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Marginalized Students' Perspectives of School Consolidation: A Case Study in Rural West Virginia

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MARGINALIZED STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF
SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION: A CASE STUDY IN RURAL WEST VIRGINIA

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ABSTRACT

Marginalized Students' Perspectives of School Consolidation:
A Case Study in Rural West Virginia

While prior research provides evidence that school consolidation impacts student achievement, the economic efficiency at state and district levels, dropout rates, participation in extracurricular activities, curriculum offerings, and the length of bus rides, "little is known about what happens in consolidated schools to impact student learning," (Blake, 2003, p. 21) and little attention has been given to studying students' lived experiences of consolidation. This qualitative case study explored these issues by attempting to understand students' transition to a consolidated high school, as well as their current experiences with and perceptions of consolidation in a rural community in West Virginia. The data collected included observations of and interviews with six students, along with reviews of pertinent student documents. Data collected also included interviews with seven teachers and one administrator who were identified by the students for inclusion in this study. The purpose of this case study was to add to the body of knowledge concerning the ways economically marginalized students, who are perceived as at risk of school failure, experienced and perceived school consolidation in a rural community. Through an analysis of the data, factors that enabled and/or constrained students' success were identified. Three themes emerged: supportive relationships with principals, teachers, and others who had high expectations; expanded curricular opportunities; and participation in extracurricular activities.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband who spent many days and nights looking at the back of my head while he watched television and I sat working at my computer. I appreciate his patience and the times he left me alone just when I needed it the most. I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother and to the memory of my late father. My father somehow knew when I was a child playing school that I would grow up to be a teacher. He would have been very proud to see this day come.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Between 1980 and 2000, West Virginia closed 322 schools statewide, with 202

closing between 1990 and 2000 alone (Reeves, 2004). In spite of research noting the

benefits of small schools, especially in poor, rural communities, West Virginia continues

to consolidate schools in an effort to relieve diminishing state and local budgets,

especially in areas where declining enrollment is prevalent. Nevertheless, Reeves

provided evidence that after two decades of school consolidation in West Virginia,

"education spending (adjusted for inflation) has increased," (p. 2) with taxpayers paying

more to educate fewer students. School consolidation impacts more than economics. In

fact, when small schools close and larger schools open students' success in school and

the nature of school-community relationships are affected.

Studies conducted by Friedkin and Necochea (1988), Howley (1995, 1996),

Howley and Bickel (1999), and Huang and Howley (1993), investigated the relationship

between student achievement and school and district size in California, Alaska, Montana,

Georgia, Ohio, Texas, and West Virginia. Findings showed that the "poorer the

community the smaller should schools be in order to maximize school performance as

measured by standardized tests" (Howley & Bickel, p. i). Nationally, large schools have

the lowest school achievement (Walberg, 1992), and students who fail to achieve are

referred to as at risk or marginalized. Shepard (2004) explained that "economic

marginalization [has] traditionally been cited as the highest correlate with dropping out of high school" (p. 1).

What does it mean to be an economically marginalized student in a rural consolidated school? How do these students view themselves in relation to others in the school? How do teachers, administrators, and other students view these students? What enables and/or constrains these students' success in school – academically (e.g. formal curriculum) and socially (e.g. extracurricular activities)? How do students who previously attended small community schools adjust to a larger school located farther away from home? While prior research provides evidence that school consolidation impacts student achievement, the economic efficiency at state and district levels, dropout rates, participation in extracurricular activities, curriculum offerings, and the length of bus rides, Blake (2003) explained that "little is known about what happens in consolidated schools to impact student learning," (p. 21) and little attention has been given to studying students' lived experiences of consolidation. This qualitative study explored these questions by attempting to understand students' transition to a consolidated high school, as well as their current experiences with and perceptions of consolidation in a rural community in West Virginia.

Significance of the Study

The West Virginia State Board of Education assumed administrative control of the Clayton County,[1] WV, school system in June 2000, after the county failed to make adequate progress in eliminating deficiencies identified earlier in a 1999 state audit (Chadwick, 2002). Soon thereafter discussions began concerning the consolidation of the

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[1] To protect confidentiality the names of places and people have been changed.

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county's four junior/senior high schools. Clayton County, located in rural southwestern West Virginia, closed the doors of its four junior/senior high schools and opened the doors of Clayton County High School in fall 2006. Residents' attachment to the community's schools propelled many to fight a prolonged battle hoping to keep open their four local secondary schools.

While considerable research has identified negative consequences of school consolidation, findings focused on the benefits are limited. Beginning in 1959, Conant stated that the elimination of small schools would lead to an increase in cost-effectiveness and more curricular offerings. Burton's (1989) qualitative study confirmed some of these benefits when it was discovered that both students and parents had favorable comments regarding the expanded curriculum in the consolidation of Alleghany County and Clifton Forge city schools. Benton's (1992) more recent study reported that when five school systems merged in Arkansas, scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Test and the American College Testing Program (ACT) improved, dropout rates decreased, extracurricular opportunities and college-going rates increased, and the offering of higher level courses increased. Benton credited the success of the merger to the community's desire to serve students' best interests through their support of a tax levy. Edgerton (1986) also found benefits associated with school consolidation reporting that students adjusted to the consolidation more easily than either the parents or teachers.

Self (2001) provided evidence of benefits in a post-consolidation evaluation conducted eight years after Ohio's Mendon-Union Local School District's reorganization with Parkway Local School District. The study concluded that the merger was beneficial to both teachers and students. Self explained that teachers benefited from peer

collaboration, salary increases, and professional development; students benefited from the expanded curriculum offerings and extracurricular opportunities. Teachers, however, were less positive about the level of increase in student achievement and lack of positive student attitudes at the new school. Two hundred parents and students were surveyed, although only 58 responded. The researcher explained that many were reluctant to respond based on their previous resistance to the consolidation. Those who did respond, however, reported an increase in extracurricular activities in the new consolidated school.

Regardless of the previous four studies reporting expanded curriculum offerings, evidence in support of small schools clearly outweighs the research on the benefits of school consolidation. For example, research has linked participation in activities with improved attendance and a reduction in dropout rates; however, participation in extracurricular activities diminishes when students leave a small school and enter a larger school (Bailey, 2000; Barker & Gump, 1964; Leisey, Murphy, & Temple, 1990). This diminished activity participation has also been linked to the increased amount of time students spend riding buses, thereby leaving little time for after school activities (Fox, 1996). Howley and Howley (2001) argued that the loss of small schools merely results in "rural students [being] bused to increasingly larger schools, located at greater and greater remove from their homes" (Historical section, ¶ 3).

Those who wield the authority to close small schools and build larger schools are privy to the literature concluding that students who live in rural communities experience higher success when attending smaller schools. For that reason, advocates for small schools question the logic of consolidation as a means to cut costs by closing old, low performing schools. In a recent interview, Craig Howley, a known researcher on small

schools, stated "that more research is needed…to understand why smaller schools seem to work better, especially for students from poor families" (as cited in Richard, 2004, Changing Landscape section, ¶ 1). Likewise, Smith (2000) noted that research is needed to understand and improve the educational experiences of marginalized students. This qualitative study explored the experiences of economically marginalized students and identified factors that enabled and/or constrained their success in school. This investigation was an opportunity to explore students' transitions from small rural, junior/senior high schools to a much larger consolidated high school, and to seek an understanding of their experiences in an attempt to determine specific mechanisms by which size impacts students' success.

Research that answers questions about what it means to be an economically marginalized student in a rural consolidated school is essential. The voices and perspectives of the study's participants provided valuable information on factors that challenged or enabled these students in the transition from small rural schools to a larger consolidated school. Gaining an understanding of students' experiences and what enabled and/constrained student success is valuable for those seeking to increase educational opportunities for students. Policymakers can also seek to understand the challenges of those who must transition from a small rural school to a much larger consolidated school. Blake (2003) argued that "there should be good reasons supported by sound research to justify taking students out of the stable environments, their former schools, and placing them in uncertain conditions" (p. 14). This study sought to provide knowledge that will be useful to policymakers and practitioners – those who work directly or indirectly with schools and students.

School Consolidation

Roots of Consolidation

Prior to the 1800s, U.S. families established schools in rural areas to teach children how to read and write (Howley & Howley, 2001). Considered informal structures controlled by local communities, these early institutions attempted to meet community needs and interests. The school year was short and students' attendance was not mandatory. Children seeking an education had no choice other than to walk to the local community school; therefore, children who lived in rural remote areas were not usually afforded the opportunity to receive an education unless parents, relatives, or neighbors provided the instruction. It was during this period that policymakers began to campaign for school consolidation as a way to improve struggling rural schools and to create improved schools with more curricular offerings. However, not until the 1930s did advancements in the transportation infrastructure materialize and proposals to build new consolidated schools emerge. During this period, The U.S. Department of Education published information from 105 consolidated schools, reporting several reasons for considering school consolidation: increasing demand on the school, state encouragement, opportunities for students, and efficiency (Covert, 1930).

States eventually sought more control in using schools to achieve national, political, and economic goals (Howley & Howley, 2001). Consolidation at the school level is defined as the practice of combining two or more schools to form a larger school for educational or economic advantages (Nelson, 1985). In the early 1990s, Walberg described school consolidation as a popular approach encouraged by legislators and school board members contemplating some avenue for school reform (1992). It was also

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during this time that the option of consolidation began to be viewed more from a business perspective with an emphasis on efficiency and costs. Coupled with advancements in industry in the late nineteenth century, the way was paved for the school consolidation movement (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2005). Yet, when the economy suffered due to the Great Depression, attempts to consolidate were stalled.

The launch of Sputnik in 1957 raised questions and concerns for the educational system in the United States, particularly in rural areas where it was feared that schools were not producing the caliber of students needed to maintain and extend our national prominence (Ravitch, 1983). Once again in 1983, the educational system came under scrutiny when the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, which proclaimed that the American educational system was dangerously inadequate: "Educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, p. 258). It was during this period that the United States experienced economic instability resulting in people migrating to urban areas looking for employment. Due to this loss in enrollment, the cost of educating students increased and small rural schools were forced to close resulting in a reorganization practice that continues today with new larger schools and more students traveling farther to receive an education.

The debate on school consolidation still remains at the forefront of counties, districts, and states throughout the country. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2006) there were 48.5 million students enrolled in 2003-04, and 48.8 million students in 2004-05 (2007). These

statistics show an increase in the number of students attending schools; however, due to school consolidations there are fewer schools to attend. In fact, Bailey (2000) reported that "since 1940, the number of public schools in the U.S. has declined by 69 percent despite a 70 percent increase in population" (p. 2). Today, the issue of school consolidation remains a contentious subject among policymakers, educators, students, parents, and community members, and any reference to "school consolidation" raises questions concerning the intended outcomes.

Benefits and Concerns

School consolidation results in an increase in student enrollment which can affect student achievement (positively or adversely), participation in extracurricular activities, community viability, and economic costs (Cotton, 1996; Howley, Strange, & Bickel, 2000; Lyson, 2002; Raywid, 1999). Researchers have identified both benefits and concerns related to school consolidation; however, the literature provides evidence of more concerns than benefits. The discussion that follows, along with a more detailed account in chapter two, describes the mixed findings.

Student Achievement. Perhaps one of the most cited studies on school consolidation is The Matthew Project. Friedkin and Necochea (1988) conducted the original study using California data to explore the relationship between school size and socioeconomic status (SES). This study, along with later replications conducted by Howley and Bickel (1999), confirmed a relationship between size and SES. The Matthew Project showed smaller school size tended to benefit students in impoverished communities, but larger school size benefited students in more affluent communities.

While there is some evidence that participation increases, Fowler (1992) reported

that "school size and student participation in activities is highly correlated" (p. 22). In

other words the larger the school, the smaller the percentage of students participating in

these activities. Likewise, Bailey (2000) found that growth in school size contributed to a

decrease in participation in school activities, a decrease in school and community

involvement, and an increase in the dropout rate.

According to a recent technical report, *Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary*

Programs (2007), produced by National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and

Communities in Schools, Inc., "an individual's school experiences have been found to

have a major impact on the likelihood that he or she will graduate. School performance

and engagement with school are two of the primary experiences" (Hammond, Linton,

Smink, & Drew, 2007, p. 12). In other words, students who exhibit poor academic

performance and a disengagement from school are more likely to drop out of school.

Economic Efficiency. Self (2001) described economies of scale as a "need for

efficiency and improved quality of education [that] contribute[s] to the idea of school

consolidation" (p. 71). Ample research emphasizes economies of scale as a means of

decreasing production costs by increasing school size and decreasing administrative

costs, a method used to operate schools from a business perspective (Brown, Johnson,

Doughty, Cecil, & Keck, 2005; Conant, 1959; Lyson, 2002). A substantial amount of

literature explores the relationship between the cost-effectiveness of school size and

student achievement (Cotton, 1996; Howley & Bickel, 2000; Raywid, 1999). In other

words, are small schools more advantageous in improving learning for all students, or are

large schools more efficacious because they are equipped to offer courses needed to prepare all students for employment or postsecondary education?

Bus Rides. For parents and students, the issue of long bus rides is often at the root of their concerns about school consolidation. It is one of numerous reasons that school consolidation is often met with resistance from students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other community members (Peshkin, 1978; Sell, Lesitritz, & Thompson, 1996; Ward & Rink, 1992) seeking to retain their community schools.

Literature provided evidence of longer bus rides for students traveling along rural, often curvy, dangerous roads (DeYoung, 1993). Howley, Howley, and Shamblen (2001) stated that this concern remains neglected by those who fail to understand the "influence of school busing on school achievement, particularly among poor or minority students" (p. 42). This study examined the experience of riding the bus in rural as compared to suburban areas in five states. The study revealed that rural students were more likely than their suburban counterparts to have bus rides of 30 minutes or longer; ride the bus with older students, experience rougher rides, and travel over rougher terrain.

Dropout Rate. Perhaps the most long-term, damaging consequence of school consolidation is the possibility of an increase in the dropout rate. We know that dropout rates are more prevalent in indigent communities and in larger schools (Barro & Kolstad, 1987; Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004; Rumberger, 1995). Kominski (1990) defined true dropout rate as the "speed with which the event occurs over a defined period of time" (p. 304). Cotton's (1996) review of ten studies highlighted the relationship between school size and dropout rates and found small schools had lower dropout rates in nine of the ten studies, but no difference was found in the other study.

Students identified as economically disadvantaged and thereby statistically categorized as potential dropouts are referred to as at risk or marginalized students. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child Nutrition Programs Income Eligibility Guidelines defined at risk students as those students who qualify for free lunch (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2007). At risk students are also defined as students who fail to experience success in school and consequently are labeled as potential dropouts (Donnelly, 1987). A variety of labels has been attached to students whose educational outcomes are thought to be less positive or attainable as those of other students. Riele (2006) identified these labels as "deprived, disadvantaged, poor, alienated, marginalized, and at risk" (p. 129), and described youth at risk as "youth whose educational outcomes are considered too low, with an emphasis on the risk of not completing senior secondary education," (p. 129) and proposed the use of the term marginalized students instead. Marginalized students are described as "individuals [who] not through their personal characteristics but through their relationship with schooling" (Riele, p. 129) have failed to achieve. This philosophy looks at what may be wrong with schooling, versus what is wrong with the student. Many studies continue to use the term "at risk," but in this study I will use the term "economically marginalized" in reference to low income students whose educational outcomes are low.

An additional relationship explored by Pittman and Haughwout (1987) found a direct effect of school size on academic offerings and on the social climate, as well as an indirect effect on dropout rate. In other words, school data from 744 public, comprehensive schools revealed that one outcome of school consolidation, which apparently has been given little attention, is the possibility that it may increase early

school leaving. An additional study conducted by Lee and Burkam (2001) explored

school size as one feature of secondary schools and concurred that "what high schools

might do to push out or hold in their students have been systemically ignored" (p. 1).

Education in Rural America

When small rural schools consolidate not only do students endure longer bus rides

and fewer opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, but they also encounter

negative perceptions assumed by the more urban students, and the "cruel irony is that

while Americans express interest in rural or small town life, those living in the

countryside now are often belittled and stereotyped in a variety of negative ways"

(DeYoung, 1993, p. 379). Most rural communities in the nation are plagued by negative

stereotypes, many of which are related to the poor economic conditions (Beeson, 2002;

Bickel, Smith, & Eagle, 2001).

According to data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a sample survey of

100,000 households nationwide, 36.5 million or 9.8 percent of people were in poverty,

and the poverty rate for children under 18 years was 17.4 percent (U.S. Census, 2007). In

2003, 14.2 percent of the population, or 7.5 million, living in nonmetropolitan (rural)

areas were poor. In West Virginia, the only state located entirely within the Appalachian

region, 33.8 percent of the population lived in poverty areas, with rates of 20 percent or

more in poverty.

Regardless of the hardships students face in rural communities, some argue that

the positive aspects exceed the negative ones. Youths view a rural community as a safe

haven, perhaps a shield that prevents crime, drugs, violence, homelessness, and other

urban occurrences from penetrating their world (Bickel, et al., 2001; Evans, Fitzgerald,

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Weigel, & Chvilicek, 1999; Rouk, 2001). Yet, a newsletter sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and published in 2001, reported that these problems are spreading beyond the boundaries of the urban communities into rural America, and poverty adds fuel to these infectious difficulties (Beeson, 2002).

A study conducted in 1999 revealed that "although rural students are increasingly vulnerable to the spread of violence, drugs, and gang culture, they report that their schools and communities are still safer and less threatening places than those of their urban peers" (Evans, et al., 1999, p. 276). Students attending schools in rural communities often emphasize the school's role in providing a safe learning environment and placing value on family and community relationships. Regardless, school reform often devalues and undermines these values (DeYoung, 1993).

School Consolidation in Rural West Virginia

Linda Martin, researcher and former coordinator of West Virginia Challenge, is a strong advocate for small schools in West Virginia. Martin explained that twenty years of research supports small schools, but unfortunately West Virginia continues to push for larger, consolidated schools (Reeves, 2004). Reeves described West Virginia Challenge as an organization committed to maintaining and improving small community schools and reforming education policy in West Virginia so that all the state's children have the opportunity to receive a first class education and the promise of a bright future. At the same time, state policymakers have argued that school consolidation reduces costs and benefits students. This argument led policymakers to close 322 schools statewide between 1980 and 2000, with 202 closing between 1990 and 2000 alone. According to

Reeves, the cost of education in West Virginia has increased despite the fact that student enrollment decreased by 34,439 students or 11 percent statewide.

Howley and Bickel (2000) found that "as schools become larger, the negative effects of poverty on student achievement increases" (p. 10). Therefore, it is not surprising that the relationship between school size and the dropout rate is of utmost importance to rural educators and parents. The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2005 a 3.8 percent event dropout rate in the United States, which is defined as the percentage of high school students dropping out of grades 10-12 in the past year (http://nces.ed/gov/pubs2007/dropout05/tables/table_A3.asp). In comparison, *West Virginia Report Cards* (2006), published West Virginia's dropout rate in 2005-2006 as 2.7 percent, and Clayton County's dropout rate for the same reporting period as 3.9 percent, a 1.5 percent increase from the previous year. Also of concern is the rate of high school graduates attending college. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007a) reported that 65.8 percent of the nation's high school graduates from the class of 2006 enrolled in colleges or universities. The 2006 West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission reported that of the 17,819 graduates from public or private high schools in West Virginia during 2004-05, an estimated 10,568 or 59.3 percent enrolled in higher education institutions in the fall 2005 semester, with 44.2 percent of Clayton County graduates attending post secondary institutions. This is significantly lower than the estimated college going rates of two nearby counties which for the same period were 60.68 and 68.96 percent respectively. The study addressed this issue, along with what enabled and/or constrained these students' success in school – both academically and socially.

Statement of the Problem

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) defined a problem statement as an "overall intent of the study…and qualitative inquiry searches for 'understanding' of some phenomenon" (p. 16). As mentioned above, and discussed fully in the following chapter, most literature on school consolidation utilized quantitative measurements and focused on student achievement and curricular offerings (Benton, 1992; Howley, Howley, & Shamblen, 2001; Self, 2001). Additional quantitative and qualitative research examined the impact of school consolidation on the sustainability of rural communities (Beeson, 2002; Bickel, et al., 2001; Lyson, 2002) and those who are impacted the most. Still other research looked at economies of scale as the basis for consolidation (Benton, 1992). What is missing is qualitative scholarship, especially in the form of consolidation follow-up studies; for example, studies to explore the impact of school consolidation (Self, 2001). In other words, we do not know much about the impact of school consolidation on marginalized students and their success in school.

According to Blake (2003), "There is little doubt that the adjustment process for those involved in consolidation will not be easy and that the true long-term effects of consolidation on those involved, especially students, may not be known for years" (p. 8). This investigation identified and explored those effects as experienced by students at a new consolidated school. The new school, known as Clayton County High School, opened its doors to approximately 951 students in the fall of 2006. Students previously attended four junior/senior high schools located throughout the county housing grades 7-12. As might be expected, these rural students in a small community began the school year with both apprehension and excitement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge concerning the ways economically marginalized students, who are perceived as at risk of school failure, experienced and perceived school consolidation in a rural community. This qualitative study used a case study design to explore the experiences of economically marginalized students and to identify and explore factors that enabled and/or constrained their success in school. In an interview, Howley stated that consolidation follow-up research is important because of a lack of research exploring why smaller schools seem to work better for economically marginalized students (as cited in Richard, 2004). The amount of research focused on consolidation is substantive, but Merriam (1995) noted, "qualitative research is ideal for…finding creative or fresh approaches to looking at over-familiar problems" (p. 52).

Many Clayton County administrators, teachers, parents, and students anticipated problems, but no one knew the extent, or if and where those concerns would materialize. No one could speculate how Clayton County High School's student achievement would correlate with prior research indicating that students living in poverty areas experience higher student achievement when attending small schools.

This case study included the voices of students, teachers, and one administrator living in Clayton County, West Virginia. Findings are relevant to the people within the community – teachers, administrators, community leaders – who work with these students both inside and outside the school. These participants provided insights about their experiences and perceptions of the merger, and revealed positive as well as negative outcomes associated with school consolidation. Chadwick (2002) stated that even though

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the county viewed consolidation as a negative outcome, there are those who were hopeful for an improved educational system, an outcome that benefited the county's students.

The strength of qualitative methods is the ability to show how things work for specific people in specific situations, a significant advantage of this design (Guion & Flowers, 2005). This study:

1. Explored economically marginalized students' transition from a small school to a larger rural consolidated high school.

2. Explored what it means to be an economically marginalized student in a rural consolidated high school.

3. Identified and explored factors that enabled and/or constrained the success of economically marginalized students in a rural consolidated high school.

Methods

Design

The research design chosen for this qualitative study was a collective case study of rural consolidation, especially as experienced by students identified as economically marginalized. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained that the "simplest rule for method in qualitative casework…is to place your best intellect into the thick of what is going on" (p. 449). In an effort to follow this rule, I served as an interviewer, observer, and analyzer of the data. I collected data through interviews and participant observations, but more importantly I continued to reflect on the participants' experiences and their understandings of those experiences as the data were collected. Denzin and Lincoln noted that a qualitative case study requires the researcher to be in the field, in contact with participants and activities, and at the same time reflect, analyze, and write.

Students attending Clayton County High School were selected because of their ability to furnish information-rich data. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explained that "qualitative researchers are concerned with making sure that they capture perspectives accurately…and consider experiences from the informant's perspectives" (p. 7). This research was conducted in a naturalistic setting, such as in the high school and at other school and student related activities. I attempted to capture individuals' perspectives of what it meant to be a marginalized student at the new consolidated school, and to document their transition from a small rural school to a larger school.

Sampling

The method of sampling I used for this study is known as purposeful sampling. This sampling strategy was fitting because as Patton (2002) explained, it "offer[s] useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest…and is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population" (p. 40). In accordance with Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) advice on selecting a sample size, a small sample was selected from the students in the Clayton County Boys' (BRP) and Girls' (GRP) Resiliency Programs, youth development programs at the school with approximately 20-25 members who were recommended by teachers or others and identified as marginalized students struggling with school. Since there were no students who previously attended Hanover High School in the boys or girls' program, one was selected to gain an additional perspective.

