportunity for social growth as well as be more efficient and economical.

Small communities feared that consolidation of their school with others would negatively impact their identity, values and industrial future. Loss of local control and independence were major concerns of community members.

This research paper explored the literature to answer the following research questions:

- 1. Does school consolidation improve student achievement?
- 2. Does school consolidation improve curriculum opportunities?
- 3. Does school consolidation save money?
- 4. What impact does school consolidation have on teacher satisfaction and retention?
- 5. What impact does school consolidation have on community involvement and economics?

Chapter Two explored the many facets of school consolidation. Even after all the research is in, there is no clear answer to the debate. The literature review investigated seven particular areas regarding consolidation: financial impact, curriculum, academic success, extracurricular opportunities, effects on teachers, effects on the community and strategies for successful consolidation.

Most school consolidations originate due to financial reasons. Deterioration of school buildings and facilities, decreasing enrollments and declining tax bases due to loss of industry within a community impact a school district's financial resources. With less money, it becomes more difficult for a school to provide students with the educational opportunities needed to competitive in the future.

While financial issues frequently lead to consolidation, the goal of offering an expanded curriculum is also one of the major catalysts for consolidation. The number of students in small schools often restricts the extent of the curricular offerings.

Consolidation frequently can open up pathways for expansion of the curriculum. School

districts with high school enrollments of at least 400 were found to be able to offer Advanced Placement classes. Within the earlier grades, classes such as art and music in which teachers can be shared become more accessible. The research has shown that large schools are not guarantees of diverse curriculums.

Academic success is often used as a standard in a school district. The learning environment can have a large influence on this. The research has shown that students learn better when there is a small teacher/pupil ratio. This is particularly true for minority and low socioeconomic students. However research has been conflicted as to whether academic achievement is better in small schools versus large schools. Characteristics of small schools such as smaller class sizes, more teacher/pupil interaction, increased interaction with parents and less discipline problems lead to higher academic success. While expansion of curriculum offerings can increase student achievement, there is no definitive answer as to show how it is affected by consolidation.

Consolidation often affords the opportunity for enhanced and expanded extracurricular activities. These activities allow for student growth in areas outside of academics. Though more activities are available and many do participate, the overall participation rate varies. Some students find difficulty in integrating with those from different neighborhoods or become overwhelmed by the pure increase in number of participants.

Teachers often have their own issues regarding consolidation. The merger of schools may allow teachers more opportunities for innovative teaching strategies and better facilities and equipment for instruction. Increased peer support is available as there are more teachers in a department. Also as the financial picture of the district improves,

teachers feel more economically stable. However large schools can also lead to alienation among teachers and a feeling on insignificance. During the reorganization following consolidation, teachers may be faced with the loss of their job, transfer to a different teaching assignment or changes in salaries and benefits.

The effect on the community from consolidation of schools is huge.

Communities fear the loss of their identity and local control. Vacated school communities particularly feel the losses. Members of the community worry about how exposure to differing cultures and values may impact the students. Loss of a school within a community can affect the economics of the area. Industrial plants may close or the closing of the school itself may leave many without jobs.

Consolidation is a volatile issue. In order for the process to be successful, much forethought and planning is needed. Superintendents and the boards of education are the primary people responsible for the success. Involvement of the community is a must. Members of the community must feel that their concerns are heard and their questions answered.

Chapter Three researched of the history of the consolidation movement in Ohio and specifically the consolidation of the Nelsonville City School District and the York Local School District. This consolidation led to the development of the Nelsonville-York City School District in 1967. Consolidations in Ohio began in the early 1900's. Buildings that were being used as schools were found to be in very poor condition. Likewise, the one-room schools were ineffective and expensive to operate. County school boards were developed and started the merging process of many of these schools. The trend continued and was influenced by many factors. The country's financial

troubles after 1929 brought about further financial problems for schools, which led to an increase in school consolidations. The legislature and the Ohio Department of Education began to get involved in the evaluation of the educational system in the state. Results of these evaluations led to implementation of minimum enrollment numbers in order to obtain state funding and recommendations for schools to provide 12 grades of education. In the 1960's, the Ohio Board of Education set higher standards for schools to achieve making it more difficult for smaller schools. All of these issues impacted the consolidation movement.