Purposeful sampling involves choosing information-rich cases to learn a vast amount from an in-depth study (Patton, 2002). I used the most useful strategy for a naturalistic design which according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is maximum variation

sampling. This sampling strategy identifies common patterns that emerge across the participants. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) defined maximum variation sampling as a type of purposeful sampling that selects participants representing a range of experiences on a specific phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon was school consolidation as experienced by marginalized students.

Data Collection

Previously collected data from a pilot project with the Appalachian Women's Leadership Project (AWLP), specifically the Clayton County BRP and the GRP, were coded, analyzed and interpreted. Additional data were collected from a small sample of three boys and two girls in the programs, one girl who had not been in the programs, along with seven teachers and one administrator.

Interviews with students, teachers, and an administrator were the dominant strategy of data collection. Completed interviews were transcribed and the written accounts, known as transcripts, were reviewed and observer comments added. Accurate and complete transcripts are instrumental in producing a quality study. I supplemented individual interviews with focus group interviews, participant observations, and document reviews to strengthen the study's validity. Fieldnotes from participant observations were written with "good description and dialogue relevant to what occurs at the setting and its meaning for the participants," and observer comments, "reflective parts of fieldnotes" were added (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 114). I reviewed personal letters, students' poems, newsletters, and newspaper articles related to the study. As the data collection proceeded, it was imperative to keep in mind that data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Following Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) advice, the data analysis process for this study involved searching and arranging the interview transcripts, documents, observer comments, and other data in a manner that assisted in the determination of findings. The process began with careful readings of the text examining the data for certain words, phrases, and patterns as they emerged. This led to a discovery of this study's important patterns. Next, labels were assigned to the patterns. After additional readings of new data, text was later included under appropriate labels. Eventually, I created three themes incorporating the important categories, and as part of the inductive content analysis enabling and constraining factors were identified and findings related to the literature.

Limitations and Strengths

Random sampling was not applicable to this study; instead purposeful sampling in this case study generated rich, descriptive data. The question of generalizability or external validity has plagued qualitative research for some time, but the case study approach makes sense "because one wishes to understand the particular in depth, not because one wants to know what is generally true of the many" (Merriam, 1988, p. 173). Hopefully, this study has reader or user generalizability, which according to Merriam, is the "extent to which findings from an investigation can be applied to other situations [as] determined by the people in those situations" (p. 58).

The strength of the phenomenological qualitative case study approach is the ability to report findings as the participants intended and in such a manner to accurately represent the participants' understandings of past and current experiences. In other words, internal validity is a strength that was ensured through employment of triangulation, the

use of multiple sources of data to confirm findings. Individual interviews were supplemented with focus group interviews, participant observations, and document reviews. Documents included personal letters, students' poems, newsletters, and newspaper articles.

Conclusion

Chapter one provided an overview of the roots of school consolidation and rural education in the United States. Also included was an overview of school consolidation in rural West Virginia. Benefits and concerns related to school consolidation – student achievement, economic efficiency, length of bus rides, and dropout rate – were introduced. These benefits and concerns, along with extracurricular activities and curriculum offerings, will be explored in more detail in chapter two. These topics will be included in chapter two because they are central to the consolidation issue as it relates to marginalized students.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A literature review "interprets and synthesizes what has been researched and published in the area of interest" (Merriam, 1988, p. 61). The literature review also guides the researcher in the development of a study's conceptual framework. In essence, Merriam explained that the majority of literature reviews integrate all pertinent information on a specific topic; for that reason, the topics included in this chapter are central to the consolidation issue as it relates to marginalized students.

In a qualitative design it is important to revisit the literature throughout the data collection and as the theory emerges. When conducting phenomenological case study research, fieldwork and literature review are closely related and can occur simultaneously in a natural setting. Patton (2002) explained that a "naturalistic design unfolds or emerges as fieldwork unfolds" (p. 44). Likewise, a literature review should continue as the fieldwork evolves.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of economically marginalized students and to identify factors that enabled and/or constrained their success in a rural consolidated school. It was the intent of this study to add to the body of knowledge concerning the effects of school consolidation in a rural community using the voices of students, teachers, and an administrator. As a way to examine the issue of school consolidation in West Virginia, specifically in a rural county, this qualitative study was a consolidation follow-up investigation of the stakeholders, primarily the marginalized students.

The amount of literature associated with school consolidation and rural education is vast and spans decades. The majority of the research-based literature is quantitative in nature focusing on the impact that school consolidation has on economies of scale, student achievement, school size, and community effects (Bard, et al., 2005). Nevertheless, Blake (2003) explained that "little is known about what happens in consolidated schools to impact student learning" (p. 21). This chapter will focus on the literature associated with school consolidation, and because this study was conducted in a rural county, rural education will also be explored. The following subheadings lay the framework for this study: roots of consolidation; benefits of and concerns with school consolidation; education in rural America; negative perceptions of education in rural America; rural education in West Virginia; school consolidation in rural communities; school consolidation in rural West Virginia; and school consolidation in Clayton County, West Virginia.

School Consolidation

Roots of Consolidation

The consolidation of rural schools in the United States has been, and most certainly will remain, a controversial issue for policymakers, educators, and communities (Bard, et al., 2005). This type of reorganization, defined as school consolidation, combines two or more schools to form a larger school. Proponents of school consolidation consider it a viable and economical way in which to alleviate states' budget problems and combat low student enrollments. The trend to merge small schools began as early as 1918 when it was perceived that small rural schools were academically inferior

and lacked the needed resources to prepare students for employment or a postsecondary education.

After a push in the 1970s, interest for school consolidation waned in the 1980s (Guthrie & Reed, 1986). Currently however, economic pressures on state governments to alleviate diminishing budgets have revived the issue of school consolidation in some states. To illustrate the extent to which school consolidation has impacted the educational system, Bailey (2000) explained that "Since 1940, the number of public schools in the U.S. has declined by 69 percent despite a 70 percent increase in population" (p. 2). Therefore, high school enrollments of 2,000 and 3,000 are not uncommon. In fact, New York City has many schools with enrollments nearing 5,000 (Cotton, 1996).

When state governments contemplate the decision to consolidate schools the effects on communities and students – the major stakeholders – are often neglected. Regardless of the intent, the "perception by many affected by the consolidation or reorganization process is that 'someone wins and someone loses' as a result of the process" (Bard, et al., 2005, Consolidation Defined section, ¶ 2). Lyson (2002) confirmed this perception when he declared that "school consolidation has been the bane of rural communities for the past 50 years," (p. 131) and follow-up studies on the "socio-cultural ramifications of consolidation have been virtually ignored, as have power issues that are inherent in the consolidation transition" (Blake, 2003, p. 21).

History. The drive for schools to consolidate began decades ago with the emergence of free public transportation and the rise of industry in urban areas. The launching of Sputnik on October 4, 1957, fueled advocates' call for consolidation (Bard, et al., 2005). Americans' reactions to Sputnik led policymakers to review the educational

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system in an attempt to prepare students in the math and science technology fields. The launch served as an impetus for the United States' drive to enlarge small schools and apply a business philosophy to education. James Bryant Conant (1959), President of Harvard University, illustrated his vision for public education in the book, *The American High School Today*. The basis for Conant's philosophy relied on his belief that small schools lacked the resources to offer students advanced-level opportunities.

Conant (1959) studied high schools in 18 states to determine whether schools could offer a quality education for all students by offering courses for a postsecondary education and vocational education courses for those not wishing to pursue a college degree. At that time, Conant advocated for schools with at least 100 students in the graduating class and argued that only larger schools could offer high-level courses at a lower cost, especially in math and science. He stated, "I am convinced small high schools can be satisfactory only at exorbitant expense;" Conant further explained that states should focus on the "elimination of the small high school by district reorganization" (pp. 37-38). Several researchers give credit to Conant's study and his subsequent book for the move toward school consolidation (Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; Smith & DeYoung, 1988; Stockard & Mayberry, 1992; Williams, 1990).

A Nation at Risk also made the claim that our nation's youth lacked the needed skills and knowledge for national and economic security (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report proclaimed that the "educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people" (p. 258). Currently, the educational system is again under scrutiny due to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) stressing school

accountability and school effectiveness. Because of this push for school improvement and some states' belief that larger schools are the best way to educate our nation's youth, it is important to evaluate the consequences before making the decision to consolidate. Bard et al. (2005) stated that "before consolidation is considered, districts should look in depth at the implications of fiscal, educational, and community advantages and disadvantages" (Consolidation and Recommendations section, ¶ 2). This advice supports the claim that research is important in assisting policymakers and educators in the decision-making process. Blake (2003) concurred with Bard et al. and explained that we know "a lot about what happens in small schools and large schools but not what happens in consolidated schools" (p. 35).

For decades school consolidation was thought to be a means to offer a better education for students by closing small schools and building larger ones (Bard, et al., 2005). But, Howley (1999) pointed out that a "putative need to consolidate is further buttressed in actual practice by propaganda claiming absolute cost savings…curricular and technological improvements, and, of course, the psychological advantage of replacing old buildings with new" (p. 6). Earlier in 1994, Howley indicated that advocates for consolidation made "the charge…that small high schools cannot provide a curriculum with adequate breadth and depth to meet students' diverse needs" (p. 4), and in spite of the documented benefits of small schools, policymakers claim this alone provides a justification for school consolidation.

Included in the following sections is a review of the literature focusing on the benefits of and concerns about school consolidation. Included first are studies reporting positive outcomes associated with the mergers. Findings show that some of the benefits

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of large schools are expanded curriculum offerings and cost efficiency. Next is a review of the literature providing evidence that the negative outcomes associated with this reorganizational practice outweigh the benefits.

Benefits of School Consolidation

Both positive and negative consequences of school consolidation have been identified by researchers as early as the mid 1800's, and an ethnographic study from 1983 to 1985 did report some benefits when Edgerton (1986) explored parents, students, and staff members' adjustment to one elementary school consolidation. Edgerton's study discovered students adjusted more easily than parents and teachers and over time they formed friendships both inside and outside the classroom. This adjustment was partly because younger students appeared not to have strong ties with the closed school, unlike the older students. The study also found that students' achievement was not affected by the transition from one school to the other. Parents, who were predominately white, reported after some time that they adjusted to the busing of their children to the newer school which was more racially balanced. It was noted however, that staff experienced the most difficulty in adjusting to the consolidation.

Burton's (1989) qualitative study also reported benefits. Burton's study looked at the impact of consolidation on education, costs, students, teachers, patrons, and the community. The study reported that students and parents in Alleghany County and Clifton Forge City Schools, rural communities in Virginia, had favorable conclusions regarding the consolidation. Community residents believed the reorganization was a success, and students and parents reported expanded curriculum offerings. Teachers also

responded positively about the increased opportunities to showcase their teaching expertise in the expanded curriculum.

Later in 1992, Benton's study on school consolidation in Arkansas also reported savings when five small schools, each with an enrollment of 150, consolidated. The schools sought to achieve goals outlined in the Arkansas Educational Standards Act. Local school boards proceeded with caution in an attempt to increase course offerings and services to students who previously lacked courses in chemistry and advanced mathematics, as well as band, choir, and foreign languages. The author reported the consolidation had "two overriding goals: to improve the quality of education and to give citizens more value for their taxes" (Benton, p. 2).

After three years, progress in academic achievement on the secondary level was reported. Other signs of progress included an increase in scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Test and the American College Testing Program (ACT). The dropout rate also declined to 2.7 percent annually, compared to the state average of 4.2 percent. The consolidated school also noted an increase in curricular offerings and extracurricular activities. After the consolidation, students had the opportunity to take courses in foreign languages, chemistry, instrumental music, computer science, computer applications, word processing, advanced mathematics, biology, and English (Benton, 1992). The county also reported savings in utility bills, school lunches, staffing, and transportation costs. Benton surmised that many of the South Nevada County's accomplishments were a result of sacrifices made by the community, such as an increase in taxes as much as 55 percent, and a decision to give up their identity tied to their local schools for an opportunity to offer their children a better education.

The state of Maine provided a more recent example of determining the cost efficiency of building large schools. Maine sought an independent perspective about building cost when the state Board of Education's Construction Committee designated a committee to look at the relationship between student enrollments and the efficiency of a building in terms of square feet per student. The chairperson sought data to assist in determining whether a new, larger school would provide savings as opposed to building two or three smaller schools. The committee, comprised of architects and consultants, researched national data on school sizes and student enrollment. The Executive Summary presented to the Maine State Board of Education recommended that the state build a consolidated school based on the report that smaller schools translate into a greater cost per student (Brown, et al., 2005).

Alspaugh's (1994) study also explored cost efficiency, but more specifically in relation to school size and student teacher ratio. This study concluded that as student enrollment declined, the secondary student teacher ratio decreased more rapidly than the elementary student teacher ratio; as a result, small secondary schools are more expensive to operate than small elementary schools. This is consistent with Thokes' (1991) argument that student teacher ratio is a major factor in economies of scale. Alspaugh, along with Fox (1981), investigated the effect of school size and concluded that both very small and very large schools tend to be the most expensive to operate.

One study reported limited savings as a result of school consolidation in all 50 state departments from 1980 to 1984. Streifel, Foldesy, and Holman (1991) summarized this study that looked at "Administration, Instruction, Transportation, Operations and Maintenance, Total Costs, and Capital Projects…[and] only Administration…indicated a

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significant…savings as a result of consolidation" (p. 15). Streifel et al. argued that recent

studies report no overall financial savings associated with school consolidation;

nevertheless, districts are sacrificing student achievement and the support of the

community by forging ahead with this reorganization.

Concerns with School Consolidation

Regardless of these noted benefits, those who support small schools believe there

is enough evidence about the negative impact on student success, economic efficiency,

curriculum offerings, extracurricular activities, bus rides, and dropout rate to support the

retention and financing of small, local schools. Included in the following sections is a

review of the literature identifying and examining concerns.

Student Achievement. In the debate about optimal school size for enabling

student achievement, often defined as students per grade, there appears to be no

consensus as to what constitutes optimal school size. There are two strands of thought in

support of large schools. The first strand, economies of scale, holds that larger schools

are more cost efficient, and the second strand emphasizes the ability of large schools to

offer a more rigorous, expanded curriculum. The studies discussed in this section provide

evidence that large school size does not necessarily guarantee an expanded curriculum

improving student achievement.

Friedkin and Necochea (1988) employed data from the California Assessment

Program to explore the relationship between school size and socioeconomic status. This

study, along with subsequent replications, provided a catalyst for research on these

particular variables. This series of studies, referred to as The Matthew Project, looked at

school size, enrollment per grade level, and SES, which was determined by free and

reduced-price meal rates (Howley, 1996; Howley & Bickel, 1999). The studies used school and district performance (separately from one another) on standardized tests as the measure of achievement, discovering that SES is an environmental condition that indirectly influences how school size affects achievement. In fact, SES has the strongest influence on student achievement (Friedkin & Necochea, 1988; Howley 2000; Howley, et al., 2000; Howley & Bickel, 1999). Specifically, data show smaller school size tended to benefit students in impoverished communities, but larger size tended to benefit students in more affluent communities (up to a certain reasonable limit); it was also found that the relationship between SES and school achievement was weaker in small schools (Bickel & Howley, 2000; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Friedkin & Necochea, 1988).

Findings from The Matthew Project, discussed previously, raised questions concerning optimal school size, and other researchers' recommendations concerning school size do not provide a conclusive answer. Howley and Bickel (2001) recommended an upper limit of 1,000 for 9-12 high schools, and 500 for K-6 elementary schools, but argued this recommendation should only be used for more affluent communities. Others believe these numbers are at the extreme limit and offer other suggestions. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health recommended 600 as the optimal school size for grades 7-12 for increasing school connectedness (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002). Williams (1990) however, specified that an effective size for elementary schools is 300-400; whereas, 400-800 is effective for secondary schools. Interestingly however, Howley, et al. (2000) noted a lack of research exploring the relationship between school size and socioeconomic status as an area of importance for researchers.

The question of school size often centers on recommendations for optimal input size, referring to the best size to minimize costs, and the optimal output size, describing the optimal size for achievement and learning. In an attempt to provide some direction, Howley (1994) summarized that "input studies determined that schools needed to be about twice the size as did output studies" (p. 2). Bailey (2000) also concluded that the optimal output size is significantly smaller than the optimal input size.

Howley (1996) replicated The Matthew Project in West Virginia with much the same results. This study, however, looked at both schools and districts because West Virginia policymakers have explored the possibility of reorganizing the state's 55 counties into fewer sub-districts. Howley's study also defined SES based on free and reduced-price meal rates. This replication simply stated that smaller school size reduces the relationship between poverty and student achievement. Howley (1999) demonstrated that "both excellence (for children in impoverished communities) and equity (overall) were improved with small schools (i.e., many of which West Virginia subsequently closed)" (pp. 8-9).

The replication in West Virginia reported that the level of "negative effects of large size among impoverished students are twice the magnitude of positive effects among affluent schools and districts; positive effect sizes among the affluent are not as large as negative effect sizes among impoverished schools and districts" (Howley, 1996, p. 5). It was also concluded that as grade level increases, the degree of significance increases, with negative effects more prevalent at higher grade levels. Howley also noted that "whereas in the California study, many impoverished students were served (not well)

in large urban schools, in West Virginia in 1990 many impoverished student[s] were served (well) by small urban schools" (p. 8).

In 1999, Bickel joined Howley in replicating The Matthew Project in four additional states, Georgia, Montana, Ohio, and Texas. They found that the SES factor once again played a significant role in three states: Georgia, Ohio, and Texas; however, the effect was not as prominent in Montana, a state that consistently sustains small schools. This series of replications was instrumental in providing information on school size in that it is the only series of studies that looked at the hypothesis that the interaction of school size and poverty influences student achievement. In all, the seven states mirrored the range of school conditions in the United States: ethnicity, locale, poverty, region, and school district organization (Howley, et al., 2000). In 2001, Howley and Bickel noted that this multi-level study found the following pattern between student achievement and SES:

- Larger schools in larger districts shows the strongest relationship with SES,

- Larger schools in smaller districts shows a somewhat weaker relationship,

- Smaller schools in larger districts shows a still weaker relationship,

- Smaller schools in smaller districts shows the weakest relationship with SES.

    (Mitigating the Influence of SES section, ¶ 8)

Three years after the replications, Johnson, Howley, and Howley (2002) once again confirmed the findings of The Matthew Project in a study that examined scores from all state required tests in every Arkansas school. This study showed that on all tests, the smaller schools reduced the effect of poverty to lower student achievement by at least 25 percent and as much as 90 percent in some areas.

In an additional effort to determine the relationship between school size and student performance, Driscoll, Halcoussis, and Svorny (2003) evaluated 5,525 schools in 755 districts in California. This study examined size effects at the district, school, and class levels and concluded that large "district size has a negative effect on student performance, as measured by standardized scores" (Driscoll et al., p. 199). However, this study found no significant effect on student performance at the high school level.

When Lee and Smith (1997) investigated optimal school size it was determined that there appeared to be a point of diminishing returns; in other words, when size is reduced the type and amount of courses offered could suffer, and the extent of teachers' content knowledge could also be affected to the point that learning is decreased. Lee and Smith's analysis found that learning gains are better supported in moderate-sized to small schools; however, gains were not as evident in the smallest schools. Students attending schools with an enrollment between 500 and 1,000 seemed to be superior in the area of mathematics; yet learning declined in schools with fewer students and significantly dropped in larger schools. The data also showed more mathematical learning in schools with higher SES. The same results, although not as significant, were found in the area of reading. In conclusion, Lee and Smith determined a high school size between 600 and 900 had the highest achievement in both mathematics and reading, and this size range had the highest achievement in both low- and high-SES schools.

More recently, in 2004, Tajalli and Opheim studied 532 schools at the fourth grade level, 198 cases at the eighth grade level, and 97 cases at the tenth grade level. In all instances, there was a relationship between SES and academic performance with low income students. For example, the academic performance for economically

disadvantaged students in the fourth and eighth grade levels was negatively affected; for each percent increase in the number of economically disadvantaged students, the chance of a school being a high-performing school drops by 6.3 percent for the fourth grade and 8.4 percent for the eighth grade.

Gregory (2000) stated it succinctly in his review of research on school size when he summarized that "the earlier the research, the more likely that it favors large schools; the more recent the research, the more likely it favors small schools" (pp. 2-3). Gregory credited this shift to four forces: the information age, the emergence of an adolescent culture, the students' rights movement, and changing views about the functions of an organization. Hence, the majority of this literature search located recent evidence favoring small schools.

Economic Efficiency. For decades, a common assumption held by the business world is that larger organizations can operate more efficiently than can smaller organizations; thereby when size increases, per unit cost decreases (Benton, 1992; Jewell, 1989; Mullins, 1973; Sybouts & Bartling, 1988). Nelson (1985) claimed that consolidation proponents rely on the financial advantages of school closings to override the negative aspects. Proponents of school reorganization applaud large schools' efforts to efficiently and effectively prepare the nation's youth at a lower cost. This business practice, referred to as economies of scale, pledged to "offset the expense of offering students advanced-level opportunities and would also justify closing small, supposedly outdated schools" (Lawrence, et al., 2002, p. 2). But the question is how to balance economies of scale and student learning. The question also remains as to how to calculate the cost of educating students.

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Though other factors contributed to the push for school consolidation, Conant's (1959) philosophy contributed significantly to the reorganization of the public school system. This reasoning suggests that larger schools are more cost effective and efficient when seeking an optimal enrollment at the same time applying organizational techniques to the management of schools. Lee and Smith (1997) defined optimal in "terms of students' learning over the course of high school in reading comprehension and mathematics" (p. 15).

According to Blake (2003), "A significant portion of the research [on consolidation] does not support economies of scale arguments" (p. 30). Nevertheless, the question still remains, "Which is more cost effective – small schools or large schools?" An aggregate of research outlining the benefits of school consolidation pointed to the reduction of costs for schools, counties, and/or states. Although much of the research on economies of scale have been the basis for school consolidation, this literature review provides evidence that some researchers question the feasibility of such a claim.

In the 1990s, Nebraska learned that building large schools and closing small schools is not always the answer to financial woes. To alleviate the loss of revenue when enrollment declined, Odell Public Schools and Diller Community Schools agreed to play football at Diller and play volleyball and basketball at Odell. When Nebraska's state aid was reconfigured in 1997-98, Diller Community Schools lost approximately $75,000 in one year. In order to counterbalance this loss, "Diller and Odell decided to consolidate. They framed the merger as a means of enhancing educational opportunities, solving Diller's fiscal problems, and creating a new, larger district that would save money" (Beeson, 2002, p. 3).

Additional efforts to save money led the new district to buy out eight teachers and one part-time superintendent, and give another superintendent early retirement at a cost of $122,000. In addition, teachers' base salaries increased $1,500, plus teachers possessing advanced degrees received a salary increase totaling $92,000. Salaries for new principals and an increase in benefits for non-certified personnel resulted in a $90,000 increase. The escalating cost to the new district did not stop with salary and benefit increases. The merger of Odell Public Schools and Diller Community Schools forced an increase in the cost of busing transportation by $28,500. Curriculum alignment with new textbooks, due to a student increase in all grades, cost an additional $50,000. New band uniforms, athletic equipment, and improvement of athletic facilities totaled $68,000. This resulted in a total increase to the district of $460,000 above base year expenses. In 2001-02, the above base year expenses totaled $230,000. Unfortunately, Odell Public Schools and Diller Community Schools' financial problems did not end with the school consolidation; the new district experienced a loss in population, 350 to 220 students, slightly above the enrollment when the merger took place.

After analyzing several studies conducted in the Nebraska school system, Funk and Bailey (1999) looked at a different approach to determine cost effectiveness and concluded that "annual cost differences between the smallest schools and the most 'efficient' size school are cut in half when measured as cost per graduate rather than as the traditional cost per pupil" (p. 1). Funk and Bailey further explained that the practice of calculating the cost of educating students who graduate is illogical. If costs are calculated by counting students who drop out in the same manner as those who graduate with marketable skills and/or go on to postsecondary education, the result is an

incomplete and inaccurate measurement. The term economies of scale emerged from the business world, so it seems only logical to use a business-like method of measuring results. No viable business would include the costs of producing (educating) a product (students) that didn't meet certain quality controls (graduation requirements) to measure its costs and rate of success in the marketplace. In a review of Striefel, Latarola, Fruchter, and Berne's research on the cost of school size, Raywid (1999) explained that, "When viewed on a cost-per-student basis, they [small schools] are somewhat more expensive. But when examined on the basis of the number of students they graduate, they are less expensive than either medium-sized or large high schools" (New Directions in Small Schools Research, ¶ 4).

In 1992, Arkansas' Lakeview School District of Phillips County filed a lawsuit accusing the state of not providing a fair and equal education to all its students. For a decade, Arkansas contemplated school consolidation as a means to offer this equal education. Beeson (2002) reported that Rural Trust's Policy Director testified before the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education that "trying to save money through consolidation of either schools or districts would likely be a 'a cure that would worsen the disease' of poor achievement caused by inequities in Arkansas' education funding system" (as cited in Beeson, p. 1). The director further explained that "consolidating the smallest schools serving the poorest communities would lower their students' performance levels, making it much more difficult for the now larger schools to meet the 'trend and improvement' standards required by the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program" (as cited in Beeson, p. 2). But as recently as 2003, Arkansas Governor Huckabee proposed to consolidate over 300 small

school districts into slightly over 100. Huckabee stated that if districts/schools did not

consolidate, the state would lack the funding to improve its schools (Barnett, Ritter, &

Lucas, 2002).

In an effort to address the implications of closing small schools, policymakers in

Vermont submitted a report in 1998 to the State Board of Education seeking to

consolidate schools with numbers fewer than 100 (Vermont State Department of

Education, 1998). Educators and community members analyzed the data and reached the

conclusion that legislatures should "continue to provide additional funding for small

schools. They are somewhat more expensive but add value to their communities and do

well by their students" (www.state.vt.us/educ/ssreport.htm). In an effort to stop the

school consolidation initiative, the Vermont Small Schools Group declared, "Small

schools…cost more to operate than larger schools, but they are worth the investment

because of the value they add to student learning and community cohesion" (Bailey,

2000, p. 2).

Dollars and Sense: The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools (Lawrence et al.,

2002), published by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, claimed that "small schools are

not prohibitively expensive. Investing tax dollars in small schools does make sense" (p.

viii). This report summarized research on educational and social benefits of small schools

and the negative effects of large schools on students, teachers, and community members.

KnowledgeWorks Foundation elaborated on legislators' reluctance to fight for small

schools for "fear that they are not economical and place an unnecessarily heavy burden

on taxpayers" (p. 1). *Rural Policy Matters* (2002), published by the Rural School and

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Community Trust, explained that one significant finding of this report is that small schools are competitive with large schools in construction costs.

As recently as 2005, Howley sought to evaluate the construction costs of small high schools by using data from two national databases of construction projects with n=3,471, along with telephone interviews with schools under study. The study accepted Lee and Smith's (1997) recommendation of 1,000 as the extreme upper enrollment limit, based on their findings that any high school larger than 1,000 results in a decrease in student achievement, regardless of students' socioeconomic status.

It was determined that smaller schools were less expensive to build, per square foot, but smaller schools do cost the same per student as larger schools (Howley, 2005). Because smaller schools allot 26 percent more space to students, it was concluded that "smaller high schools are not, in general, more expensive to build than new larger high schools, within the enrollment limits set by the study" (Howley, Results section, ¶ 4). Howley summarized that schools with an enrollment of 138 to 600, on average, were no more expensive per student to build than schools with an enrollment of 601-999; these schools were less expensive per square foot - $96 vs. $110. Therefore, Howley concluded that there is no certainty that schools will benefit economically due to school consolidation.

Curriculum Offerings. Increased curricular offerings are the third major argument used to support consolidation. Proponents of school consolidation noted an inequity within the schools that "make students in rural schools less marketable in the workforce and hinder their chances of pursuing further education because they have not been adequately prepared to take advantage of future educational opportunities like

students in larger schools" (Blake, 2003, p. 31). Studies documenting the rationales for school consolidation are abundant, and a significant portion report expanded curriculum offerings as a major reason for consolidation. Considerable data-based research however, shows that larger schools do not necessarily result in greater curricular opportunities for students.

As early as 1964, Barker and Gump collected data in secondary schools with enrollments from 35 to 2,287. The data showed that large schools did not necessarily mean an expanded curriculum. In fact, large schools with a much higher student enrollment offered only twice the number of courses than schools with small enrollments. In other words, Slate and Jones (n.d.) stated that "large school[s] will have additional sections of courses to accommodate the greater number of students, but do not necessarily add a variety of new courses simply because there are more students" (Curricular Diversity section, ¶3).

The claim that small schools cannot offer curriculum in the same breadth and width as large schools is exaggerated (Haller, Monk, Spotted Bear, Griffith, & Moss, 1990). Despite the benefits mentioned earlier in Burton (1989) and Benton's (1992) studies reporting that large schools are more equipped to offer students more courses, Monk (1986; 1987) discovered when schools with fewer than 400 students added additional students, students' access to courses improved; however, increases in enrollment above the 400 student level made little difference thereby illustrating the law of diminishing returns. Also, Haller, et al. found that the additional classes offered in large schools benefited the more academically superior students rather than the students who sought employment after graduation.

Pittman and Haughwout (1987) argued against the claim that large schools offered more courses. A study of 744 public, comprehensive high schools explored academic offerings as an indirect effect on dropout rate. The study found that "on average a 100 percent increase in enrollment yields only a 17 percent increase in variety of offerings" (p. 337). This limited increase was also reported in Lee and Smith's (1997) review of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study. The data showed that the curriculum in small schools is composed of more academic courses, with more students following the same program of study regardless of interests, abilities or SES – resulting in a higher average achievement and an achievement that is more equitably distributed.

Extracurricular Activities. While proponents of school consolidation argue that extracurricular activities are an advantage of a merger, research has not supported this claim. As early as 1964, Roger Barker and Paul Gump collected data from schools of 35 to 2,287 students. Barker and Gump found that both the number and selection of extracurricular activities in which students participate are considerably higher in small schools than in large ones. Additional studies (Cotton, 1996; Fowler, 1992; Stockard & Mayberry, 1992) discovered that students participate in extracurricular activities at a higher rate in small schools when compared with large schools.

Likewise, Lawrence's (1993) case study focusing on consolidation in Mount Desert Island, Maine, provided support for the role extracurricular activities play in students' schooling. The school's principal reported that "all of his children' [in the small school] are involved in extra-curricular programs…because he and the other teachers think that children are more successful in school if they are involved. The more frills the

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more skills" (p. 27). School sports provided a link to community life, especially in small schools. This connection was evident when one coach and teacher stated that the loss of basketball and school spirit within the community were key factors in some parents' resistance to consolidation.

Cotton's (1996) study also countered the claim that a large school can offer more extracurricular activities by showing that students attending small schools participate in more activities and hold positions within those activities. In small schools more students are needed to fill teams, be in clubs, and hold offices; hence shy or less popular students are more apt to participate. According to Cotton, "As schools grow larger, opportunities for participation also grow—but not proportionately; a twentyfold increase in population produces only a fivefold increase in participation opportunities" (Research on Social Behavior section, ¶ 1). Therefore, more students in large schools are vying for fewer slots on teams, in clubs, and in leadership positions. Kraft argued that large schools are best suited for the most talented and athletic students, but questioned what happens to the other 80-90 percent of the students (as cited in Bailey, 2000).

Morgan and Alwin's (1980) study provided a different view of extracurricular activities in the state of Washington using previously collected data from a simple random sample of juniors and seniors in 30 rural schools. The study found that school size has an effect on the rate of participation in school activities, but this particular study determined that the rate of effects varies with the type of activity. The study looked at the elasticity and centrality of several school activities. Elasticity was defined as having a capacity to draw more participants, and centrality referred to the schools' tendencies to offer scarce resources to ensure that the activity was offered. For example, the study

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concluded that a debate team has a low elasticity and a low centrality – in other words, it is an activity that is difficult to expand in the number of participants. A low elasticity and low centrality activity is offered in less than 25 percent of the small schools and in only 50 percent in large schools. Conversely, the study concluded that athletics was the only activity in which all schools had participants; therefore, athletics had a high elasticity and a high centrality in terms of participation rate.

Bus Rides. Long bus rides are another problem that has been associated with school consolidation. In addition to the loss of community stability, long bus rides are often a reason why students and parents are opposed to school consolidation (Bickel, et al., 2001). Many students endure long bus rides traveling to schools located farther from their small communities. Transportation costs associated with buses traveling in rural areas, along long and possibly dangerous routes, stem from more than just escalating gasoline and personnel costs. According to DeYoung (1993), "The students and communities most inconvenienced—in terms of bus-ride times for students and inaccessibility to parents—are those most isolated and impoverished" (p. 391). The dynamics of the community change when two or more schools consolidate, especially for students living on or near the boundaries of the county who must travel greater distances to attend school. The increased amount of time spent riding on school buses is a salient aspect from students and parents' point of view, but surprisingly, research associated with transportation costs is limited (Howley, et al., 2001).

Lawrence (1993) used interviews, newspaper reports, and data included in school budgets and student performance scores to explore the policy of consolidation and its effect on four communities. This case study looked at the consolidation of fourteen

village schools into one high school and four elementary schools, but specifically the study focused on the four previous high schools. After a review of the data, Lawrence determined that the foundation for the consolidation decision stemmed from the run-down condition of school buildings and the school budgets. When asked about the impending long bus rides, consolidation proponents did not deem the issue as consequential. Instead, it was pointed out that newly paved roads were adequately safe and shuttle buses would be provided to take students home after extracurricular activities. Lawrence appeared to question this reply when he argued, "They seemed to have missed the underlying concern on the part of the community members that the children would be removed from the community for long periods of time" (p. 25).

After a number of school consolidations in West Virginia, the state issued guidelines on the maximum length of school bus rides. According to Jimerson (2007), in a Rural School and Community Trust publication, the "recommended maximum one-way rides are 30 minutes for elementary school, 45 minutes for middle school, and one hour for high school students" (http://ruraledu.org). Interestingly however, Jimerson explained there is evidence in a West Virginia report on transportation that the guidelines are neither mandated nor enforced.

Despite an increase in school consolidations, transportation costs continue to rise. During each school day 400,000 buses travel over 21 million miles in the United States (Mitchell, 2000). Howley and Howley (2001) maintained that long bus rides are hidden costs associated with school consolidation, and Howley (1991) argued that "The interests that families, communities, and students have in the arrangements and effects of buses seldom receive any attention from policy makers or researchers" (p. 51). A study

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conducted by Howley, et al. (2001) examined the experience of riding the bus in rural as compared to suburban areas in five states (Arkansas, Georgia, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Clayton). Overall, the study revealed that rural students were more likely than their suburban counterparts to have bus rides of 30 minutes or longer, ride the bus with older students, experience rougher rides, and travel over rougher terrain.

The negative consequences of long bus rides go beyond just being uncomfortable in a bus seat traveling to and from school each day. Not only do longer bus rides extend the time students spend riding on buses, but also longer bus rides increase the time students spend at school – arriving earlier having only to wait for school to begin – staying later having only to wait for the bus to return to take them home. On average, the morning wait time for rural students in the five states was an estimated 14 minutes, and the average afternoon wait time was 13 minutes (Howley, et al., 2001).

Not only has school consolidation increased the amount of time students spend waiting for and riding on buses, but Killeen and Sipple (2000) also found that rural schools spend twice as much as urban schools on transportation. According to the *West Virginia Educational Statistical Summary 2005-2006*, West Virginia's school buses traveled 37,957,659 miles in 55 counties, transporting 234,579 students. The buses in this study's rural county traveled 724,144 miles and transported 3,275 students (approximately 221 miles per student). In one nearby urban county, buses traveled 1,339,441 miles, transporting 10,712 students (approximately 125 miles per student), and another urban county's school buses traveled 3,035,763 miles, transporting 20,457 students (approximately 148 miles per student). This increased time spent on the bus translates into increased transportation costs for rural counties. In fact, Eyre and Finn's

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(2002) award winning study for *The Charleston Gazette* reported that West Virginia

spends more of its education dollars on transporting students to schools – more than any

other state.

  Dropout Rate. The overall probability that a student will drop out of school

increases as school size increases (Funk & Bailey, 1999). According to Kominski (1990),

the high school dropout rate is one of the most significant measures that reflects the status

of education in the United States. Hammond, et al. (2007) argued that dropout rates can

not be predicted based upon one single factor. Instead, multiple issues have been

identified as significant risk factors for school dropout. Factors such as a large school

population (Barro & Kolstad, 1987; Duncan, 2007; Lehr et al., 2004) and low SES have

been linked to an increase in the dropout rate (Lehr et al.). Likewise, participation in

certain extracurricular activities, such as athletics, reduces the likelihood of students

dropping out of school (McNeal, 1995). Consequently, as noted previously, larger

schools with a lower percentage of students participating in extracurricular activities has

been linked to school consolidation and an increase in the dropout rate.

  Students who are negatively affected by large school size and are more likely to

drop out of school before graduation are referred to as at risk or marginalized students.

The U.S. Department of Education (1993) identified indicators leading to poor school

performance for at risk students and emphasized the relationship between at risk and low

income. The indicators were: "children of migrant workers, adjudicated youth, limited

English speaking youth, pregnant minors, children in single parent families, children who

live in poverty, children with school attendance and/or behavioral problems, and

homeless children'' (p. 23). At risk students are defined by The National School Board

Association as those students who are "subject to environmental, familial or societal forces over which they have no control and which adversely affect their ability to learn in school and survive in society" (as cited in Crenshaw, 2005, pp. 10-11). Crenshaw's quantitative study of 250 students found that self-efficacy, teacher caring, and school culture were paramount in academic success. Interestingly, Crenshaw noted that the term "at risk" has "marginalized schoolchildren more so than their own intrinsic and extrinsic factors" (p. 37). Therefore, this study will refer to these students as "marginalized" rather than "at risk."

In an attempt to identify factors that prevent students from dropping out of school, or more specifically characteristics that establish educational resilience, Shepard (2004) explored factors that encouraged students to stay in and graduate from high school. Shepard's study discovered internal influences such as "personal interests, desires, judgments, decisions, and resultant behaviors [which] promoted educational outcomes," (p. 59) all indicators of "personal competence and control" (p. 60). Shepard also reported that students recognized external influences such as parental influence, influence of others, and extracurricular activities as important factors in their quest to graduate. Shepard's findings were consistent with Bartko and Eccles' (2003) research that revealed that students who participated in extracurricular activities had a lower rate of risky behavior; the participation seems to have assisted students in bonding with the school. According to Riele (2006) the lack of such bonding results in marginalized students failing to achieve in school "not through their personal characteristics but through their relationship with schooling" (p. 129).

Lee and Burkam (2001) explored the relationship between school organization and students' decisions to stay in school. This study identified three features of secondary schools affecting the dropout rate: curriculum, school size, and social relations. Lee and Burkam reported that students have a tendency to stay in school where mainly academic courses rather than nonacademic courses are offered. It was also determined that schools with fewer than 1,500 students had fewer dropouts.

As noted previously, these documented benefits of and concerns with school consolidation play a significant role in the education of our students, especially in rural communities. The Rural School and Community Trust (Beeson & Strange, 2000) and Keller (2000) explained that rural education is crucial to states' educational performance; thereby declaring the need for attention to rural education as urgent. The following sections will explore the literature on education in rural America, the negative perceptions of education in rural America, rural education in West Virginia, and school consolidation in rural communities, in rural West Virginia, and in Clayton County, West Virginia.

Education in Rural America

Definition

According to Whitaker (1982), "rural" was first used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in 1874 when it was defined as indicating the population of a county exclusive of any cities or towns with 8,000 or more inhabitants. Recently, the 2000 U.S. Bureau of Census defined rural areas as those areas that do not lie inside an urbanized area or an urban cluster with fewer than 2,500. Yet, there is still no shared definition of what constitutes rural America (Hatfield, 2003). At the beginning of the 21st century rural

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America was comprised of 2,305 counties – 80 percent of the nation's land – and was home to 56 million people (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003).

Using The Beale Codes classification system, the U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2006), reported 1,045 public school districts, 461,901 students located completely in rural areas – those with less than 2,500 urban populated areas not adjacent to a metro area. In addition, over half of all operating school districts and one-third of all public schools are in rural areas, more than in any other locale (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). With 942,000 students living in rural school districts with a higher poverty rate than either Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, or Detroit (Rural School and Community Trust, 2007b), it is important to keep in mind the number of students affected when decisions are made regarding closing small, rural schools.

History

Not until fifty years after the birth of our nation did the educational system change its structure from a predominately "private, charity, religious, and partially public-funded schools [model]," (Theobald, 2005, p. 116) to a more formal public domain. This emergence began in the more urbanized areas located in the northern states. Theobald explained that it was during the mid 1800s that residents in the urban areas "openly embrace[d] a system of free common schools" (p. 117). However, rural residents were skeptical of state departments' attempts to govern their school systems from a distance in the state capital. Theobald explained that rural and urban areas disagreed with what state departments deemed as important in order to meet rural students' needs. For example, students living in rural areas were needed to work at home, so one root of this disagreement stemmed from rural students' family obligations with farm-related

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activities. On the other hand, schools in urban areas placed more emphasis on formal education and graduation from high school. These discrepancies about how to meet rural students' needs is characteristic of how many perceive the issue of education in rural America.

Negative Perceptions of Education in Rural America

Throughout the 19th century the number of rural students clearly outnumbered students who lived in urban areas (Theobald, 2005). Not until after 1930, did urban schools dominate the educational experience when emphasis was placed on graduation. It was during this time that both rural and urban students began attending the same schools, often meeting each other for the first time. Theobald explained that it was not uncommon for "city kids" to attach labels such as "farm kids" to the rural students. These labels often resulted in harsh treatment of the rural students. For example, Manning's *Hill Country Teacher: Oral Histories From the One-Room School and Beyond* (1990), noted the stigma and difficulties endured by rural students emotionally when called names by their urban peers. Some of this type of humiliation continues today when rural students and rural culture generally are ridiculed in schools located in urban areas (Beeson, 2002).

Evidence of this negative perception was found as early as 1914 when Ellwood Cubberley, Teachers College professor, stated that "rural school[s] today [are] in a state of arrested development, burdened by education traditions, lacking in effective supervision, controlled largely by rural people, who, too often, do not realize either their own needs or the possibilities of rural education" (p. 132). This perception was once again found in Harmon's (2001) report indicating that "adults and youths who desire to stay in a rural place are usually labeled with low aspirations, persons who obviously are

not considered the 'best and the brightest.' They refuse to seek greater personal achievement and prosperity offered in urban America" (p. 5). Harmon further stated that because of this opinion educational research in a rural context should be conducted.

Ninety-two years later, this negative perception of rural America still prevails. Todd and Agnello (2006) reported that students in teacher education programs often voice negative opinions about students in rural communities. At one public university teacher candidates assumed that rural schools have "noncertified teachers and administrators, low standards of achievement, lack of services for special needs students, isolation from varied learning experiences, inadequate access to technology, and separation from national and global community" (p. 180). In an attempt to change perceptions and expand knowledge and understanding, the university required students to visit rural schools, observe classrooms, and talk to students and teachers. At the conclusion of the field trip one student remarked that the trip unmasked advantages to living in a small town and perhaps living in a small town would be all right.

A study conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research Inc. (2001), published by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, mirrored the university students' negative mental representations of rural America. Interviews with 242 people in various urban, suburban, and rural regions throughout the United States revealed conflicting assumptions about rural communities. According to the report, rural America is thought to have "traditional American values, but is behind the times…is more relaxed and slower than city life, but harder and more grueling…is friendly but intolerant of outsiders and difference…is richer in community life but epitomized by individuals struggling independently to make ends meet" (www.wkkf.org). Survey participants saw rural America plagued by

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persistent poverty, low wages, dismal job opportunities, and saddled with inadequate

educational systems.

The Need for Every State to Take Action on Rural Education, Beeson and

Strange's (2000) study, conducted for the Rural School and Community Trust Policy

Program, outlined the need for more data-based research addressing the needs of rural

education. Their study compared states on two gauges of concern related to rural schools

and communities. The first gauge, rural importance, examined how important it is to the

overall educational performance of the state to address the particular needs of its rural

schools; the second gauge, rural urgency, examined how urgent it is in each state that

policymakers develop rural education policies given conditions in each state's rural

schools and communities. Both gauges were measurements of a state's particular need for

rural education reform. There were seven states where rural education was deemed

crucial to the state's educational performance and where the need for attention was urgent

(Beeson & Strange, 2000; Keller, 2000). West Virginia, one of those states, was ranked

second, with 63.9 percent of the state's population living in rural areas; it was also

second, 49.7 percent in the number of public schools in rural areas, and second, 49.1

percent of all public school students who attend schools in rural areas.

Rural areas are often labeled as depressed and do not catch researchers' interest,

resulting in a scholarship deficiency (DeYoung, 1987). Rural schools are plagued with

declining enrollments, low teacher salary, and communities where income and

educational degrees are low (Keller, 2000). The plight of rural schools is evident in

Howley's (1999) statement that "affluent communities enjoy decent schools and high-

minded pedagogy, whereas impoverished communities continue to 'enjoy' shabby schools and a pedagogy of expedience (that is, focus on 'basic skills')" (p. 1).

Barley and Beesley (2007) conducted an exploratory study of the factors perceived by school personnel as significant to contributing to success in high-performing and high-needs rural schools. This study was based on prior research identifying four key components of success: leadership, instruction, professional community, and school environment. Barley and Beesley visited five schools and conducted telephone interviews with educators, school board members, parents, and community members in 21 central rural schools located in the United States. The determination of high-performing and high-needs was based on assessment scores and free and/or reduced-price lunch rates. The study found that high expectations, a focus on student learning, use of data, individualized instruction, teacher retention and professional development, and alignment of curriculum with assessment were perceived as the most significant factors. It was also reported that the school's close relationship with the community helped ensure higher expectations and provide effective leadership.

Regardless of the virtues of rural communities many experience some of the same problems as other more urban areas. The perception that small rural communities are free from violence and drugs is incorrect. In a self-report survey of Nevada's 7th and 12th graders, rural students recognized that small communities face some of the same challenges with violence and drugs as do urban areas. However, they still perceived their schools and communities to be safer than urban areas and less threatening when compared to larger schools (Evans, et al., 1999).

Spatig, Parrott, Carter, Keyes, and Kusimo (2001) investigated the issue of communities by exploring both urban and rural students' varied experiences in Appalachia. Spatig et al. interviewed eight girls – four urban and four rural – "whose stories might provide an opportunity to understand the girls' family, school, and program experience" (p. 65). This study explored students' local neighborhoods and communities, plans for the future, gender issues, and finally the "issue of resistance, discussing missed opportunities to use strong community identification and relationships, especially in the rural area" (p. 66). Similar to Evans et al.'s (1999) study, Spatig et al. reported that "alcohol and drugs figure prominently in discussions of community problems in urban *and* rural settings" (p. 69).

Regardless of the concerns with living in rural communities, Harmon (2001) argued that schools should provide educational opportunities for students to remain and flourish in rural America. Harmon argued that the mission of rural education is to not only meet the needs of the students, but to also meet the needs of the community. This emphasis on improving rural education outlines the "key characteristics of rural education…decentralization, diversity, low bureaucracy, parent and community involvement…small scale (small, safe and caring schools), and technology enhanced" (p. 14).

Rural Education in West Virginia

West Virginia is considered impoverished, geographically dispersed, and populated with small rural communities (Chadwick, 2002); rural residents are considered a demographic and political majority in the state (Beeson & Strange, 2000). The majority of the state's students attend schools located in rural areas. For example, as of the 2003-

04 school year West Virginia reported 281,209 public school students, with 131,993 or 46.9 percent attending rural schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). According to *Rural Policy Matters*, the poorest 800 rural school districts in the U.S. are concentrated in just 16 states. West Virginia, one of those 16 states, reported 12,772 Title I students with a 33.4 percent poverty rating, and more than half of all rural students qualify for subsidized meals (Rural School and Community Trust, 2007b).