As was the case in many parts of Ohio, school districts in Athens County were facing dilemmas with meeting the demands of the Ohio Board of Education while also struggling from a financial standpoint. Studies recommended various strategies for meeting these problems but most offered school consolidation in some form as the best option. In May 1966, a proposal for the consolidation of Nelsonville City School District and York Local School District was approved by the State Board of Education.

However, at that time the issue had to be put before the voters of both districts and needed a majority vote in order for the consolidation to take place. The benefits of the consolidation included expanded curriculum opportunities in the new district, access by more students to better facilities, increased athletic offerings and additional social experiences.

Through the leadership of the two superintendents and the boards of education, a campaign was started to urge citizens to vote in favor of the proposal. Several media avenues such as newspaper articles, question and answer sessions shown on closed circuit TV, presentations by consolidation committee members at civic organizations and

placement of billboards were utilized to obtain the support of the voters. On November 8, 1966, the consolidation proposal did pass predominately due to the large affirmative vote from the city of Nelsonville. The task of organizing the new Nelsonville-York City School District started.

One of the first undertakings was the formation of a new school board.

Nominations from each of the former boards were submitted to the state board of education which then appointed five members to the new board. On December 16, 1966, an organizational meeting of the board was held and on January 3, 1967, Jack Hillyer was named the first superintendent of the consolidated school district.

Controversy and division erupted as the district set out to choose school colors and a mascot. After two votes, the school board with the assistance of the student council presidents chose the colors and mascot. This action was taken to try to defuse the tension and bring harmony between the two former districts.

The superintendent and principals began in earnest to expand the curriculum, plan teacher assignments and hire teachers for new classes in anticipation of the next school year. Busing plans were outlined as the number of students that would be bused increased quite a bit.

Many groups such as the band boosters, athletic boosters and student councils from the two districts began meeting in order to facilitate a smooth and successful transition. There was a strong consensus that the academic opportunities greatly increased by the consolidation. The relationships among the various communities would take much longer to develop. Loss of control and identity were certainly echoed by many, most from the former York district.

Conclusion

In 2010, consolidation of schools in Ohio is roaring its head again. The Ohio Policy Center/Brookings Institution has recommended to the Ohio School Boards

Association (OSBA) that the creation of school districts with 2500 students would lead to decreased administrative costs which would leave more money for classroom instruction (Ohio School Board Association, 2010). This proposal would reduce Ohio's school districts by one-third through the consolidation process.

The OSBA, which represents the boards of education of the public schools in Ohio, quickly responded to this recommendation. The association stated they are always seeking new ways to reduce costs and have implemented many cost saving programs throughout the school systems in Ohio. Shared services among schools within a region are used as often as possible (Ohio School Board Association, 2010). Examples of this would be the use of shared Talented and Gifted Coordinators as well as school psychologists and speech and hearing professionals. For schools that may not provide as many Advanced Placement classes, options are available for online classes to meet this need. Post-secondary class opportunities present another avenue for classes beyond what may be offered at the local level.

Richard Lewis, executive director of the OSBA, countered with this statement: "School district size alone does not define the sole qualification for success. Some of Ohio's most successful school districts are small and boast high academic performance and strong community support. Community support is essential, particularly as long as Ohio's school-funding model requires local taxation." He further suggested that

consolidation is always an option for schools but the decision is best made at the local level (Ohio School Board Association, 2010).

With education being such an important aspect of society, it will continually be examined and reexamined to determine how it can be most improved. Research on this subject will be ongoing. In the meantime, every effort must be made by school districts and communities to use the available resources to serve and enhance the educational experience of their students.

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