Because of these rural demographics, schools serve as central links within many communities and when a small school closes, school consolidation can deliver a detrimental blow to the community's sustainability. In a 2001 study in rural West Virginia, Bickel, et al. explored the existence of neighborhood effects on student achievement independent of social class and family backgrounds. Quantitative data from 292 kindergarten students in 12 elementary schools located in two counties were analyzed. Ethnographic data showed that community members view their communities as friendly, informal, safe, and as social entities. The data also showed that "as [a] neighborhood more closely approximates the configuration…early school achievement, on average, is enhanced. As [a] neighborhood departs further from this configuration, achievement, on average, is diminished" (p. 25).

In a focus group with parents of children attending a small rural elementary school in the coal fields of West Virginia, Bickel, et al. (2001) evaluated the effects neighborhoods have on school achievement in poor, rural neighborhoods. The data showed that "if a sense of safety, stability, social cohesion and shared world view pervades the neighborhood, students bring this with them to school" (p. 23). In other

words, students' perception of a neighborhood's comfort and safety translates to an in-school neighborhood that is seen as both secure and nurturing.

Perhaps more significant in relation to society's negative perceptions of rural America, the study reported that "misguided typifications to the contrary, poor, rural West Virginia neighborhoods are not the sort of uniformly socially disorganized, culturally pernicious contexts which give rise to the dubious concept culture of poverty. Instead, they can be sources of safety and stability" (Bickel, et al., 2001, p. 25). In fact, as residents were threatened with school consolidation, love for their community schools was evident. A mother of a child attending one such school said:

> The educational benefits of a large school are not worth it if you lose your
> values. They feel real comfortable coming here. They're accepted…They
> look after each other…It's much easier to know what kids will do and
> keep track of what's going on. (Bickel, et al., 2001, p. 14)

In West Virginia, as in other areas, a rural school is generally thought of as a "'red-headed stepchild.' This characterization reflects budget cutting and diminished academic offerings which follow from the expectation that the school will soon fall victim to consolidation" (Bickel, et al., 2001, p. 10). Because students value "sources of stability, predictability, and safety" (p. 12) and dread long bus rides, it is understandable why students and parents oppose school consolidation. Parents and community members often feel threatened with consolidation and stand firm in their beliefs that small schools reinforce family values.

In addition to the negative perceptions of education in rural communities mentioned previously, educators are concerned about graduation rates. Chenoweth and

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Galliher (2004) explained that even though West Virginia has a higher graduation rate (75%) than the national average (68%), the difference between graduation rates in rural counties versus the more urban counties remains a concern – 37 percent to 82 percent. Chenoweth and Galliher examined factors that influenced 242 West Virginia rural students' decisions to attend college. Results showed that 69 percent of the seniors planned to attend college within one to two years after graduation. The study also concluded "a strong relationship between fathers' occupations and the decision to pursue college" (p. 7). Those not pursuing a college education had fathers who were unemployed, unskilled, or semiskilled, and a lower SES was associated with males not pursing a college education.

School Consolidation in Rural Communities

There is substantial research on school consolidation's detrimental effects on small rural communities; nonetheless, there is a dearth of studies that strive to quantify a relationship between a school and its community (Lyson, 2002). Sell, et al. (1996) claimed "the impact of school consolidation on students is immediate, or nearly so; however, the impacts of consolidation on the respective communities – socially and economically – may take place over several years" (p. 1). Hines (2002) indicated that a strong presence of community is typically evident in a rural school. A school not only meets the educational needs of its students, but it also serves as a source of employment and a place for social and recreational activities (Lyson, 2002). Accordingly, when a rural school closes its doors, it not only impacts the lives of the students, but it also can destroy a rural community.

The dialogue surrounding school consolidation is polarized between policymakers and community members and unfortunately the discussion is often characterized by a win-lose mentality. Legislators and state governments often emphasize the economic inefficiencies and limited curriculum choices associated with small schools, whereas community members view the loss of a school as detrimental to the community (Bard, et al., 2005). As early as 1975, Henderson and Gomez concluded that when community interests were ignored during propositions of consolidation, student absenteeism and community interest and support waned.

A recent study conducted by Lyson (2002) examined the fiscal impact and socioeconomic effects of school consolidation on small rural communities in New York. Findings revealed that the smaller the community, the more a school matters to the community and its members. The authors noted that "in even the smallest rural villages in New York, schools serve as important markers of social and economic viability and vitality" (p. 136). Further, a school's social environment was found to epitomize community values acting as the center of community activities, regardless of the proximity of the school to community residents.

In the late 1980s, the Coffee County School System consolidated its two junior/senior high schools. Leisey, et al.'s (1990) case study of this school system revealed that community residents felt as if they were nonexistent concerning their feelings about school consolidation. They reported that the school board was not open to their views, and according to some respondents, they feared a loss of identity and community spirit as a result of consolidation. Leisey et al. reported that the "bitterness will remain as a result of the decision by the local board of education. It can only be

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hoped that in time the people who bear the brunt of this decision, the students, will come through unscathed" (p. 42).

In an attempt to understand why one Illinois community opposed school district consolidation, Ward and Rink (1992) collected data through interviews, document analysis, newspaper articles, minutes of meetings, administrative records and letters, and through participant observations at community meetings. It was determined that the major resistance stemmed from the community's refusal to associate with other community members in the western and river districts. A sense of hostility was shown toward this group; in fact, a "special hostility was demonstrated toward residents of the river district, who were often called 'river rats'" (p. 15). This fear of the loss of community identity is often at the core of a consolidation resistance. In fact, many opponents of consolidation prefer to remain "big fishes in a small pond" (Leisey, et al., 1990, p. 25). Bailey (2000) also described the root of resistance efforts when he explained that consolidation resistance stems more from the fear of a loss of identity rather than from a loss of control.

School Consolidation in Rural West Virginia

School consolidation continues to grow in West Virginia. Looking back to 1933, West Virginia reorganized its 398 school districts into 55 county units (DeYoung, 1993). In 1990-1991, West Virginia had 1,105 public and elementary schools; in 2000-2001, the number was 840; in 2004-2005, 710 schools were located in the state (U. S. Department of Education, 2006).

Due to a declining student enrollment and a push for school consolidation, the West Virginia Legislature appointed a School Building Authority (SBA) in 1989 to

finance capital improvements for school districts. In order to solicit the SBA for school "improvements, districts had to meet mandated enrollment levels set by the state" (Bard, et al., 2005, Factors Leading to Interest in Consolidation section, ¶ 4), which ultimately forced consolidation of small schools. Once districts went forward with consolidation plans, they received funds for the construction of new schools or the remodeling of existing schools that met new and larger class size requirements.

The SBA in West Virginia was created by the legislature to carry out a mandate of the Recht Decision (Purdy, 1997). After an analysis of the state's educational system, Judge Arthur Recht ruled that the legislature "must completely reconstruct the entire system of education in West Virginia" (Spence, 1998, p. 18). The judge deemed the state's schools as "woefully inadequate" when compared against high quality educational standards, and this declaration, titled the Recht Decision, concluded that the state's public schools failed to meet the "thorough and efficient system" standard of public education demanded by the West Virginia Constitution (Spence, p. 10). The judge ordered that school financing be restructured to provide the same opportunities to all children, regardless of property values in their respective counties. Spence explained that as a result of this decision, restructuring was to take place at the earliest possible time. This reconstruction resulted in salary increases for teachers across counties and an influx of new equipment and supplies into the classroom. In addition, whether intended or not, a byproduct of the Recht Decision was a massive push for school consolidation led by some political and educational state and county leaders who argued that to achieve this restructuring small schools should be closed and new larger schools built.

According to Purdy (1997), very little of the court-mandated order has been carried out beyond the implementation of state-wide financing through the SBA. The SBA distributes money to counties for school building and maintenance, using criteria to judge counties' plans for funding. In order to receive funding counties must agree to construct new schools or substantially remodel existing schools to meet the new requirements (Bard, et al., 2005). Since the SBA's induction however, economies of scale have been the overriding criterion. Reeves (2004) stated that the criteria for new schools and renovations promote school consolidation in West Virginia. According to the SBA, (WV Department of Education, 2005) the minimum required student enrollment to meet guidelines for economies of scale for grades 5-9 is 150 students per grade level and 200 students per grade level for grades 10-12. These numbers produce a basic required school size of 450 students for grades 9-12.

Rural communities throughout West Virginia have fought furiously against this forced movement, arguing that school consolidation is merely an action to demonstrate the power of the state (Spence, 1998). Likewise, Howley's (1996) analysis of existing data suggested that the "motive for consolidation actually had little to do with education…and much more to do with high-level public administration generally – of which schooling is but a part, though a large one in terms of the share of …budget in West Virginia" (p. 6). Howley chided West Virginia's lame attempt to adequately fund education in the state when he wrote, "Resources exist to fund schools adequately, but the[y] are controlled by organizations with little concern for educational adequacy for West Virginians" (p. 6). Purcell and Shackelford (2005) documented West Virginia's enormous expenditures in its actions to cut costs by consolidating schools: "West

Virginia has spent almost 15 years experimenting with efforts to initiate educational

policy…and has spent over $1,000,000,000.00 (that's correct-over one billion dollars) in

their efforts at reconsolidation that has resulted in the closure of more than 300 schools"

(p. 3).

Hicks and Rusalkina's (2004) *School Consolidation and Educational*

Performance: An Economic Analysis of West Virginia High Schools provided a slightly

different perspective on school consolidation in West Virginia. Hicks and Rusalkina

employed several studies in an analysis of school size and school performance in West

Virginia. This analysis used data from 1997 through 2001 in each middle and high school

in the state. This study reported that "school size does not reduce any performance

measure, and may actually enhance some areas, though the impact is too small to be the

prime guide of policy…We [found] a modest negative impact of rurality on school

performance" (p. 31). In fact, Hicks and Rusalkina stated that school consolidation in

West Virginia has neither had a negative nor a positive impact on school performance.

West Virginia's students facing the loss of their small rural schools perceive a

threat of violence and drugs they believe are associated with larger schools. For example,

a student in one poor rural West Virginia district explained that in a larger school, "No

one knows your name…There are more fights…There are drugs and guns – kids bring

guns to school!...The individual does not matter" (Bickel, et al., 2001, p. 12). This small

school mentality provides students a sense of neighborhood where security and

hopefulness is shared by those who "are not socially isolated nor culturally adrift nor

morally indifferent, as stereotypes of the poor and the rural would have it" (Bickel, et al.,

p. 23).

Both Bickel et al. (2001) and Leisey, et al. (1990) have documented the importance of neighborhoods on student achievement as well as on community sustainability in West Virginia and Georgia. Lawrence (1993) however, reported that we need a greater understanding of the impact that mandated policies have on both students and communities in the United States. This understanding will assist policymakers and educators when states consider consolidation as an answer to budget woes.

School Consolidation in Clayton County, West Virginia

Chadwick (2002) described Clayton County as an area plagued by "political issues, unemployment, severe poverty, and geographic isolation" (p. iii). Roads leading through the countryside make traveling difficult. Residents claim that the lack of traffic and the slow paced life are advantages of living in rural communities; on the other hand, these very same attributes are blamed for the feeling of isolation and the inability to travel easily to school and community activities (Bickel, et al., 2001).

West Virginia, located entirely in the Appalachian region and known for its mountains, has a population of 1,808,344. According to the 2000 U. S. Census, West Virginia's mean household income is $29,696, with 17.9 percent of individuals and 13.9 percent of families living below poverty level. Clayton County, one of West Virginia's 55 counties, is located in the southwestern part of the state with a population of 22,108 (99 percent White). This rural county has a mean household income of $22,662 – compared to a national mean of $41,994 – with 27.9 percent of individuals and 22.8 percent of families below poverty level (U.S. Census, 2000).

Due to the county's failure to make adequate progress in rectifying major deficiencies identified in a 1999 audit, The West Virginia State Board of Education

assumed control of the county school system in June 2000 (Chadwick, 2002). In an effort

to unify Clayton County and assist in the strategic planning process for school

improvement mandated by the state, Appalachian Education Lab (AEL) attended county

meetings, and then later interviewed 46 people stratified by level of attendance and

whether the participant was a community member or school employee. This study

reported that 39 of 46 respondents did not believe the county was unified. In fact, it was

discovered that county residents associated more with other communities located in

adjacent counties instead of the communities within the county. One respondent

described the county as follows:

> [Clayton] is a divided community because of the way we are situated, so
>
> isolated from one another. It's 35 miles from the northern to the southern
>
> part. We have a lot going on in between. The mountains…the geography
>
> separates us. I hope we'll have highways someday. (Chadwick, p. v)

One school employee claimed that the county held divided views causing rifts in

relationships.

> It's so territorial. We all want the same thing, but we want it in our area.
>
> Nobody wants to help anybody. We are totally different in all four areas.
>
> Our cultures, our views, and our lifestyles are so different. (Chadwick,
>
> 2002, p. 22)

When Clayton County began discussing the consolidation of its four junior/senior

high schools, strategic planning meetings were organized. It was not long until

participants noted a change in attitude among the people from the four county's

communities. In an open-ended item on a questionnaire county residents were asked to

respond to this prompt: "In my opinion, the greatest challenge that [Clayton] County faces in creating and carrying out a strategic plan for education is..." One respondent wrote: "Getting over the attitude that 'it has always been this way, always will,'" and another respondent wrote, "Developing consensus across geographic and philosophical barriers" (Chadwick, 2002, p. 13).

Community members attending the strategic planning meetings were not allowed to discuss the issue of consolidation, even though it was precisely the topic of most concern. This conflict-ridden factor created a rivalry that went beyond the typical jealously communities may experience. In fact, one parent viewed consolidation as a fixation creating a division within the county.

> Concerning the school system, very divided. It's because of the
> consolidation issue, and some of the communities feel they have no
> influence and no power in decision making at all. Everything is under state
> control. At least in another county, if you are not happy, you can vote for
> or against board members. You can't do that in this county. (Chadwick,
> 2002, p. 23)

Chadwick (2002) pointed out that this non-collaborative mind-set has divided Clayton County because its "geography, consolidation, affiliations with cities in other counties instead of with other [Clayton] County communities led to an 'us vs. them' mentality" (p. 23). The county has struggled with the issue of school consolidation since the 1980s. In 1991, Clayton County residents voiced their opinion concerning this reorganization of schools when they defeated a levy proposal to consolidate the county's four senior high schools. Eventually, the SBA stopped funding to upgrade and maintain

school buildings in Clayton County thereby forcing the county to consolidate its four high schools. In fall 2006, Clayton County High School opened its doors.

Conclusion

The research on school consolidation is abundant and somewhat conflicting with evidence of both benefits and negative outcomes; however, each of these bodies of literature stresses the importance of continued research concerning the effects of school consolidation on our students and on our communities. Lawrence, et al. (2002) explained that many communities have already lost in their struggle against school consolidation and "unfortunately, many communities have already lost their good, small schools because they could not argue successfully against educators and policy-makers" (p. 21). In fact, despite Gregory's (2000) claim that it has been over 30 years since the last study recommended large schools, districts and counties (including those in West Virginia) continue to close small schools and build large schools.

As a result of small schools closing, enrollment in public secondary schools rose 33 percent from 1990 to 2006 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2007). West Virginia, however, was one of eighteen states that experienced a decrease in school enrollment from fall 1999 to fall 2004. West Virginia's enrollment in public elementary and secondary levels in fall 2004 was 280,129, with an average of 592 students per school. However, regardless of the increase in most states' enrollment, the trend to consolidate small schools brought a large decline in the total number of public schools in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2007), in "1929-30, there were approximately 248,000 public schools, compared with about 97,000 in 2004-2005" (p. 54).

Blake (2003) argued "numbers alone based on economies of scale research should not justify continuing a policy that we really know little about" (p. 9). It is not enough to study consolidation using variables such as course offerings, student achievement, and finances. Hopefully, the findings of this qualitative study will enable those who work with economically marginalized students to understand the impact consolidation can have on this group of students. Statistics alone can not provide policymakers and educators a basis for making decisions about those directly affected by the closing of small schools. This study gives voice to economically marginalized students so that we can learn from their experiences with and perceptions of school consolidation in a rural community.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter reiterates the questions examined in this study and to describe the design and procedures used. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore economically marginalized students' experiences with and perceptions of high school consolidation in Clayton County, a rural community in West Virginia. The research identified factors that enabled and/or constrained these students' school success. Student success is defined "as academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities; satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies; persistence; and attainment of educational objectives" (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007, p. 10). The definition also noted "that some of the more difficult to measure aspects of student success are the degree to which students are satisfied with their experience and feel comfortable and affirmed in their learning environment" (Kuh, et al., p. 8). This study:

1. Explored economically marginalized students' transition from a small school to a larger rural consolidated high school.

2. Explored what it means to be an economically marginalized student in a rural consolidated high school.

3. Identified and explored factors that enabled and/or constrained the success of economically marginalized students in a rural consolidated high school.

Case Study Design

The purpose of a phenomenological research design is to describe individuals' personal experiences and perceptions of a particular phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen,

2003; Merriam, 1988). A case study design allows the researcher to go in-depth about a particular issue or unique case (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007; Morse & Field, 1995) – specifically, this phenomenological case study explored economically marginalized students' experiences with and perceptions of rural high school consolidation.

Experts in the field of qualitative research have described the case study design in different ways. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Stake (1995) defined a case study as a choice of what to study rather than a choice of methodology. Yin (1994) explained that the case study design "comprises an all-encompassing method – with the logic of design incorporating specific approaches to data collection and to data analysis" (p. 13). In this respect, a case study is neither just a data collection method nor just a design, but instead it is a comprehensive strategy. Bloor and Wood (2006) explained further that a case study design is a "strategy of research that aim[s] to understand social phenomena within a single or small number of naturally occurring settings" (p. 27). Regardless of the description, Eisner and Peshkin (1990) declared that case studies have the potential to take researchers to places that most would never have the opportunity to go, and have experiences they may otherwise never have.

Unlike other research designs, a qualitative case study design provides in-depth insights and interpretations of a particular setting in a natural environment and "unfolds or emerges as fieldwork unfolds" (Patton, 2002, p. 44). This phenomenological collective case study focused on six students' experiences with school consolidation in the context of a rural high school in a natural setting – Clayton County, West Virginia – using multiple data collection methods explained further in a later section. There are various

types of case study methods, but I chose a collective case study because it focused on a detailed account from a number of individuals, thereby showing different perspectives on the issue (Creswell, et al., 2007; Merriam, 1988). Combined with a phenomenological approach, a collective case study design divulges information about what participants have in common about a particular phenomenon. I modified the design as the study proceeded and I could make more informed decisions about what to include.

Purposeful Sampling

This collective case study attempted to understand individuals' meanings of their experiences with and perceptions of a phenomenon – school consolidation in the context of a rural consolidated high school. The sampling method I used for this study is known as purposeful sampling. This sampling strategy was fitting because it offered an opportunity to gain insight into a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, et al., 2007; Patton, 2002) – specifically, economically marginalized students' experiences with and perceptions of rural high school consolidation.

Research participants for this study included a small sample from the students in the Clayton County BRP and the former GRP, youth development programs at the high school sponsored by the AWLP with approximately 20-25 members who were identified by teachers or others as marginalized students struggling with school. As a researcher I helped to investigate the sustainability of these grass-roots youth development programs in Clayton County. I have been involved as a research team member since fall 2006. Both programs were designed to help students develop the skills and emotional resiliency necessary to promote positive mental health, engage in social behavior, prevent violet behavior and drug abuse (personal communication, September 16, 2006). The boys were

identified as at risk based on one or more of the following criteria from the AWLP –

poverty; potential to quit school; anti-social behavior; absenteeism; delinquency;

potential for drug abuse; negative attitude; family problems; involvement in pregnancy;

aggression; violent behavior, and poor (personal communication, September 16, 2006).

At the time of this study, there were no students from Hanover High School in

either the boys or girls' programs. This school consolidation was made even more

multifaceted by the fact that most students from Hanover High School chose to attend a

regional high school, located in another county, but closer to the community rather than

travel the approximately 30 miles to the new consolidated school. Because of this study's

emergent design, I allowed the interview data to guide me as I sought a student from this

school. During an interview with a student participant, I was informed of a female student

who was not a member of the resiliency program but who previously attended Hanover

High School; therefore to gain this perspective she was included in this study. Like the

other five students, she was from a low-income family.

This study explored students' experiences with school consolidation in the context

of a rural, economically depressed community. The context for this study is a rural West

Virginia consolidated high school costing over $30 million that opened in fall 2006.

Clayton County, located in southwest West Virginia, is comprised of four predominately

white rural communities. Prior to fall 2006, there were four junior/senior high schools

located in the county. According to the U.S. Census (2000), Clayton County reported that

99.04 percent of its 22,108 people were White. The median income for a household was

$22,662, and about 22.80 percent of families and 27.90 percent of the population were

below the poverty line, including 37.60 percent of those under age eighteen.

Merriam (1988) advised qualitative researchers to select a sample from which they can learn the most, and Patton (2002) explained that "the logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding" (p. 46). This study built on my prior research wherein I met and developed rapport with the boys and girls in the resiliency programs. As part of studying the youth development program, I conducted individual and focus group interviews with the boys, staff members, and the principal at the new school. For the current study, I identified six students for a more in-depth study of their experiences with and perceptions of the school consolidation.

I enlisted assistance from the director of the AWLP to select five participants from the population of 20-25 students. I employed the maximum variation sampling technique in order to select participants representing a range of experiences with rural school consolidation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), maximum variation sampling is the most useful strategy for a naturalistic setting because the purpose of the technique is to "document unique variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions" (p. 102). All but one student are current members of the BRP or former GRP and identified as economically marginalized. To gain different perspectives, students were selected based on a variety of other characteristics, such as level of academic achievement, degree of participation in extracurricular activities, former school, and enrollment in specific programs of studies. At the time of this study, there were no students from Hanover High School in the boys or girls' program. Because of its emergent design, a student from Hanover was identified by a participant for inclusion in the study. Participants also recommended teachers and an administrator to interview who had experience with the boys/girls now or in prior years. Maykut and Morehouse (1994)

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referred to this referral technique as snowball sampling, where one participant suggests another participant to interview who may be different based on one of the identified characteristics. In this manner, maximum variation sampling is emergent and sequential (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Merriam (1988) noted that qualitative researchers should remain open and follow any lead in the investigation. Thorp (2006) referred to this as letting go of prior expectations and "plan[ning] in the doorway" (p. 28). Acting on the advice of Bogdan and Biklen (2003) I viewed this case study as a funnel – the larger end representing the beginning of the study with the study narrowing down to the smaller end as the fieldwork proceeds. At the beginning of the study I focused the data collection on the six students selected for the study; as the study proceeded, the fluid, emergent design led me to the next person to be interviewed and the next document to be reviewed.

In discussing case study design, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained that the case is decided prior to beginning the research; however, there are "subsequent choices to make about persons, places, and events to observe" (p. 451). The design for this study allowed the how, who, where, and when types of decisions to be made as the study progressed. Participants selected later included current teachers and an administrator living in Clayton County who had current or prior knowledge about any of the student participants.

Data Collection

A qualitative study, because of its inductive, emergent nature, "precludes the ability to know either all of the important selection criteria or the number of observation or interview sessions [that are] necessary to gather adequate data" (Glesne & Peshkin,

1992, p. 25). Hence, early in the study the number of interviews and/or observations was undetermined. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stressed the importance of a qualitative researcher keeping an open mind, neglecting nothing, and remembering that anything said or observed could be a possible clue unlocking an understanding of the subject(s) studied. I proposed a qualitative case study design because of its ability to answer "how" and "why" questions by exploring students' experiences with the transition from four small junior/senior high schools to a larger rural consolidated high school. This study also explored students' perceptions of what enabled and/or constrained student success in a consolidated school by investigating a variety of evidence about school consolidation. Yin (1994) explained that this evidence can be obtained from documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) referred to the materials collected from a research study as data. Merriam (1988) commented that data can be both concrete (measurable) and abstract (feelings). The interview transcripts and observation fieldnotes from this study provided the concreteness and observer comments provided the abstractness that Merriam called data.

Since September 2006, I have been a member of a qualitative research team associated with the AWLP. As part of the team I have studied a youth development program gaining insights about this strengths-based as opposed to problems-based organization. I helped to collect data from the youth participants in the BRP, and the GRP, AWLP staff and board members, and the principal of the new consolidated school. My involvement in the research led me to explore students' experiences with school consolidation and to ultimately identify this area of study for my dissertation.

My prior research experience provided a foundation on which to build this study, and to get close to the participants, both physically and psychologically, and collect information-rich data. My prior experience enabled me to gain re-entry into the setting at Clayton County High School, the AWLP, and to obtain recommendations for interviews with an administrator and teachers from Clayton County.

Interviews with students, teachers, and one administrator were the dominant strategy of data collection. Interviews were conducted with fourteen participants from September 2006 to February 2008. It was important to interview student participants who were identified as economically marginalized and who represented a range of characteristics described earlier. I conducted 24 interviews with six students, seven teachers, and one administrator. I observed seven boys' activities and reviewed 12 documents written by the girls. There were two student participants from Gateway High School, one from Hanover High School, one from Douglass High School, and two from Henry High School. I completed and transcribed interviews; transcripts were later reviewed and observer comments added. It was my intent to write fieldnotes that were "well-endowed with good description and dialogue relevant to what occurs at the setting and its meaning for the participants"...and add observer comments that were "reflective parts of fieldnotes" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 114).

To collect the data, I was in the field. Patton (2002) explained that fieldwork means "having direct and personal contact with people under study in their own environments – getting close to the people and the situations being studied to personally understand the realities and minutiae of daily life" (p. 48). The field in this particular case

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study was the Clayton County High School, the AWLP, after-school activities, and in any other locations that were found to be important in the lives of the students in the study.

Yin (1994) explained that a "case study is an empirical inquiry" (p. 13) that explores a phenomenon with a real-life context, specifically when the boundaries between the event and the context may become blurred. In this case, the event was school consolidation and the context was Clayton County High School, both relevant to understanding economically marginalized students' experiences. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) recommended that procedures to achieve triangulation be implemented to "reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation" (p. 453). Therefore, as a qualitative researcher I used a variety of data collection strategies including interviewing participants, observing participants and occurrences, and collecting and analyzing written documents. Both individual and focus group interviews were used to elicit information about what it is like to be a marginalized student in a rural consolidated high school.

As noted above, interviews were supplemented with participant observations and document collections to strengthen the study's validity by providing multiple sources documenting the same phenomenon (Yin, 1994). I reviewed documents such as personal journal writings, students' poems, newsletters, newspaper articles, and county records. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explained that these documents relay "how the people who produced the materials think about their world" (p. 124). In this study, the documents provided additional information about students' experiences with and perceptions of school consolidation and their transition from a small school to a larger school.

Individual and Focus Group Interviews. Interviews are a significant source of data for case studies. Patton (1980) explained the purpose of an interview is to "find

out…those things we cannot directly observe….We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time…interviewing allow[s] us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 196). Following the advice of Yin (1994), open-ended interviews gained facts as well as opinions about participants' experiences. Participants' insights led to additional sources, both other interviewees and documents. I kept in mind Thorp's (2006) recommendation to loosen my grip sometimes on my interview script, and "discover insights into my research that would normally not be revealed" (p. 123).

Lloyd-Jones (2003) stressed the importance of remaining "open and alert to possible alternatives" (p. 6); therefore, even casual conversations can provide essential information. Thorp (2006) explained that "stories are not low-hanging fruit simply to be plucked during an interview – it is not just a matter of *asking for* stories or *listening to* stories but rather of learning to be *with stories*" (pp. 119-120). Thorp continued by explaining that this flexibility, this uncertainty, may be viewed as a weakness by some, but actually is indispensable in understanding the participants' lived experiences. In this study, the interview process provided me an opportunity to learn to be "with the stories" and to discover what it means to be a marginalized student in a consolidated school. This flexibility allowed me to learn about the students' transitions from a small school to a larger, consolidated school, and what enabled or constrained their success in that process.

I employed both individual and focus group interviews keeping in mind that this data collection method should be flexible in its design. Student and administrator interviews were conducted in the school, after meetings, during in-school activities, during after-school activities, in restaurants, and at the AWLP office. Interviews with

some students were conducted throughout the pilot study, but to gain greater in-depth understanding, additional interviews transpired in January and February 2008.

I also selected one additional student to interview based on the maximum variation sampling technique. When meeting with each student, teacher, and administrator participant, I explained the purpose of the study. The interviewees were asked to sign a consent form informing them of their rights and seeking permission to participate in the study (Appendix A). Participants received two copies of the consent form – one to sign and return and one to keep for their records. All participants under the age of 18 were given a parental/guardian consent form and asked to obtain the appropriate signatures before returning one copy and keeping a second copy for their records (Appendix B). Each participant was asked for permission to record the interview session. All participants agreed to be recorded.

Research questions were intended to identify factors that enabled and/or constrained economically marginalized students' school success. I designed open-ended interview questions that encouraged participants to talk. I began each participant's initial interview by asking him/her to tell me about themselves. Students were then asked questions focused on their perspective of school consolidation, their transition from their former school, and what had enabled and/or constrained their success at the new consolidated high school. Because I have previously collected data from some of the participants, I followed Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) advice and "focus[ed] on particular topics that emerged during the preliminary interviews" (p. 96) to gain additional information. Examples of questions I used included:

1. Tell me about your former school.

2. Tell me about your first year at the consolidated high school.

3. What were some of the challenges that you experienced as you transitioned from a small school to a larger consolidated high school?

4. Tell me about your second year at the consolidated high school.

5. What do you miss about your former school?

6. What are some of the benefits of attending a larger consolidated high school?

To gain additional information I used the following probing questions suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2003). Probing questions elicited specific responses and helped me to understand thereby ensuring that participants' views were accurately reported in this study. The probing questions were:

1. What do you mean?

2. I'm not sure that I am following you.

3. Would you explain that?

4. What did you say then?

5. What were you thinking at the time?

6. Give me an example.

7. Tell me about it.

8. Take me through the experience. (p. 96)

I designed open-ended interview questions to encourage an administrator and seven teachers to discuss their perceptions of the student participants' school consolidation experiences and their transition from their small schools to the larger consolidated school. Additional questions were then asked based on their prior

knowledge of the study's participants. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Examples of questions included:

1. Explain your relationship with the student.

2. How would you describe the student academically?

3. What do you perceive as the benefits and/or constraints to the student attending their former small, rural school?

4. What do you perceive as the benefits and/or constraints to the student attending a larger, consolidated school?

However, Yin (1994) warned that interviews should "always be considered *verbal reports* only…they are subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation" (p. 85). Therefore, it is important to corroborate with other sources such as participant observations. Keeping in mind my role in accurately reporting participants' perspectives, I asked permission to tape record all interviews thereby ensuring a more accurate accounting of participants' comments.

Participant Observations. Observations require that the researcher visit the "field" or site and observe the phenomenon under investigation. An observation may substantiate information gained from other sources and supply additional information. In conducting participant observations, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explained that the ends of the participant/observer continuum are extreme: "At one end is the complete observer…and at the other end is complete involvement at the site, with little discernible difference between the observer's and the subject's behavior" (p. 82). Yin (1994) explained that participant observations allow researchers to assume a role within the study and to participate in the events being studied. But more importantly, Yin described

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"the ability to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone' 'inside' the case study rather than external to it," (p. 88) as a distinctive advantage of participant observations.

In this study I understood the benefits of participating and observing participants in the data collection phase, and my earlier access to Clayton County High School and to the boys in the resiliency program eased this process. In the pilot project I played laser tag, watched movies, and ice skated with the boys. Nevertheless, Yin (1994) explained that "case studies need not always include direct, detailed observations as a source of evidence," (p. 14) and Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated that "questions concerning how much, with whom, and how you participate tend to work out as the research develops focus" (p. 83). Therefore, decisions about the extent of participant observations in this study were made based upon the availability of activities and events that provided opportunities to understand participants' experiences and perspectives about school consolidation. Due to job requirements and the amount of time required for such activities, I limited the number of observations. I was unable to participate in after-school activities or observe students' interactions and activities beyond those in the pilot study during fall of 2006 and periodically throughout 2007. Those prior observations were conducted during in-school meetings, at the AWLP office, and at various after-school activities. The amount of time required for such activities was a factor later considered as the study proceeded. When applicable however, I wrote fieldnotes during and/or after all observations and added observer comments at a later time. Any conversations during activities were also taped, transcribed, reviewed, and observer comments added.

Documents. A third type of data collection method is document review. This source of evidence enabled me to review already available written materials, as well as

newly created materials. By examining documents, subjects' perceptions of the

phenomenon – school consolidation – were corroborated thereby strengthening the

validity of the case study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explained that "some of the

materials provide only some factual details such as the dates meetings occurred. Others

serve as sources of rich descriptions of how the people who produced the materials think

about their world" (p. 124).

In this study archival records were available for data analysis. Students' poems

and journal writings, newspaper articles, newsletters, and county records were the

primary documents reviewed. These records included prior studies focusing on the

AWLP organization, AWLP organizational records over a period of time, and school

survey data.

To maintain confidentiality of the research participants in my records, each

interviewee was given a pseudonym, thereby protecting each participant's identity. The

county and each school were also given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Because of the unclear boundary between the event and context, this case study

depended on multiple sources of data collection to guide me in the analysis and

interpretation phases. In an attempt to follow Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) advice I

reviewed data to develop ideas about the findings, while at the same time I related

findings to the literature and to broader concerns and concepts. Bogdan and Biklen

defined these processes as data analysis and data interpretation. I analyzed the data using

an inductive approach suggested by Patton (2002). In this way, qualitative research is not

conducted to test a pre-determined hypothesis. Instead, the data from this naturalistic

inquiry emerged from a phenomenological standpoint in which I attempted to understand the meanings of students' experiences with school consolidation.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explained that the data analysis process requires the researcher to search and arrange the fieldnotes, interview transcripts, documents, and other data to assist in the determination of findings. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and later analyzed. These interviews, observations, and documents provided the information to answer the research questions. I began the coding process by looking for themes, common words or phrases that emerged. After identifying the common words, I organized the codes into groups to gain an understanding of what the data meant. Initially, there were thirteen codes that are discussed in chapters five and six. After further analysis, the thirteen codes were reduced to three themes discussed in chapter seven.

Data analysis was done simultaneously with data collection. Therefore, to guide me through the study I followed Bodgan and Biklen's (2003) suggestions to help make data analysis and data interpretation part of the data collection process. Throughout the data collection and data analysis I:

1. Made decisions that narrowed the study – following the funnel approach described earlier.

2. Developed analytic questions – including assessing pre-determined questions for relevancy.

3. Planned data-collection sessions based on what was found in previous observations and interviews – reviewed transcripts and fieldnotes for leads, or made any changes to questions or in the selection of other participants.

4. Wrote observer comments – reflected and recorded thoughts during data collection, and

5. Wrote memos about what was learned – summarized data and possibly what was emerging.

Validity and Reliability

Internal Validity

Merriam (1988) explained that internal validity "deals with the question of how one's findings match reality" (p. 166). Because a qualitative case study design takes place in a natural setting, internal validity is considered a strength. As the researcher I was interested in participants' understandings of their experiences with and perceptions of school consolidation. Or, as Pope (2001) explained in her book *"Doing School" How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed Out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students*, I wanted to find out what is going on inside of students' heads as they sat in the classroom each day.

Yin (1994) explained that one way to enhance internal validity is by using pattern-matching. In the data analysis phase, pattern-matching compares one pattern or theme with other patterns or themes. Yin further explained that successful matching of a pattern to other patterns provides evidence that the patterns or explanations are correct. As the researcher I attempted to ensure accuracy in the data collection phase as I reported how participants view school consolidation and their experiences associated with this phenomenon. It was also my intent to use care in constructing coding categories to enhance internal validity.

The practice of data triangulation is the use of "multiple-data-collection methods [that] contributes to the trustworthiness of the data" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 24). Therefore, to enhance this study's internal validity I used multiple data collection methods. Individual and focus group interviews, document reviews, and when possible, participant observations were employed. Data was also collected in multiple settings. I attended and observed as many in-school and after-school activities and meetings as time allowed.

External Validity

Merriam (1988) defined external validity as the "extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (p. 173). In other words, how generalizable are the findings to other people and places? Regardless of its merits, the main opposition to the case study method is its lack of generalization to larger populations. Yet, Yin (1994) explained that "case studies…are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universe" (p. 10) and Stake (1995) argued that a generalization is not necessary because of the ability to provide information-rich data, which is important to the field of social sciences.

Eisner and Peshkin (1990) explained that the goal of qualitative research is not to produce results that are standardized. Instead, it is to provide a description of the participants' perspectives that is consistent. I chose a case study design because of my desire to understand one particular situation in depth, not what is necessarily true of many. However, I employed maximum variation sampling as a means to strengthen external validity, using a small sample and showing common patterns.

Perhaps a better way to view external validity in qualitative research is to think of it as reader or user generalizability (Merriam, 1995). For example, by providing rich, thick descriptions of the setting, the participants, and phenomenon under study, readers can determine the extent to which the findings can be applied to their own experiences. I sought to describe students, administrators, and teachers' experiences in such a way that readers can understand the phenomenon and make good decisions about the applicability of the findings to their own circumstances.

Reliability

Reliability relates to replication; in other words if the study was undertaken again, would the findings be the same? Merriam (1995) stated that measurements, observations, and interpretations can be wrong, and just because multiple people experience a phenomenon in a particular way, it does not make the observations more reliable. Also, reliability is hard to obtain in a qualitative study if the data are from multiple representations from multiple participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that instead of demanding the same results from replications, it makes more sense to view qualitative research reliability from a different angle. In other words, given the data collected do the results make sense – are they consistent and dependable?

To strengthen reliability I followed Merriam's (1988) suggestions and used the audit trail technique. This meant keeping detailed descriptions on how the data were collected, how the coding categories were determined, and how other decisions were made. This audit trail technique serves as a "manual" for others wishing to conduct a similar study.

Howley (1996) and Howley and Bickel's (1999) research show that smaller school size tends to benefit students in impoverished communities. I contend that because of Howley and Bickel's previous research findings and others discussed in this chapter, and because the students are economically marginalized, a great deal can be learned from these students who were most adversely affected by the school consolidation.

Conclusion

Chapter three outlined the questions examined in this study and described the case study design and the research procedures such as sampling, data collection, analysis, and interpretation used. This chapter also provided an introductory description of the participants and the setting. Finally, the issues of validity, both internal and external, as well as reliability were also examined. Chapter four provides a description of the four junior/senior high schools, the new consolidated school, and concludes with a description of the population and sample.

CHAPTER FOUR: SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

This chapter provides an overview of the research site and the study's participants. It begins with descriptions of Clayton County, continues with descriptions of the local school system, the county's four former junior/senior high schools, the new consolidated school, the resistance to the county's recent high school consolidation, and concludes with descriptions of the population and sample.

Clayton County, West Virginia

Clayton County, West Virginia, population 22,108, was created by the state's legislature in 1867. The county, located in a rural area of the state, encompasses 439 square miles, has a population density of 50 people per square mile, and is nestled among four other rural and two more urban counties (U.S. Census, 2000). *[Clayton] County West Virginia and Its People* described this county's earlier economic times: "mines [that] operated around 1911 and continued to bring prosperity to this part of [Clayton] County until the early thirties and the Great Depression, after which they ceased to operate and many structures were dismantled" (McCormick, 1991, p. 15). It was then that workers traveled to the coal mines in adjacent counties to find work. However, work in the coal fields has given way to unemployment, poverty, and geographic isolation (Chadwick, 2002). According to the U. S. Department of Labor (2007b), Clayton County reported an unemployment rate of 4.4 percent for December 2007 (www.bls.gov/r03/wvlaus.htm). The leading industries and chief agricultural products are petroleum, natural gas, lumber, tobacco, corn, and potatoes.

Politics fuel many state and county educational decisions, school consolidation being the most controversial (Spence, 1998). In fact, Spence described Clayton County in this manner: "Politics is the lifeblood of [Clayton] County, a small, rural, sparsely-populated area of rugged farmland and high unemployment sandwiched between the industrialized [area] to the north and the dying coalfields…to the south" (p. 8). On the other hand, Carol, a participant in this study, described this county as the "most peaceful place in the state. There is a very strong community feeling here, even though it's still split into four small communities."

Beginning in 1914, the first high school was built in Clayton County, and by 1954, the fourth junior/senior high school was completed. Prior to the high school consolidation in fall 2006, the county was home to four junior/senior high schools, seven elementary schools, and one career and technical center (Chadwick, 2002).

Clayton County School System

The West Virginia State Board of Education assumed administrative control of the Clayton County, West Virginia, school system in June 2000, after the county failed to make adequate progress in eliminating deficiencies identified in a 1999 state audit (Chadwick, 2002). The 2000 report found "that the county had over 200 deficiencies in areas ranging from hiring practices, [to] teacher certification, curriculum and instruction, and cleanliness of facilities" (www.wvde.state.wv.us/news/183).

As a result of the four schools' low test scores and a decreasing population in Clayton County, the state of West Virginia decided to close the doors of the four junior/senior high schools at the end of the 2006 school year, and build one larger consolidated high school. The state argued that buildings were outdated and costly to

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operate for the number of students in the county. Even though the decision was made to consolidate the four schools, the SBA issued funds for renovations to the outdated facilities in order for the older buildings to remain open for the county's elementary/middle school students. According to an article written by Gregory (2007a) in *The Lincoln Journal*, the costs associated with the older schools, which were a major argument for the school consolidation, are still intact, but these costs are now coupled with the costs of operating the new high school. In November 2007, *The Lincoln Journal* explained that the fiscal officer for Clayton County Schools issued a report outlining the costs of both the new consolidated school and the other county schools. The report showed that Clayton County High School's annual utility expenses totaled $305,992. The central office and other county schools accumulated an additional $649,256 in utility and maintenance costs. Regardless of these costs, the report showed that the school system is seeing some economic benefits as a result of the school consolidation. The school's efforts to be environmentally cost effective and save on energy costs will be explained further in this chapter.

As mentioned previously, students' test scores were another major argument for school consolidation. Shown in Table 1 are Clayton County's 2005-06 Statewide Testing scores for Grade 10 in all four schools. Three of the four junior/senior high schools reported Math scores below the statewide 69 proficient percentage, with Hanover reporting a 34 proficient percentage. Henry High School's Math testing score of 69 equaled the state proficient percentage. In Reading, all schools fell below the state proficient percentage level in all categories for Grade 10. Also shown as a subgroup are scores for students identified as Low SES in Grade 10. Henry High School reported a 65

proficient percentage, above the statewide 58 proficient percentage. It is important to note that the majority of Hanover students chose not to attend the new consolidated high school; therefore, this school's scores, included in Table 1, have been eliminated from Clayton County High School's Statewide Testing Scores discussed later.

Table 1

2005-06 Clayton County Schools Statewide Testing Scores, Grade 10

2005-06 Low SES Scores, Grade 10

	Proficient %	Proficient %
School	Math	Reading
Douglass	47	59
Low SES	38	45
Gateway	41	42
Low SES	35	40
Hanover	34	52
Low SES	29	46
Henry	69	72
Low SES	65	62
COUNTY	48	56
Low SES	40	46
STATE	69	76
Low SES	58	64

West Virginia Report Cards (2006)

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The West Virginia Department of Education reported additional general school information from each of the four junior/senior high schools, Grades 7-12, for 2005-06. However, to simplify comparisons with Table 4 discussed later, Clayton County High School's data in Table 2 includes only data for Grades 9-12. Student enrollment, number of students receiving free/reduced lunch, percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch, average class size, dropout rate, and graduation rate are shown in Table 2. Gateway High School reported the largest student enrollment for Grades 9-12 at 363, and rural Hanover High School reported the lowest enrollment at 196. The percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch ranged from 49 percent at Henry to 69 percent at Gateway. All schools, except Henry High School, fell below the state level of 19.2 for average class size, with Gateway High School falling substantially lower at 14.8. Two schools, Douglass and Gateway, reported a higher dropout rate than the 2.7 percent state level, and Henry High School at 77.1 percent was the only school whose graduation rate fell below the state level of 84.6 percent.

Table 2

2005-06 Clayton County Schools General Information, Grades 9-12

Information	State	Douglass	Gateway	Hanover	Henry
Enrollment	83,477	298	363	196	243
Free/Reduced Lunch	33,434	186	251	134	118
Percentage	40%	62%	69%	68%	49%
Average Class Size	19.2	17.0	14.8	17.4	19.8
Dropout Rate	2.7%	6.1%	4.0%	2.4%	2.1%
Graduation Rate	84.6%	84.8%	87.7%	85.4%	77.1%

West Virginia Report Cards (2006)

Clayton County Schools and Administration Information for Grades 7-12, which includes number of teachers, pupil/teacher ratio, and percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers for 2005-06, is shown in Table 3. Both Douglass and Henry high schools reported a higher pupil/teacher ratio than the state level of 14.2 percent. Douglass at 82.4 percent and Hanover, substantially lower at 51.4 percent, fell below the state level of 91.6 percent of classes taught by highly qualified teachers. The West Virginia Department of Education (2006) defined dropout rate as the "percentage of students in grades 7-12 who left school, for any reason except death, before graduation or without transferring to another school…and defined the graduation rate as the "number of high school graduates divided by the sum of the number of high school graduates and the number of dropouts from the class for the high school years" (http://wveis.k12.wv.us). The department also defined low SES or economically disadvantaged students as

"students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch through the National School Lunch

Program" (http://wveis.k12.wv.us).

Table 3

2005-06 Clayton County Schools and Administration Information, Grades 7-12

Information	State	Douglass	Gateway	Hanover	Henry
# Teachers		30	39	21	23
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	14.2	15.1	13.3	13.8	15.7
% of Classes Taught by					
Highly Qualified Teachers	91.6%	82.4%	92.3%	51.4%	92.4%

West Virginia Report Cards (2006)

The following section provides a brief history of each of the four former

junior/senior high schools and continues with a description of the new consolidated

school, Clayton County High School. This chapter concludes with a description of

Clayton's County's resistance to school consolidation and with brief descriptions of the

population and sample.

Clayton County's Former Junior/Senior High Schools

Gateway High School

According to Thompson (1991), Gateway High School was built in 1926-27, and

held classes in an elementary school with three teachers. In 1927, the school, with its blue

and gold school colors, relocated in a new building consisting of a basement, four

classrooms, library, and two halls. The school was strategically located near a river,

railroad, and on a state highway, making it easier for students to attend. There were five

teachers and 150 students the first year, with each student taking four subjects a year. To

graduate, each student completed sixteen units. A second section to the school was later

constructed in 1929-30, adding a gymnasium, auditorium, three classrooms, and a

laboratory. To meet the needs of its teachers, the school held classes for any rural teacher

who did not hold a high school degree.

   To learn more about Clayton County and its schools, I, along with a fellow

doctoral student, took a driving tour of Clayton County in January 2007. We began our

tour at Gateway High School, the most populated school in the county. As we approached

the school we noticed an old, rusty sign with peeling blue and gold paint that indicated

that it was Gateway High School. The sign had not been changed to reflect its new status

of a middle school for grades six – eight. The exterior of the building was in need of

repair. The window panes were rusty and the basement windows had been painted over

with blue paint. We drove around the school trying to find any sports facilities and

discovered a football/all-purpose field. Located beside the field was a very small

elementary school, situated close to a river. In front of the elementary school, there were

several old rocking horses built on springs that were anchored with cement in the ground.

   Two of the study's student participants, Sam and Rusty, previously attended

Gateway High School. Sam disliked Gateway, but explained that if given a choice he

would

      probably go back just so I can say I graduated from [Gateway], because

      that is where Dad grew up. I would be the first to graduate in the family

      from there but that is where everyone went. It would be more of a tradition

      thing, instead of graduating from a better school.

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Rusty described the school as "kind of like your roots. Like your family went there. Your parents went there; your parents' parents went there. It is like your roots." A sense of tradition was obvious as I talked with the participants; yet, as we drove away I could not help but wonder why the students regretted leaving such an old, run-down facility.

Hanover High School

The former Hanover High School is located 20 miles from Gateway High School and approximately 30 miles from the new consolidated school. Driving along the state route it was obvious that the area was more rural. The curvy roads were less populated with houses. Perhaps because the road was cut into a mountain, it was like driving through a state park with no houses along the road. The leafless trees provided a clear view. At one point the road dropped off on one side, its shoulders slipping away and we could see smaller roads along a creek at the bottom of the valley.

The former building of Hanover High School, now housing grades four – eight, had its new name, Hanover Intermediate, painted on the back of the old high school sign. The structure was small, but with its newer windows and blue painted doors, the school appeared to be in better condition than Gateway High School. There was a large football field next to the school taking up more space than the actual school.

Hanover High School, a school labeled by the West Virginia Department of Education as a "High Poverty School" in a state known for its poverty and rural communities, was built in the community because of residents' concerns about students traveling over dangerous, mountainous roads to the other county schools (Spence, 1998). The school opened on October 2, 1954.

According to Slavin (2005), it was here in this rural community that some of the hardest fought battles against consolidation transpired. This may be because Hanover High School is located approximately 30 miles from the consolidated school site as well as because for over fifty years the school served as a community center for local residents. In the 1990s, the county's school board issued a lawsuit to prevent consolidation efforts, but ultimately the resistance proved to be fruitless. The townspeople of Hanover claimed the state was "doing harm to children and violating their right to be educated" (Slavin, pp. 11-12). When the new consolidated school opened its doors many Hanover High School's former students were not in attendance. This may not have been unexpected. Slavin reported that the new school's size was unable to accommodate the number of students from the four previous junior/senior high schools.

When Clayton County High School opened in fall 2006, a majority of the students who previously attended Hanover crossed the county's borders and enrolled in a nearby high school, where in 2007, a new regional high school opened to accommodate the two counties' enrollment of approximately 700 students. According to Clayton's principal, the parents' decisions to enroll their children in another county's school were largely due to distance from the Hanover area to the new consolidated high school.

Nancy is the sole student participant who previously attended Hanover High School. Nancy's love for her community was evident as she noted,

> I really like where I live. I wouldn't change it. Sometimes I would say if I
> lived in [town], it would have been so much easier to get to school. I
> wouldn't have to get up so early. But then I say, "No, I don't want to live
> in [town]. I like to live where I have been born."

Initially Nancy planned to attend a nearby county's regional school rather than the new consolidated school. Perhaps because Nancy's mother works in Henry she decided to stay within the county and attend Clayton County High School. Regardless of her decision, Nancy beamed as she explained how much she

> loved [Hanover]…I knew all the kids and grew up with everyone. She
> described the school as "homey," and it wasn't so big and it wasn't so
> crowded. I liked it. I really didn't want to do anything more than what I
> did at [Hanover].

Douglass High School

Douglass High School, constructed in September 1914, was the first high school built in Clayton County (Spence, 1998). According to Goode (1991) the oil fields were booming during this period and people who moved to this area were interested in an education for their children. This one room high school, with one principal serving as the only faculty member, opened with thirteen students in a room beneath the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F) Lodge Hall.

A new building opened for the 1915-16 school year, and student enrollment grew. In fact, a dormitory was built in 1925 to accommodate the number of students who lived too far away for the daily commute. The high school soon expanded to include a gymnasium for basketball and other indoor activities. By 1952, the enrollment had increased beyond the capacity of the old building and a new school was built at the present site. As early as 1917, athletics played a significant role at Douglass High School and in the late 1970s the school became state football champions.

The school appeared smaller than Gateway and Hanover, but according to the West Virginia Department of Education (2007), Douglass High School had the second highest enrollment in the county. The building's students had been replaced by students in grades PK-8. The parking lot in front of the school was full; in fact some drivers would find it difficult to leave without others moving first. We saw two students hanging out of a second floor window as we approached the school, but as we pulled into the parking lot they shut the window and closed the blind. A sports field was located next to the old high school, and an adjacent building housing elementary students, had what appeared to be a new playground structure nearby. There were several large barren trees and numerous picnic tables in front of the two-story tan, brick building.

Brad, the only student participant who previously attended Gateway High School, described it as "a small school [and he] pretty much preferred it than [Clayton] County High School, plus the teachers weren't as strict." He also explained that the "teachers at [Douglass] actually try to be your friend." It was obvious that Brad missed the friendly atmosphere of this small, rural high school.

Henry High School

Henry High School, less than five miles from the new consolidated high school, is located in a small town. Businesses are nearby and the area could be described as less rural. The building is currently home to grades PK-8, and from the outside the school seems to be in better condition than the other three schools. New black framed windows updated the look and with the activity from businesses and traffic, this building seems more modern than the other more rural schools. Missing from the front windows were the air conditioners we saw protruding from the other schools' windows. This school was

originally constructed from native stone from a nearby rock quarry. Construction began

in 1919 at the cost of $60,000 which was provided for by bonds. Information about the

bonds, published in two county newspapers, was placed in a cornerstone laid in 1920 by

the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. The building was completed in 1922, and the

name was changed to Henry High School. In 1949, the school caught fire and suffered

damages of approximately $300,000. After viewing all four junior/senior high schools, I

noted in my fieldnotes:

> How can four schools, deemed too old for a high school population,
>
> suddenly be adequate for elementary and middle school students? Yes,
>
> Henry had gone through some renovations, but the other schools certainly
>
> had not. The other three schools, if they have been worked on, still are in
>
> need of repair…If these schools are better than the old middle schools –
>
> what kind of shape were the previous middle schools in?

Two of the former GRP members, Carol and Joyce, previously attended Henry

High School. Carol described her former school as "small [and] everyone knew everyone.

I loved it." She also explained that the "teachers could have a more one-on-one with you

because the classes were small…It was where my mom and dad graduated. I wanted to

graduate there too." Joyce also described Henry as a "small school. Everybody knew

everybody pretty much, and what they did. There were not a whole lot of kids in the

classes, and you knew all the teachers." Joyce saw this as an advantage because "you get

really close to the teachers and you could ask for help."

Clayton County [Consolidated] High School

Our driving tour ended at Clayton County High School, built from 2004-06, which opened its doors in time for the 2006-07 school year. According to the West Virginia Report Cards (2007), the school ranks 37th in size in West Virginia. The main entrance to the school was impressive with its windows spanning two stories, providing the visitor a peek into the school's library. The new, light-colored brick, coupled with the bright red, yellow, blue, and white interior, contrasts sharply with the neutral colors of the older schools. The career technical center and community college are located in the left wing, the gymnasium on the right.

In an attempt to be a model school for others seeking to save energy costs, Clayton County High School's green, energy-saving features include a library with large windows permitting sunlight to warm the interior. Motion detectors reduce energy costs by shutting off when students or others are not in the hallway. Boilers, chillers, and air conditioners are rated energy-savers. Bright colors cut down on the need for light, and according to Gregory's article in *The Lincoln Journal* (2007b), the school's green-school status showed a savings when comparing square foot costs. A report showed that Clayton County High School's utility cost per square foot was $1.386; only two other schools in the county showed a lower square foot cost - $1.364 and $0.976 respectively.

Since the new school opened, the Clayton County school system has had two county superintendents at the helm. According to Carpenter (2007) the first resigned just ten months into the state appointed position in April, 2007. Carpenter's article in *The Lincoln Standard*, another county newspaper, provided an interview with the state-appointed superintendent just two weeks before her resignation. When asked if there had

"been a real difference in being a state-appointed superintendent versus…previous superintendent positions," the superintendent replied that the "main charge in coming to [Clayton] County was to work with curriculum, as the consolidation was behind us; however, the consolidation issue is still a barrier for some" (p. 8).

Another newspaper article in *The Lincoln Journal* (2007) provided evidence of this barrier when Ramey, a county school board member, reported that the construction of the new high school, costing approximately $36 million, along with the construction of the new regional high school located in a nearby county, costing $18 million, "means $54 million of taxpayer dollars has been spent for 1,200 students. Anyone can do the math on that and see what the cost is per student……that is far beyond what it has ever cost anywhere else" (Gregory, 2007a, p. 1). Rural School and Community Trust (2007a) reported that the "new high school opened…with the dubious distinction of being the most expensive high school building, [based on construction costs] on a per pupil basis, in West Virginia history" (p. 3).

A major argument for the school consolidation centered on students' low test scores. Clayton County High School's first Statewide Testing scores, Grade 10, (2006-07) are shown in Table 4. When compared with the four schools' averaged scores in Table 1, Table 4 shows that Clayton County High School's Grade 10 scores increased in Math – from the county's 47.75 percent to 51.41 percent, and in Reading – from 56.25 percent to 58.29 percent. Low SES students' scores also increased from 41.75 percent in Math to 47.44 percent and in Reading from 48.25 percent to 52.94 percent. It should be noted that Clayton's testing scores shown in Table 4 do not include Hanover High School's low test scores shown in Table 1 since an overwhelming majority of the

Hanover students chose to attend school in a nearby county. Therefore, to show a more appropriate comparison, Table 5 shows the average Reading and Math scores for Douglass, Gateway and Henry (the three remaining schools). When Clayton County High School's testing scores are compared with those from the three former junior/senior high schools, Clayton's Grade 10 scores decreased in Math – from 52.33 percent to 51.41 percent, but in Reading, scores increased from 57.67 percent to 58.29 percent. However, in the low SES subgroup Math scores increased from 46.00 percent to 47.44 percent and Reading scores increased from 49.00 percent to 52.94 percent.

Table 4

2006-07 Clayton County High School Testing Scores, Grade 10, and 2005-06 Clayton County Schools Statewide Testing Scores

	Enrollment	2006-07 Math	2005-06 Four Schools Math Average	2006-07 Reading	2005-06 Four Schools Reading Average
Grade 10	242	51.41	47.75	58.29	56.25
Low SES	99	47.44	41.75	52.94	48.25
STATE	20,292	68.75	69	76.26	76
Low SES	8,571	57.54		65.41	

West Virginia Report Cards (2007)

Table 5

2006-07 Clayton County High School Testing Scores, Grade 10, and 2005-06 Clayton County Schools Statewide Testing Scores (Excluding Hanover High School)

	Enrollment 2006-07	2006-07 Math	2005-06 Three Schools Math Average	2006-07 Reading	2005-06 Three Schools Reading Average
Grade 10	242	51.41	52.33	58.29	57.67
Low SES	99	47.44	46.00	52.94	49.00
STATE	20,292	68.75	69	76.26	76
Low SES	8,571	57.54		65.41	

West Virginia Report Cards (2007)

Clayton County High School's 2007-08 General Information Data are shown in Table 6. The school reported 863 students in grades 9-12, with a 57.36 percentage of students identified as free/reduced lunch. Three of the former schools (Douglass, Gateway, and Henry), reported 904 students in grades 9-12, with a 61.40 percentage of students identified as free/reduced lunch. As previously shown in Table 2, the four junior/senior high schools reported 1,100 students with a 62.63 free/reduced lunch percentage. Once again, it is important to note that the majority of Hanover students chose not to attend the new consolidated high school; therefore, this school has been eliminated from Clayton County High School's General Information Data shown in Table 6.

Table 6

2007-08 Clayton County High School General Information Data, and 2005-06 Clayton

County Schools General Information Data (Excluding Hanover High School)

	School	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Clayton Enrollment	863	297	187	192	187
Three Schools Enrollment	904	265	260	201	178
Clayton Free/Reduced Lunch	495	188	99	105	103
Three Schools Free/Reduced Lunch	555	178	178	115	84
Clayton Percentage	57.36	63.30	52.94	54.69	55.08
Three Schools Percentage	61.40	67.17	68.47	57.21	47.19

West Virginia Report Cards (2006 and 2007)

Clayton County's Resistance to School Consolidation

In the mid 1970s, a group of parents in Clayton County sued the West Virginia

State Board of Education claiming unfairness in the distribution of tax monies for

education. The suit claimed that the funding formula favored the wealthier counties over

the more poor areas (www.wvculture.org/history/timetrl/ttmay.html). The court case, settled in 1982, mandated that West Virginia strive to offer equitable funding for education to all counties in the state.

After an analysis of the state's educational system, Judge Arthur Recht ruled that the legislature "must completely reconstruct the entire system of education in West Virginia" (Spence, 1998, p. 18), and deemed the state's schools as "woefully inadequate" when compared against high quality educational standards. The Recht Decision declared that the state's public schools failed to meet the "thorough and efficient system" (Spence, p. 10) standard of public education demanded by the West Virginia Constitution. The judge ordered that school financing be restructured to provide the same opportunities to all children, regardless of property values in their respective counties. In 1989, at the request of then Governor Caperton, the West Virginia legislature created the SBA to carry out the mandate of the Recht Decision (Chadwick, 2002; Purdy, 1997). The purpose of the SBA was to finance capital improvements for school districts by selling bonds, but Slavin (2005) argued that essentially the SBA's "policy has been to fund only new, consolidated schools" (p. 11). Likewise, Linda Martin, former coordinator of West Virginia Challenge, a statewide organization of parents, educators, and others committed to maintaining and improving small community schools, viewed the Recht Decision as a plan for an expanded curriculum, services, and facilities, and as a massive push for consolidation of the schools in West Virginia (Spence, 1998).

Martin argued that consolidation was an attempt to move the poorest children in the state away from their small, rural community schools to large schools located miles from their homes, "where they would be ridiculed for their speech, dress, or family

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background" (Spence, 1998, p. 23). Decades after the decision, Martin still believed that the "twin legacies of the Recht Decision are consolidated schools and the consolidation of power by the state" (Spence, p. 28). In an effort to describe the questionable logic of consolidating schools based on a state's or county's decision to save money, Martin provided this analogy:

> [Economy of scale] says that the larger numbers of children you can serve in a certain area, the better spent your money is. In a sense, that's a wonderful theory if you were producing nuts and bolts or car steering wheels that didn't have feelings or didn't have to ride on a bus to get there. (cited in Spence, p. 37)

> In 1991, residents in Clayton County defeated a bond which would have led to two consolidated schools – one serving Henry and Douglass and the other serving Gateway and Hanover students. The SBA responded to this opposition by refusing to give monies to the county school system to either upgrade or maintain its buildings (Chadwick, 2002). However, this defeat did not end the push for consolidation. Later that year Hanover High School was designated as a "seriously impaired" school, with a poor attendance record, a 33 percent dropout rate, and low test scores (Spence, 1998). The county superintendent blamed parents for not placing enough emphasis on education. However, one school dropout claimed that placing the blame on parents does not solve the unfairness of education for students struggling in the four county schools.

> Twenty percent of the kids get the best of everything. Eighty percent get what's left. You're in a category. They know who you are and who your parents are. People who have introductory calculus or physics are

politicians' sons or daughters. What they mean is, 'I know where you're

from and you don't need this.' So you battle for a while but then you just

give up. (cited in Spence, p. 59)

Throughout the 1990s, plans for consolidation were continually met with strong

community resistance, and therefore were defeated by the county school board. In

December 2000, when Clayton County sought to improve its educational system,

Concordia, Inc. evaluated five West Virginia counties' ten-year Comprehensive

Education Facilities Plans (CEFP). Each plan was written to apply for a $20,000 grant

given by the West Virginia SBA (Spence, 2002a). In West Virginia, the SBA controls

the money awarded to counties in efforts to build new or renovate existing schools. This

initiative was targeted to facilitate a planning process thereby allowing each county to

develop guidelines explaining their county's plans for providing the best education for

students in their respective counties.

The SBA stated that committees were formed to assist with the facilities planning

process and to provide opportunities for county residents to participate in the Statewide

Planning Institute of 1998. However, community residents were not given adequate

opportunities to voice their concerns about school consolidation (Chadwick, 2002). Upon

examining the counties' plans, Concordia, Inc. found a major flaw in four of the five

counties. In particular, with Clayton County's plan it was noted that "the majority of

those named to the committee by the local school board were school board employees"

(Spence, 2002a, p. 2). The committee included no student members, and very few

parents, but did include many people who were known to be in favor of school

consolidation.

As the committee undertook the county's planning process and "it came time to approve or reject the plan, those who were added to the committee were told they wouldn't be part of the process" (Spence, 2002a, p. 2). The result was that "only eight people (out of the approximately 50 people named to the two committees) voted for the plan, which called for widespread school consolidation" (p. 2). Community residents serving on the committee were not given the opportunity to voice their opposition (Chadwick, 2002). In fact, Spence reported that one Clayton County resident remarked that "'research that was presented was always on the pro-side of large consolidation. The committee tried to bring up a study that was anti-large school, but it was not elaborated on'" (p. 3). Residents claimed a "lack of genuineness on the part of the school system to seek 'real' input from residents" (Chadwick, p. vii).

In 2002, *The Charleston Gazette* published an award-winning series on school consolidation written by Eyre and Finn. In the article, the SBA admitted to not saving the taxpayers any money. The cost savings associated with closing schools had been negated by the increased expenditures on building new schools, increasing transportation costs, and climbing administrators' salaries.

Long bus rides were a concern voiced by many rural community residents faced with the possibility of school consolidation (Slavin, 2005). Reporters Eyre and Finn of *The Charleston Gazette* (2002) reported in the series *Closing Costs: School Consolidation in West Virginia*, that long bus rides increase the cost of transporting students further away from home. Spence (2000a) reported that in 1998, MGT of America, Inc., an independent research and management consulting firm retained by the West Virginia Department of Education, Office of Transportation and Facilities, found

that the "State of West Virginia operates the most expensive transportation system in the nation" (p. 1) – based on cost per pupil and cost per mile. Parents' protests against longer bus rides failed to influence the committee's decision. A Clayton County committee member explained that "'We offered geographic information and driving distances for children. It fell on deaf ears….'" (Spence, 2002, p. 3). Another resident claimed, "It was kind of political – they were after a political agenda and not what is right for the people'" (Spence, 2002, p. 9).

To illustrate the state's support of the consolidation in Clayton County, the governor in 1991, claimed that the longer bus rides would give students an opportunity to socialize – an opportunity they would not have if they remained at their small, rural community school (Hughes, 1991). Former State Superintendent, Henry Marockie, in 1990, showed no support for the rural county's fight to retain their small schools and preserve their rural communities: "The ultimate value of consolidation is not consolidated buildings, but educated children. In order to get those skills, one has to give up something. They must give up the nostalgia of clinging to rural culture" (Spence, 1998, p. 92).

In 1994, the county voted to build one consolidated school, a school to house the county's students in grades 5 through 12. The county fought this decision and the State Board voted not to accept the plan. But, once again the consolidation movement did not end. During the following spring, the West Virginia Department of Education issued a report declaring that Clayton County students were not receiving the necessary education in order to succeed in college or enter the workforce.

According to an article in the newsletter *Rural Policy Matters* (2007a), published by The Rural School and Community Trust, Ramey stated there was a proposal in the 1990s to close the county's four junior/senior high schools. It was then that Ramey, a current county school board member, decided to lead the community effort to stop it. He explained that he

> understood that community and having opportunities to be involved in
> your own community are important…When kids are forced out of their
> community and into long bus rides they become isolated. They are forced
> to disengage from community life. When people disengage from civic and
> community participation, that is a major downfall of any society.

The county submitted to the state a facilities plan to keep the four schools open; however, the plan was rejected. Later in 2000, the state took over the county, relieved the local school board of authority, and proceeded with the consolidation.

At least three of the six student participants were somewhat involved in the school consolidation resistance. For example, when Carol first heard that her small school would close she "thought it was a big joke. I didn't think they could do that. People were just too far away." She admitted that she was in "denial." Carol wanted to graduate from the same place in which her "parents graduated. It's really close knit."

In protest of the consolidation, members of the GRP, Carol and Joyce, traveled to the state capital in February 2005, "trying to get a bill passed, the no cost bussing bill. We were trying to raise awareness…trying to make the bus rides easier." Both Carol and Joyce explained that the bill proposed transporting the elementary students separately from the middle/high school students.

They were trying not to make it longer by not having the elementary

students on there. So they would try to pick up the elementary from one

area, and busses would run a wider area for just the high schools.

However, the bill failed and younger students ride to school with the much older high

school students.

Carol explained that their trip to the capital was intended to shorten the length of

bus rides. They carried signs such as "Honk for Shorter Bus Rides." They made a "paper

chain. It was really, really long, representing the hours on the bus." The chains were

carried in a fake coffin and signified

how many hours were dead. We went and marched to the governor's

house. We went up and opened it. We were trying to walk in formation; it

was kind of weird. We left the coffin on the governor's step, and told him

we would be back. They thought it was a death threat. They had moved it

back to one of his garages to figure out what it was all about.

Sam also was unhappy when he initially heard about the school consolidation. In

fact, Sam, along with another BRP member, attended protest meetings because he did not

"want the school to close." He explained that "nobody really thought that it was going to

happen so they didn't push it a whole lot." Yet, he attended anti-consolidation meetings

because "we thought if enough people signed that little paper, they wouldn't do it. We

went to two or three meetings, so we would sign in to show we were against it…we

thought it would help."

At the age of 18, Sam understood how important Gateway High School was to the

community. He tried to explain to me the school's connection to the community. Sam

contended that without Gateway no one knows the community. In other words, people will cease to remember this community now that the school is gone. He ended by saying, "Now there is nothing you could say" about our community.

Sports played an important role in the Gateway community. Sam remarked that the attendance at Clayton's games does not compare to the number of people who attended games at Gateway.

If you go to a football game here [Clayton] there would be 60 to 70 people, and you would be lucky to get 100 people in the stands. At Gateway, you would have all the bleachers filled up, all the side lines covered. There [were] on an average of 300 to 400 people. Everybody came.

Nancy remembered sitting in class at [Hanover] High School listening to teachers talking about the impending school consolidation. She sat there and hoped

the parents [would] stop it…Everybody [would] say no, no, no. If [the other three schools] want to consolidate, leave us alone. We are all the way on the other end of the county. We shouldn't have to drive way over there, or go to the [regional school]…I went home and my mom saw it on the news, and they were consolidating the next year, and it was our last year at Hanover, pretty much final. I cried. I hated it. I hated leaving my friends, because I only had like four or five that came with me.

Nancy was not directly involved in the resistance efforts, but her grandmother went to most planning meetings. Nancy explained that her grandmother said

people would just start standing up and telling them why consolidation

was bad; no one had a good reason for consolidation. They tried to do

petitions…They tried to do tons of stuff, but there was so many [more]

people for it than people against it. The people that were for it didn't have

a good reason. Why would you put four county high schools that were

pretty much rivals and pretty much hate each other and put them in a

school…They tried to do tons of stuff because there was so many people

for it than against it.

Unlike, Sam, Rusty, Carol, Brad, and Nancy, Joyce did not feel the same

connection to her small, rural school. Since she was born in Tennessee, she was "kind of

"excited [about the new school]. It really didn't bother me like it did a lot of people. I

wasn't really close to [Henry] like everybody else. I thought [consolidation] was a good

idea."

As discussed in chapter two, the population most affected by large school size is

often the economically marginalized students. Spence's (2000b) research suggested a

"widening achievement gap between disadvantaged and advantaged students over the

course of 13 years of public schooling. In other words, the rich get further ahead, while

the poor fall further and further behind" (p. 4). Spence also reported that "small schools

and small school systems offer low-income students the best opportunity to achieve" (p.

1). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore students' transition from a small

school to a larger school, and to explore and identify what enabled and/or constrained the

school success of economically marginalized students in a rural consolidated high school.

The population for this study was students in both the BRP and GRP in Clayton County who attended the new school.

Description of the Population

The BRP and GRP were "designed to help students to develop the skills and emotional resilience necessary to promote positive mental health, engage in pro social behavior, and prevent violent behavior and drug abuse" (personal communication, September, 2006). Both programs were sponsored by the AWLP located in Clayton County, West Virginia. However, due to a loss of funding, the BRP is the only youth development program now in operation. Criteria for being in the BRP include: poverty; potential to quit school; anti-social behavior; absenteeism; delinquency; potential for drug abuse; negative attitudes; family problems; involvement in pregnancy; aggression; violent behavior; and poor (personal communication, September, 2006). The GRP was described as a social-change oriented youth program focusing on the development of leadership skills by promoting the girls' strengths. The AWLP seeks to build on students' strengths thereby empowering them to make better personal and educational decisions.

According to MacDowell's (1992) first year narrative and analysis of the *[Douglass] Drop Out Prevention Project*, he received a $400 grant from the State 4-H Foundation to start a program at Douglass High School for boys in grades 9 – 10. MacDowell explained that Douglass was targeted because the school had more youth on probation than any other county high school, and he had a working relationship with the school's principal and found him supportive. The program began that year with 11 male participants. MacDowell remarked that he soon "found [himself] drawn more and more

into their lives…I was becoming an advocate for these youth in a system where they had no advocate" (p. 2).

The GRP began in 1996 with eight girls in one junior high school. In 1999, the program expanded to include three schools and over 65 participating girls. The GRP was one of twelve youth development organizations in the United States selected to be supported by the Ms. Foundation's Collaborative Fund for Youth-Led Social Change program. Michelle Gaines, founder of the Appalachian Women's Leadership Project, explained that the youth development programs work with teen girls and teen boys, separately, to develop leadership and skills as a way for improving the future for these rural youths.

Members of the GRP participated in community and social activism initiatives. For example, faced with the threat of school consolidation in Clayton County, students in these programs participated in a social change initiative whereby they

> worked on an anti-consolidation campaign for two years, starting by
> interviewing students and parents throughout [Clayton] County. They
> have spoken out at public hearings, have written petitions against lengthy
> bus rides, and lobbied legislators. They are challenging the educational
> system, both at the local and state levels, and they are making an impact.
> (Gaines, n.d., p.2)

In 2003, the AWLP initiated the BRP, which currently includes boys in grades 9 - 12. According to the program literature, the program includes monthly in-school meetings focusing on team building, leadership, setting goals, coping skills, trust, communication, problem solving/conflict resolution, boy-code, healthy relationships,

violence, diversity, avoiding drug abuse, and handling anger. There are also after-school

discussion meetings and monthly teambuilding activities, along with community service

projects. Adventure-based learning activities are also planned approximately three times

a year (personal communication, September, 2006).

Both programs have tried to build youth resilience. Gaines (n.d.) expressed

confidence in the ability of the students to create change in this poor, rural Appalachian

community. Currently, the boys' program operates at Clayton County High School with

approximately 10-15 students.

Description of the Sample

The sampling method used for this study is known as purposeful sampling. This

sampling strategy offered an opportunity to gain insight into economically marginalized

students' experiences with and perceptions of rural high school consolidation at Clayton

County High School. Chapter five provides profiles of each student participant. A profile

of each teacher who was identified by one or more of the students provides additional

data concerning each student. Immediately following each student profile are data

describing factors that enabled or constrained student success.

Three boys and three girls were identified for inclusion in this study: two

sophomores, three juniors, and one senior. All students are identified as economically

marginalized and White, but the students are different in a number of ways. Some

students participated in extracurricular activities, others did not. There were two students

from Henry, two from Gateway, one from Douglass, and one from Hanover. Some

experienced academic success at Clayton whereas others struggled with the high

expectations. Also, seven teachers were identified by the students for inclusion in this

study. Table 7 shows a matrix illustrating the results of the maximum variation sampling technique used to select student participants.

Table 7

Maximum Variation Sampling Technique

Variation	Douglass	Gateway	Hanover	Henry
Decreased in Achievement	Brad	Rusty		
Stayed Same or Increased in Achievement		Sam	Nancy	Carol Joyce
Participation in Extracurricular Activities		Sam		Carol Joyce Nancy
No Participation in Extracurricular Activities	Brad	Rusty		
Program of Study (CTE)	Brad	Sam Rusty	Nancy	Carol Joyce
College Prep			Nancy	Carol Joyce

Conclusion

Chapter four provided descriptions of Clayton County, West Virginia, the local school system, the county's four former junior/senior high schools, the new consolidated school, the resistance to the county's recent high school consolidation and concluded with brief descriptions of the population and sample. Chapter five will provide brief

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personal profiles of the student and teacher participants and single case analyses of the

student participants identifying factors that enabled them to achieve student success.

CHAPTER FIVE: SINGLE CASE ANALYSES OF ENABLING FACTORS

FOR THRIVING STUDENTS

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge concerning the ways economically marginalized students, who were perceived as at risk of school failure, experienced and perceived school consolidation in a rural West Virginia community. The data presented in this chapter were collected over an eighteen month period – September of 2006 to March of 2008 – with the majority of the data collected during the months of January and February in 2008. Data were collected from individual interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and written documents. This study explored how six students experienced the transition from smaller community-based junior/senior high schools to a new county consolidated high school. In the pilot study, I initially began only interviewing and observing BRP participants; therefore the data from the boys are more information-rich than the data from the GRP participants. This chapter contains single case analyses of four students identifying factors that enabled their success at the consolidated school. Chapter six will contain single case analyses of two students identifying factors that constrained their student success at the new school. Chapter seven will present a cross-case analysis discussing themes that emerged across the six cases.

The transition from a small school to a larger school was explored with each student. Themes identified capture their experiences with the transition and reveal factors that enabled and/or constrained their success. The following sections describe four students including a brief personal profile followed by the student's school consolidation

experiences identifying factors that enabled his/her student success. Each section also includes comments by teachers who were identified by the students.

Sam's Participant Profile

Sam was in junior high school when he became one of the first five boys in the BRP. Formerly from Gateway High School, Sam is 18 years old and a senior at Clayton County High School. I interviewed Sam on four separate occasions, and observed him four other times at in-school and after-school activities sponsored by the BRP. I first met Sam in 2006, as I drove four boys to Charleston for an after-school activity. He wore a black toboggan, black tennis shoes, and a black shirt. When the boys talked, I turned on the recorder and asked questions in an attempt to understand their perspectives concerning school consolidation. Sam had many comments concerning the new school and he was often the first to offer his views during the interview.

I later met Sam in January 2008, at a local fast-food restaurant for our first one-on-one interview. It was apparent that Sam often visited this fast-food establishment and that he knew most everyone. Sam joked with the order takers behind the counter as he ordered three chicken sandwiches without mayonnaise. He nodded and said hello to several customers as they passed by our table on the way in and out of the restaurant. Sam appeared to maintain a tough guy attitude, but his ever-present smile gave me a peek of a more vulnerable teenager that I could only guess most teachers and administrators do not get a chance to see. Sam's curly hair, which last year touched his shoulders, is now cut short. It was cold that day, but his slender frame was missing a coat. Sam explained that he had given his coat to his girlfriend to wear, and that he really did not need one. I

wondered just how much he gets to eat, since Sam at the age of 18, is basically on his own.

Sam's parents divorced approximately five or six years ago. After the divorce, he moved from parent to parent until his father's death in 2007. First, Sam lived with his dad for nine months and then moved in with his mother for two years. Then, according to Sam, "mom threw me out. Then [I] went to live with dad, [and] lived with dad until he passed away in April." Once again Sam returned to stay with his mother for a couple of weekends, where he "stayed in the house mainly." According to Smith, Clayton's principal, Sam then

> stayed with his aunt and uncle, and she was the one that was killed a month or so ago in the first snow…I know whenever it happened, he came up to me, and said, "[Mr. Smith] when is this all going to end?" I said, "I don't know what to say to you buddy."

Sam still has some contact with his mother, and according to him, she has tried getting him a job working at a nearby discount store. However, at the conclusion of this study Sam was still looking for a job. He recalled being an only child and "most of the time staying at the house with dad and fished. We played outside a whole lot." According to one of Sam's teachers, he worshipped his dad and had to grow up fast after his father's death.

Sam described himself as "mainly a good kid" before entering Gateway High School. When Sam was asked to describe his former school he began by telling me about his eighth grade year: "I set the suspension record in one year. I was suspended 47 times in one school year." Sam continued by explaining the reasons: "disruption of class,

disobeyed authority, used verbal assault a few times, destruction of school property, vandalism." At one point in the interview I asked Sam to "compare the boy who I now know to the boy who was previously suspended 47 times." Sam replied, "He was a bad kid, used a whole lot of foul language. There were a lot of drugs." During the next two interviews I learned more about Sam's experiences with and perceptions of school at both Gateway and Clayton County High School.

Analysis of Sam – "Never Did Like Anybody Having Authority Over Me"

After analyzing the data from interviews and observations, I identified three factors that enabled Sam's success at Clayton County High School: (1) improved relationships: principal, teachers, and girlfriend; (2) building technology and welding – CTE classes; and (3) participation in football.

To best understand what enabled Sam to succeed at Clayton County High School, I first must explain what constrained his academic success at his former school. Sam provided ample evidence of the challenges he encountered at Gateway "where he never really learned a lot."

Sam liked the fact that Gateway High School was small, easy to get around in, and "it made everything smoother because you knew everybody." He recalled the students' enthusiasm and strong school spirit. Nevertheless, Sam did not like the small, rural school. He was adamant that teachers at Gateway High School did not understand him and would not "just leave [him] alone and let it be." In fact, he told me "I didn't get along with the teachers, [and I] didn't get along with the principals." As I tried to understand how one student could get suspended 47 times, I came to realize how well Sam understood himself. It seemed that this 18 year old student knew he had a problem

responding to people who exhibited authority over him and his actions. In fact, Sam admitted that he "never did like anybody having authority over [him], and he also understood what made him susceptible to defiant behavior and the importance of teachers remaining "calm" instead of yelling at him and sending him to the principal's office.

Small schools are noted for the benefits of the one-on-one attention teachers bestow upon their students. But that did not appear to be the case with Sam when he attended Gateway High School. During Sam's two individual interviews, I explored his relationships with teachers and the impact those relationships had on his ability to remain calm when faced with adversity. I began by asking him how he was suspended 47 times. Sam replied:

> Usually the attitude the person has towards the way they go to school and
> what's going to happen at school and exactly what somebody is going to
> tolerate. The attitude the teacher gives toward the person and they would
> tell me how it's going to go. I would have my own idea about that, and I
> have a real big problem with authority.

During the next interview, I asked Sam to further explain this comment. He replied, "Everyone has their own idea of what they are going to do while they are at school." I probed further and Sam continued.

> Teachers have their idea that they are going to come to school and that
> they are not going to put up with any of the kids talking or anything, and
> then that makes them stricter on the kids. Then you have teachers come
> and they don't care what the kids do. They let them do what they want to

do and when they want to. They are just going to pass them to get them

out of there.

Sam's negative opinions concerning the Gateway teachers surfaced throughout both interviews. In fact, he believed there was not "a whole lot of teaching [going on] at his former school." Sam argued that he went to school to get a degree, so he had to "come and sit in my chair, be quiet and do what they say." But, Sam admitted he had a difficult time conforming to their rules, mostly because he is a "very independent person and I know how to do a whole lot of stuff."

After listening further to Sam's description of some of the Gateway teachers, it came as no surprise that his inability to get along with teachers constrained his chances of succeeding in school. He was adamant that he knew "how [he] could learn best and get done." For example, he explained that "they never made no extra effort to make sure I stayed calm. They knew if they would say, "sit down and shut up, and you have to do your work," they knew it was going to be an argument. But, they did it anyways." I explored this comment further during an interview.

According to Sam, one of his math teachers at Gateway High School did not try to get along with him: "Me and _____ were two of the worse to get along. Me and her didn't agree…She didn't listen. She had her own idea of what was going on in that classroom." The director of the AWLP agreed and described Sam as smart and explained that Sam did well when he helped him with his algebra homework. But, regardless of his math ability Sam did not perform well in the class.

I could do the work. It's just the fact she got me upset and I wouldn't do it.

When [the] school year started the first six weeks, I had the highest grade

in any of her math classes. She had senior kids doing the same math and I

was doing better than them. She didn't talk to me a whole lot when the

year started. Then she started. She lost control with a couple other

students, so she started taking it out with me too, and that just never

worked. So, I ended up failing that year of math and had to take it over the

next year, which ended up costing me a whole extra class.

I later asked Sam what he meant when he said the teacher did not listen. Once

again, he explained, "I tried to explain to her if she would just leave me alone and let me

work, I would be fine." Instead, Sam claimed she used him to teach others in the class. It

was then that his grades slipped, and "the more [he] helped everyone else, the less I

would do."

Sam claimed that at his previous high school "most things were negative.

Everybody was getting into trouble. They [teachers and students] done what they wanted

to do." He continued by explaining that he really did not care, "he was getting easy

grades and passing school and that is all I worried about. I didn't have to come to school

and I still passed." Sam added that he passed because "they probably didn't want to deal

with me again."

Throughout the interviews, Sam provided several other disparaging examples of

what he thought prohibited his success at Gateway:

Never really learned a lot. They didn't offer a whole lot of programs like

they do here. I tried to get into Drivers Ed. I tried like two years to get in

over there but couldn't get into it. They only had six spots available, so

you were lucky if you got picked for the class. You had to be a favorite of

the teachers.

Regardless of Sam's previous relationships with most teachers at Gateway, he did

identify Mr. Murphy as a "good fellow" and as someone who continued to offer his

assistance once Sam was at the new school. Sam liked that Murphy gave him his work

and left him alone. But, if he had difficulty with the assignment "he would try to explain

it." He explained what made this teacher different: "You could actually sit down and talk

to [him] and he would listen. He stayed calm. He never yelled. He would always ask you

to do something, instead of telling you you have to."

In October 2006, just two months after Clayton County High School opened,

Sam's opinions of the teachers at Clayton were less than positive. He reported that "some

of the teachers [were] nicer to some of the kids that come from their school, and they're a

little bit meaner towards the kids who don't." Sam also commented that one teacher "said

he didn't like Douglass or Henry kids and he called them inappropriate names."

However, Sam's opinions about the teachers at Clayton began to change toward the end

of the first school year.

Factors Enabling Success

Improved Relationships: Principals, Teachers, and Girlfriend. Sam mentioned

that Principal Smith promoted a one-school philosophy: "He has been telling us since it

started that we are from Clayton County and there wasn't no more schools." Sam further

explained that Smith was "all right. He is a pretty nice fellow. Me and him have had quite

a few talks." Sam referred to his seven to eight inch suspension file kept in the principal's

office. He was proud that his number of suspensions had decreased to three, and that he

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had been sent to the office only 15 to 20 times since the new school opened. Sam attributed this improvement to the teachers and principals: "It's easier to get along at the new school. The teachers are easier to get along with. The principals is easier to get along with. They try and help the kid more than just send him on." He continued by adding that the principal sits down and talks with him to determine how they can work out problems, even if it means taking him out of one teacher's classroom and putting him in a different one. If Sam had a similar problem earlier at Gateway High School, he was told "to deal with it."

Five of the six students identified Principal Smith as someone who made a difference as they transitioned from their former small school to the new consolidated high school. Sam explained that Smith and he have "had quite a few talks." I considered this praise from a student who was previously suspended 47 times in one school year at Gateway. At Gateway, Sam was frequently sent to the principal's office whenever his behavior became a problem in class. He was accustomed to the walk from the classroom to the principal's office after "arguing with another student…That [walk] would always end up in a fight going down the hallway." Sam commended Smith on his ability to discuss the problem in an effort to remedy the situation instead of being told to merely "deal with it."

> I know I went to the office quite a few times, and a certain teacher won't
> get along, and the principal sat down with me and him and figured how we
> could work it out. For example, me and _____ couldn't get along, and
> they sat me down and talked to him and me and figured out we couldn't

get along and they switched me to a different teacher for the same subject,

and I ended up passing for the whole year.

Smith appeared knowledgeable about Sam's personal life circumstances, as well

as with his difficulties at school: "I think that circumstances have made him grow, from

last year to this year. I have probably seen him in my office [fewer times] last year to this

year. That leads me to say that there is some growth there." Unlike at Sam's former

school, Gateway, Smith contended that the administration at Clayton will

do everything in our power not to suspend a child. It is like going to a race

track and not getting in the car. If you are here …you are supposed to be

here for a reason. What we do is to educate the child, and you send him

home that is part of the problem. That is ridiculous!

Before transferring to the county school board office, Smith was principal at one of the

former schools; therefore, he recognized that Sam had grown both as a student and as an

individual. Smith described Sam as a

bright kid. Sam will be successful. He does an excellent job with the

welding. Sam is very good with his hands. Like I said before he probably

had to grow up a lot quicker than some of the other kids. He has a steady

girlfriend; he has lots of friends; he is a social butterfly. The only problem

with Sam is that he doesn't like people to confront him. If you are a

teacher and you confront him in class, he is not going to respond.

Smith's desire for students to achieve more in Clayton County promoted a unified

approach in demanding high expectations. Students complained that teachers required

them to work harder, but as the second year progressed I asked Sam if he thought the classes were indeed harder. He responded:

I stay out of trouble. I pay attention in each class. It might be because the classes are a lot harder. At [Gateway] I wasn't challenged. I would have liked to go to the new school since the ninth grade. I would've had a lot better grades. I would've learned a whole lot more.

Murphy, Sam's special education teacher, and Stone, his agriculture teacher, agreed with Sam's opinion of the school's principal. They described Principal Smith's role as instrumental in getting things organized and up and running so quickly.

[With Smith] being the leader we have made a lot of progress from that first day students walked through the door to where we are now. As a school, I see us continuing to grow in a positive way…He seems to have brought everything together.

Despite Sam's experiences with his former teachers, he appeared to be appreciative of Clayton's teachers in January 2008, when he offered this perspective: "They did a lot more work on the board and showed a lot more examples. They come and write down three or four problems for each kid, and make sure everyone understands before they send them on doing it on their own." Perhaps just as important, Sam stayed out of trouble and paid more attention in class. Sam attributed this change to the challenging classes and the "better environment" at the new school.

He particularly liked that there were usually two or three teachers teaching the same subject. Whereas, at Gateway if he didn't like a teacher

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you really couldn't change. You just had to deal with it. There wasn't

many subjects you could choose from. Over at the new school, what you

signed up for is what they teach you. Over at Gateway, if you signed up

for dance class you sat around and played poker all day.

Sam explained that "at first I didn't want to go to a new school, but now that I'm

here, it ain't a real bad place." Unlike Brad and Rusty, who are profiled in the next

chapter, Sam regarded the classes as better because the "teachers were more into

teaching. They worked a lot harder to keep the kids calm, instead of yelling at and

sending the kids out." Sam praised some of Clayton's teachers. For example,

When they see you get upset about work, they will try and offer a little bit

of extra help, or if you are arguing with another student, instead of just

sending you to the office, they will talk to you about it or they will send

you to a counselor. They have a lot more choices to do than just send you

to the office.

Nearing the completion of his second year at Clayton, I asked Sam when he first

noticed that his attitude changed. He replied "it was towards the end of the [first] year [of

the consolidation] before everybody started to get along. It was only 12 weeks left when

everybody started understanding it wasn't so bad. This year it wasn't bad at all." Prior to

the schools consolidating, Sam did not like school. In fact, he was contemplating quitting

school when he turned 18 years old. I asked him what stopped him now that he had

achieved that milestone. It was then that he mentioned how his father influenced his

decision to remain in school.

My dad wouldn't let me. He wouldn't let me quit school. I was pretty

upset. He made me go the rest of that year [at Gateway]. Then we got over

to the new school, and it wasn't all that bad. I made it through the first

year, and then this year I done real good.

Keiffer, a former teacher at Gateway prior to fall 2006, often ate lunch with Mr.

Murphy, who was Sam's self-contained behavioral disorder teacher. He also substituted

in the special education classes when Murphy left early or was absent from school.

Keiffer was familiar with Sam's academic and personal background, and reported that

Sam was in "quite of bit of trouble before, [but] this year I have him in class and when

he's here, he seems to be doing fine." Keiffer pointed out that he thought Sam appeared

to be enjoying himself a lot more than when he was at Gateway. He divulged that Sam's

academic achievement had increased as well. For example, in civics "he has a high C or

low B, and he has maintained that for the entire year." According to Keiffer, Sam

attended school more regularly and when he did miss he inquired about any make-up

work.

Students frequently face personal challenges which affect their academic

achievement. According to Keiffer, the biggest challenge for Sam and other students in

this rural area is "their home life. A lot of parents don't put an emphasis on education.

That is the biggest thing I see. Some of them you can get through to them and show them

the importance of education, but some of them won't do anything." Keiffer commended

Sam for remaining in school because "a lot of students have more advantages than Sam,

and they just drop out – sometimes waiting until their senior year to do it."

Isner, an English teacher at Clayton, knew Sam but not as a student in her class. She laughed as she stated, "you got to love him. He has a kind heart, but has a hard time with his feelings and he flies off the handle." This simple statement from Isner seems to capture Sam well.

Perhaps, Sam's most ardent supporter is Mr. Murphy. Murphy was Sam's teacher during his last year at his former school in a "self-contained BD [behavioral disorder] classroom" and during the first year at the new consolidated school. He previously taught for five years at Gateway High School before transferring to Clayton. Prior to the closing of their small school, Murphy talked with his eight students about their fears. He explained that the students' biggest worry concerned the size of the new school, and the "rigorous curriculum. That bothered them…knowing the change was coming." Regardless of Sam's difficulties in school, Murphy described Sam as "probably an average kid. This year he seems to be more upbeat about things and going to class. He talks about his English class, because before he was in a self contained class." Murphy thought that Sam reacted positively to inclusion and enjoyed his classes more.

According to Murphy, Sam "seems to be calmer since the last year to this year. I don't know if it is getting older, or because his dad passed away." Murphy explained that Sam

> doesn't like a loud voice to yell at him, and all the time that I have had
> him, I told him "now son any time you are in the room with me, I will
> never yell at you. I will always come and talk to you. If you have a
> problem, I will do whatever I can to help you." After I sat down and talked
> to him a year ago, he just kind of latched onto me from that.

Murphy gave detailed descriptions of Sam's personal and home life. He described Sam as a boy who "came from a rough home life. Dad was an alcoholic, and mom didn't want anything to do with him. Dad was always in trouble." As a result, Sam was pretty much on his own from the age of 13 or 14. He lived in a "negative environment" and worried about the "next meal, if he had enough money to make it through the month, if they had enough money to pay the bills, if they were going to turn the water off and so forth." At Gateway, Murphy described Sam as "bothered and not really focused," but noticed that Sam is now calmer in the classroom.

According to Murphy, another challenge students faced in the transition stemmed from their fear of not being noticed. Murphy explained that "it is easier to remember names if you are in a small group, and that is something they worried about." This was especially troubling for Sam who worried whether he would always have Murphy as a teacher. Murphy remembered him saying, "That if he did have new teachers and they did not know him then he would always be in trouble." Murphy reassured students that they would see familiar faces and he asked other teachers to welcome the students to the school. In Murphy's opinion, this extra attention from some of the teachers helped Sam to feel accepted at the new school. One teacher gave Sam a "hug when school first started, and that made him feel that he was accepted here from the smaller school to the larger one."

Regardless of Sam's success at Clayton, he still faced challenges in some of his classes. English was one of his hardest classes. I laughed as he explained that he just didn't like English, and "she got me doing too much work…That is a rough class. There is a lot [of] work. I have still done four or five big reports for it. It just ain't right."

Regardless of Sam's dislike for English, he acknowledged that "she's a good teacher. She is a nice woman. She helps you a lot." But, when he missed a week of school Sam found it difficult to make up his assignments.

> In my English class, I had a six page report due. I had one of those IEPs, and they were supposed to modify my assignments to be smaller, give me extended time to do them, pretty much all the help I can get [because of my lower reading level]. They didn't shorten or extend my time. Instead of doing all that, they switched me out of class to a class where I didn't need to be.

> Sam referred to this as a special needs class for students with "severely challenged kids. They are right above the mentally incompetent…It pretty much sucks. I sit in there [and] do real easy assignments and not learn anything." Sam argued that his English teacher "sent me in there as an excuse so she didn't have to work with me." Sam regretted being placed in the same class as "mentally incompetent students." Nevertheless, perhaps because of the prior challenges Sam faced when he was at Gateway, he appeared to accept the circumstances. To my knowledge, Sam is still in this class at the time of this study.

Regardless of the circumstances that previously constrained Sam's academic achievement and personal satisfaction at Gateway, Clayton's teachers and principal seemed to be a source of support to Sam. In addition, Keiffer, Murphy, and Smith identified another individual as having a positive influence in Sam's life. They noted that Sam's improvement is due to his girlfriend who attends Clayton. Smith remarked that

"she keeps a tight leash on him." Murphy described the impact that Sam's girlfriend had on his attendance:

> I think the big influence in Sam's life is his girlfriend. She really keeps a close tab on him. Past couple of years since I've known him and she has been with him, she has gotten him to school. He wouldn't show up half the time if it wasn't for her.

Building Technology and Welding – CTE Classes. In addition to the civics class discussed above, there were two classes in particular in which Sam seemed to experience higher achievement and personal satisfaction. He was enrolled in two CTE programs – building construction and welding – at Clayton County High School. Previously, any student wanting to take a CTE course had to ride a school bus to the career technical center located separately from any of the four junior/senior high schools. Sam said that even if the classes had been offered at Gateway he "wouldn't of had enough extra credits to take them. Here I worked out enough credits to take two classes." He continued by explaining "you have to have your core classes – English, math, science and history – but if you fail then you are taking two classes, and you won't have enough credits to go into that."

At the new school, all CTE programs are located in the wing with the community college. Sam liked the hands-on learning opportunities that the classes provided and the fact that he anticipated that he could always find a job in welding or building. Because of Sam's desire to enroll in the welding program, he seemed to appreciate how hard the counselors worked in order to gain his admission in both trade programs:

They gave me building technology the first year and I completed it. Then

the second year I had a few extra classes and they gave me this big list of

things I had to do. I wanted to do welding, so I could have two trades. I

would only know a little bit, but I couldn't finish the second year of

welding because I wouldn't be there. They got me in [the] class. All the

counselors worked real hard to get me into it so at least I could learn

something about it. They do a good job of getting you in the classes that

you could use.

Sam discussed his plans to participate in an upcoming Skills-USA state

competition in masonry, a skill he is learning in building technology. Sam referred to his

new teacher as "a pretty good teacher" who planned to work with him for six weeks in

preparation for the competition. Sam praised this new teacher's strategy to provide

students more hands-on learning opportunities. The instructor was a former resident of

Clayton County and recently returned to the area after several years working in the

construction trade. Sam appeared to value the instructor's decision to return to this rural

area to teach. Principal Smith also praised the building technology instructor and his

plans to raise the program's standards:

He wants next year [to have] the first year students to frame a house, and

the second year students to come and finish it, and then auction the house

off. Anything [he] ask[s] me, I'm not going to tell [him] no, because for so

long that construction class had been [building] bird houses or doll houses.

So I told him, "Whatever he needs to do to make that program take off he

has my blessing"… I have talked to a couple of the kids, [who] used to

skip the class. Now you walk by they look like sponges. They are all

sitting there, in their seats all wide eyed waiting for him to say something.

Murphy, Sam's behavioral disorder teacher, explained that he sees a difference in

the students who take classes in CTE programs or participate in activities such as

JROTC.

They enjoy being in the programs. I'm in classes where I co-teach [in the

agriculture] program and they love it. They talk about it. Several of the

kids told me about some of the animals that they have raised and before

you didn't hear anything [about] that. We also have the JROTC program

and that has been a big boost for kids. We have had some that has had

some academic problems, also behavioral problems. Being in that

program, academics have increased with their other classes.

Sam also pointed out other advantages of attending a larger school with an

expanded academic curriculum. According to Sam, Clayton County High School has

more computers and more computer training classes where students can learn how to

build and repair a computer whereas, at Gateway the number of computers was

inadequate.

Sam liked the new school so much that he explained that he "would have liked to

go to the new school since the ninth grade. I would've had a lot better grades. I would've

learned a whole lot more." Sam explained that the new school played a significant role in

changing him:

It wouldn't have come about at [Gateway]. I would have still [been] in

trouble. I probably done gave up on school. Most of the reason I stayed in

school [was] because dad died and he wanted me to finish school. So I
finished last year and I'm going to finish this year.

Mr. Murphy concurred with Sam's assessment of the new school. He explained that if he was given the chance to return to Gateway, he would remain at Clayton: "I pretty much like it here. It is a change. The kids have more opportunities here." Murphy himself was a graduate of Gateway and knew that the extracurricular activities and expanded curriculum offered at Clayton greatly outnumbered those at his former school.

Mr. Stone also agreed with Sam's comment regarding increased opportunities at Clayton. For example, he overheard seniors in his agriculture class discussing that they too wished the school had opened sooner: "These are not trouble kids. They just know the opportunities will soon be over, and they wish they could have had more of it [than] just one or two [years]."

Regardless of any challenges with the new school, Mr. Keiffer, Sam's civics teacher, agreed that he too would not return to Gateway High School. He liked the weekly department meetings at Clayton which enabled him to talk to other social studies teachers about lesson plans and activities. Keiffer acknowledged Smith's contributions to the operation of the school and "from the beginning he set a good example, what is to be expected, and what needs to be done and we just followed his example."

Participation in Football. Sam loved participating in football during the 2007-08 school year. Sam's grades were never high enough to play football at Gateway; his GPA hovered around a 1.0, well below the required level. Regardless, Sam passed year after year.

However at Clayton, Sam began to achieve at a higher level. During his second year at the new school, he "made the grades to play football…and was the number two safety for Tri County A." I found it hard to believe that Sam's slender frame took hits from much larger players. Nevertheless, he explained how important it was to him to play football:

> It kept me out [of] a whole lot of trouble and I came to school a whole lot more. The entire football season I missed one day. That was because I was sick and had to go to the doctor, and I still made it at the end of the day.

Sam admitted that after the football season ended his grades slipped somewhat. He explained that his GPA was 3.0 at the beginning of his second year, but he has since "failed one or two classes," causing his GPA to decline. Without hesitation, Sam reported that he has not been working in math or English. He continued by explaining that he missed a week of school and did not make up the work. Sam acknowledged that both teachers and principals

> saw a real bad thing since I quit playing football. They see a difference in my attendance since I quit. They sent home a letter and it said I missed 22 days this year, and I've missed 19 days since football season ended. There simply is no reason to come to school, if I'm not playing football.

However, Sam explained that it was difficult to play at Gateway because the coach had his favorites and he put the people on the team that he liked. This was unlike the coach at Clayton. The coach "didn't care where you were from…He actually promoted us being a team. He actually banned the kids wearing their stuff from the different schools…When you come to practice you were from Clayton County, not from

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a separate school." Furthermore, "by the end of the whole season we was all [the mascots] and we was all friends and got along a lot better."

Prior to Sam trying out for the football team, Murphy, one of Sam's current teachers, remembered thinking that "playing football would be a good thing for him." However, he noted that Sam's lack of transportation proved to be a hindrance forcing him to walk home several times after games and practices, which according to Murphy "was a good walk." Nevertheless, Sam loved playing football and Murphy explained that playing football changed Sam's behavior: "It did a 360 on him, because he knew he couldn't get in trouble. He knew he wanted to be a part of that group and on the team, so that was a big thing." For example, Murphy recalled earlier in the year a boy trying to punch Sam. Sam merely held the boy so he couldn't throw a punch. Murphy explained that he told Sam he had matured, "because he didn't react to this kid calling him names when he went to punch." Sam just replied, "No, because I didn't want to get in trouble."

Keiffer, Sam's civics teacher, believed Clayton County High School offered students the benefits of extracurricular opportunities. For example, "there are more activities they can get involved in...There is a media center, mobile labs, volleyball or wrestling." He contended that "students that really didn't participate in sports before…ones that didn't try out for football or baseball, they have tried out for volleyball or wrestling. They have found something they are good at. They are more motivated to work." Sam admitted as much when he reported that his attendance decreased once football season ceased.

Despite Sam's approval of the new school and the factors that enabled him to succeed, he surprised me with the "tradition" word at the conclusion of our last interview. When I asked if he would return to Gateway if given the opportunity, he replied

I would probably go back just so I can say I graduated from [Gateway], because that is where dad grew up. I would be the first to graduate in the family from there, but that is where everyone went. It would be more of a tradition thing, instead of graduating from a better school.

Factors that would have constrained other students did not appear to constrain Sam's success at the consolidated school. At such a young age, he seemed to be able to cope with personal and family problems. For example, during one of my last visits to the school, I sat on the floor in the hallway waiting for a class to be dismissed. Sam, who just had received in-school detention, sat beside me and began to talk. As we waited for the bell to ring, Sam stated with a sense of wisdom that sometimes you just have to "wear a helmet" when faced with life's difficulties.

From what I have observed and learned during the past eighteen months, Sam has matured, and he never ceased to amaze me as I interviewed and observed him during this study. Only Sam could answer my last question so well, "Give me three adjectives describing you." Without pausing Sam replied, "Everyone is always asking me that in psychological evaluations. You would have to ask somebody else that one."

Carol's Participant Profile

Carol joined the GRP when she was in the eighth grade. As a GRP member, Carol was interviewed several times throughout the pilot study. Three interview transcripts and Carol's ten written documents provided rich data for the study. Currently, she is 16 years

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old and a junior at Clayton County High School. Our first interview took place in February 2008, in a conference room at the new school. As I sat across the conference room table I saw a seemingly confident, well-spoken teenager answering each question. Carol's long light brown hair was braided and pulled back in a low ponytail falling down her back.

Carol previously attended Henry High School, and currently lives with her mother, father, younger brother, and sister where her father works on ATVs in the family garage. She proudly told me that she loved to read and that she "love[d] school, which is probably really really different from most people." When asked what she loved the most, Carol replied that she loved AP English and nursing, a CTE class. As a sophomore, this straight A student won an award in the *Young Writers* contest for the ninth and tenth grades for her story *They Are the Tears*, a story about a girl who died from second hand smoke. Carol explained that she is probably the only student in her nursing class who wants to become a doctor rather than a nurse.

Other than her prior affiliation with the GRP, Carol does not participate in any extracurricular activities. Carol explained that before joining the GRP, she "didn't have much of a social life. I had to deal with the fact that I lived too far away from Henry to really do anything. When I joined the group I got to get out of the holler." At one point she indicated that she tried to participate in a play, but her mom's work schedule did not allow her to participate or to attend any ballgames.

Analysis of Carol – "I Want to be a Doctor"

After analyzing the data from Carol's interviews and documents, I identified two factors that enabled her success at Clayton County High School: (1) nursing – CTE

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classes and advanced placement classes; and (2) positive relationships: principals and teachers.

When Carol first heard that her school, Henry High School, would be consolidating with other schools in the county, she immediately thought it was a joke. She was in the sixth grade when students were told there would be a new school and to pick the new school colors and vote on a new mascot. When it became obvious that the consolidation was imminent, Carol thought

> It was just ridiculous. They couldn't expect all of us to fit in one school
>
> and get along. I was scared because of all the people trying to get along.
>
> Because of all the fights. There was enough fights at [Henry]. You stick
>
> all these people with these rivalries that go back for generations in one
>
> school. [Henry] and [Gateway] were really, really bad. They just hated
>
> each other, and [Hanover] was sort of out and everybody was really mean
>
> to [Hanover]. And [Douglass] and [Henry] and [Gateway] sort of got
>
> along, but they couldn't get along together.

Carol claimed that for generations, students and other county residents ridiculed students from Hanover claiming they were products of incest; Gateway students were referred to as river rats; and students from Douglass were called gays and lesbians. I thought perhaps the terms actually came from residents living in Henry, since Carol did not know what Henry students were called.

Carol loved Henry High School and described her former school in much the same manner as other participants from Douglass, Gateway, or Hanover: "a small school where everybody knew everybody." She continued by describing her small classes in

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which teachers could give students more individualized attention. The classes had "people you grew up with and you just got along."

Carol had nothing but praise as she talked about her teachers at Henry High School. She described them as "real nice. They were hard but they were real nice and they would help you…They were fun, and if you were having trouble they would stop and help." Regardless, Carol now recognized that Henry did not offer the type of classes she needed for college. Prior to Clayton's opening, "I didn't know there could be more because it was all I ever heard of. [I didn't know] you could have [advanced placement] classes."

Carol's initial fear of the school consolidation went beyond the possible fights between students from different schools. She also imagined that once her school consolidated, she would not receive the type of education to which she was accustomed because the classes would be bigger at Clayton. Also, she did not want to miss graduating as a _____ (the school's mascot) and from the school whose claim to fame was a certain graduate who was a Brigadier General.

Five months after Clayton County High School opened Carol wrote in her journal that "our culture isn't as strong as it was at our old school, but it's coming along just fine." She continued by explaining that the new school is trying to establish some traditions of its own: "We've gone through many changes. Different people view these changes in different ways. Some good, some bad. I guess it's really going to blow over in time." Regardless of the changes, Carol believed that students got along "reasonably well."

Because of my research on the pilot study with the BRP, the amount of interview data in this study on the boys is more abundant than the data on the girls. The boys were interviewed for over a year before the interviews with the girls commenced.

Factors Enabling Success

    Nursing – CTE Classes – and AP Classes. When I erroneously assumed that she was taking nursing classes to become a nurse, she quickly replied, "I don't want to be a nurse. I want to be a doctor. They said I will probably need that. It helps and it is really great." Carol described her activities in nursing class: "taking pulse and respiration and heart rate…using stethoscopes and the cuffs. It is pretty cool." She explained that her classes

> helped me learn what I couldn't learn back in [Henry], or just the classes I
> couldn't take. I don't think I could have taken anatomy. I definitely
> couldn't take my AP English class and to take my nursing class I would
> have to take a bus ride all the way down to the vocational school, so it is
> really easy having it right here.

Before coming to Clayton County High School, Ms. Elliott, Carol's nursing instructor, taught at the county's career technical center in the nursing program. Elliott is the only teacher participant who previously taught at this separate facility. Currently, both Carol and Nancy, who is introduced later, are students in Elliott's health occupations program located in the west wing of the high school. Elliott enjoyed teaching at the career center where the "program was always full, but [I] can accommodate more students at Clayton. We could really use 1 ½ teachers in the program."

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Elliott too commended the new school on its diverse teachers, opportunities for different classes, and higher expectations in some of the content areas. However, this health occupations teacher noted a disadvantage to having one school instead of four. She explained that the students at Clayton have less of an opportunity to receive possible scholarships: "previously we had four winners - one from each school. But now [we] only have one winner from Clayton. The school is still too small to receive more scholarships."

During the first year after the schools consolidated, Carol began to appreciate the opportunities that Clayton had to offer. She especially valued the advanced placement courses that were not available at her former school. Carol wrote in her journal:

At the beginning of all of this, nobody thought that this school would

work. That's one of the many ways it's changed my life…They brought us

together to teach us, and they do…This school offers more. They gave

some classes here that I never would've gotten the chance to take at

[Henry]. That is one thing that caught my attention at this school.

Carol was comfortable at the new school and she admitted that she would not return to Henry High School even if she was given the chance. Grades were important to Carol and she sounded mature as she exclaimed: "I like it here and I have gotten used to it and the classes. They look a whole lot better for college transcripts." Carol's grades are impressive as she explained that her GPA is "about 3.7 or 3.8, because I get B's in my AP class, but I would rather get a B in there instead of a super A in the other class just because it is easy." She attributed her good grades to "just having to work harder and liking what I am doing." Elliott did indeed describe Carol as a "very high achiever.

Always doing something during down time." However, she also referred to Carol as someone who "need[ed] constant reassurance."

Carol talked frequently about the advanced placement classes offered at Clayton. Both Carol and Joyce, who is also introduced in the following section, are students in Isner's AP English class. Isner described both as "really good students and for them consolidation has been a plus." She explained that Clayton's expanded curriculum with advanced level classes provides Carol and Joyce with more opportunities in school and after graduation.

Carol showed excitement as she described the technology available in the classes at Clayton. She was thrilled that teachers participated in professional development opportunities to learn how to operate the Smartboards and responders. She reported that the school had computer labs and mobile labs called COW (computers on wheels), with laptops that go from room to room. Carol reported that her anatomy teacher frequently uses computers in the classroom for reports and on-line labs to dissect animals. According to Carol, the availability of technology and the addition of advanced placement classes have helped her to be successful.

Positive Relationships: Principals and Teachers. Similar to the other participants, Carol described her first day at the new school as "scary. It was really confusing. There were so many people, it was so scary. I was so afraid I wouldn't be able to find my friends." However, Carol's fears were short-lived. The teachers at the new school enabled Carol to flourish as a student. She spoke highly of the teachers and their role in making the school consolidation a positive experience:

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I love them. I didn't think they would be able to help but they do. There are so many people. I didn't think they would be able to give individual attention, but they do. This year I have an anatomy teacher for two periods with 31 kids. I thought she would go nuts…But she still manages to give individual attention. She is a wonderful teacher.

Carol's excitement about her classes extended beyond the content she was learning in English. For example, when Principal Smith invited Carol's AP English class to devise a plan to alleviate tardies, Carol was "proud of [her] AP class." It was apparent that Carol's keen awareness of school activities involved more than what happened in the classroom. She proudly discussed several initiatives that Smith implemented, particularly this year. Like the other student participants, Carol believed that Principal Smith played a significant role in the operation of the school. She explained that Smith implemented a plan that her English class developed: "We decided to tell Ms. [Isner] to tell Mr. [Smith] that we would give up five minutes of our lunch so we wouldn't be tardy. So we would get out of lunch early." She remarked that the plan to leave lunch five minutes early is "working really, really well. You can go or you can stay," but leaving early alleviates the congestion in the hallway at a time when it is flooded with freshmen changing classes. Carol smiled as she explained that when Smith accepted her AP English class's plan for preventing tardies, it was "cool."

The hallways are really big but there is this one little doorway going from the media center to the actual school part of it, and it is really tiny and the freshman are trying to go this way and we are trying to go this way, and

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we can't get anywhere. It is the traffic jam, so without the freshmen we

can get to our classes a lot easier.

Along with the plan to reduce tardies, Smith implemented a new program

suggested by the new superintendent to help eliminate the smoking in the restrooms. I

was impressed by Carol's knowledge concerning Smith's attempts to make changes in

the school. She understood why the school hired an individual to monitor students in the

hallways between classes and the bathrooms for smokers. The county hired a person

specifically to assist Smith with this problem. Carol reported that this person has helped

"a whole lot" and her duties include the bathrooms and hallways:

> She monitors it. She catches you doing things, and she helps with tardies.
>
> It has just gotten a whole lot better. We complained about her at first
>
> because it was kind of weird having a girl standing there making you
>
> empty your pockets and some people kind of got mouthy with her and she
>
> kind of got this reputation [of] being mean. She really isn't.

Carol also appreciated that Smith added one minute to each class period to help

reduce tardies, and devised a plan to notify busses of the appropriate time to leave,

thereby preventing busses from leaving school too early without many of the students.

This plan instituted a bus bell, which signals the drivers it is time to leave.

Both Carol and Rusty, who is introduced in the next chapter, acknowledged

Smith's attempts to reward students when they "were very good" and to encourage

student participation. During the second year, Smith began allowing students to chew

gum and listen to MP3 players during lunch. Carol proudly stated: "We were very good

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students. Our tardies and being late to school has diminished and they decided to reward us." I considered Carol's following statement concerning Smith the highest praise:

He is wonderful. He has managed this so well. He took on a very big responsibility. I don't think many people would be able to do it with everything…He is very nice too…You can talk to him about anything you want to and he will listen.

Carol appeared to be wise beyond her 16 years as she periodically wrote in her journal. There was evidence that she still valued Henry High School, but it was also apparent that Carol appreciated Clayton and she was beginning to let go of her love for her former school.

I would love to tell you that the school was a big mistake. Heck, some people will if you ask. I can't. I hate that I have to walk a mile to my classes and I hate that I don't get to have lunch with my boyfriend, but I love this school. It doesn't feel like home, but it's close enough. Twenty years down the road when someone asks me where I went to school, I won't even think to say [Henry]. I'll proudly answer, "[Clayton] County High School."

Joyce's Participant Profile

As a GRP member, Joyce was interviewed several times throughout the pilot study. One additional interview and two of Joyce's written documents provide additional information about her experiences. I interviewed Joyce in February 2008. This 16 year old junior is the only student participant not born in West Virginia.

In the summer before sixth grade Joyce moved to Clayton County from Tennessee, "the heart of Nashville," where she previously attended a small private school. Joyce lives with her parents, both of whom work in the healthcare field, one "real brother," who is in college, and an 18 year old brother who is not "biological," but moved into their home escaping an abusive father.

Joyce was told as a child that she was expected to attend college for four years, so it came as no surprise when she explained that "she wanted to be one of the first [in the family] to finish four years." Joyce shared a different perspective concerning life in a rural community since she moved from a suburban area located only ten minutes from a mall, to a more remote area located at least an hour from shopping and restaurants. Since moving to Clayton County, Joyce has struggled with the overt racism expressed by students and other residents. She was not accustomed to the lack of diversity. She explained that most of the students' hatred and racist remarks are not spoken directly to the African American students. There were three African American students at Clayton during the 2007-08 school year, and "students do things behind their back, but when you get close to each other they are nice." She admitted to "clinching my fists all the time from keeping from being horrible mean about it." She also described being shocked when she learned about the amount of violence in the county's homes:

> I thought it was just a joke kind of a thing, not a joke, but something that
> rarely happens to kids, because I came from a private school and like I
> never heard anything about actual parents beating their kids or anything.
> Since I've moved here, I've had two of my friends have been beat[sic], put
> in foster care and moved away because their parents would beat them. I

just realized it's something that really happens. You gotta be careful about

it. If you notice it, you gotta make sure to do the right thing cause I always

never really noticed how real it was because I'd only ever seen it in

movies or something.

Despite the lack of diversity, Joyce has learned to love her rural community in

Clayton County and her time spent at Henry High School. She stated that Clayton County

High School gave her the opportunity to grow as a band member and participate in the

agriculture program at the new school, which she loves. Stone, the agriculture teacher is

in his first year of teaching CTE courses at the new school.

Clark, Joyce's band director, graduated from Gateway High School, taught at

Hanover High School for six years, at Henry High School for 12 years, and her husband

taught at Douglass High School before coming to Clayton. We laughed as I told her that

"she had all four schools covered." Clark had Joyce, and previously Joyce's older

brother, as members in the school band. She has known Joyce for approximately four to

five years, since the student moved from Tennessee. Clark described Joyce as a

top-notch [student]. She has always been so kind, very very dedicated,

reliable, hard working. You can always count on her. Whatever you ask of

her she is always so willing to do it. I don't know how she is in her other

classes, like math, but for me, she has always been top-notch.

She added however, that Joyce can be somewhat "adventurous," referring to her recent

behavior which resulted in Joyce getting into trouble at school. Clark explained that

Joyce is more involved in school-related activities at Clayton County High School than

she was at Henry. For example, she participates in FFA, a student organization for

agriculture students. She also worked last year in a greenhouse and thought perhaps she would do so again this year.

Smith too, described Joyce as a well-adjusted student. He explained that Joyce was "not in my office a lot, but just from seeing [her] I think [she] ha[s] a good social network. Joyce is in the band, [and] she has her own group of friends." Smith explained that being a band member serves as a "hook" and is "something that interests" Joyce.

<div align="center">**Analysis of Joyce – I Love the Band**</div>

I identified three factors that enabled Joyce's success at Clayton County High School. She enjoyed classes in: (1) agriculture – CTE classes – and AP classes; (2) participation in band; and (3) a positive relationship with principal.

Joyce has been a member of the GRP for four years, and I met her for the first time for dinner and a trip to the mall. This gave me an opportunity to talk with Joyce outside of the school. She was the only student participant not born in Henry, she moved there from Tennessee prior to her sixth grade year. She was also the only student who previously attended a private school. Joyce surprised me as she described her private school:

> In the Christian private school there three different grades in one
>
> classroom and it was really small, and we didn't have gym or art or a
>
> band. The only sports we had were volleyball and basketball, so I was
>
> really excited about being in a band, because it is a big thing to me.

When Joyce first attended Henry High School, it "seemed like a bigger school than what I was used to." In the private school Joyce did not change classes, and she described the school as "a lot different." Joyce described Henry using precisely the same

word as the other five students used to describe their own school: "small." She also

followed that one word with the now familiar words: "everybody knew everybody."

Joyce explained that Henry was definitely more "country" than living in Tennessee.

There she lived in a "suburban area, and [here] it's hard to go down the road without

someone saying your mom is so and so, and her parents are so and so, and you find out

you are related to somebody you never even know." It appeared that Joyce became

comfortable in her rural surroundings and school when she explained that Henry

> was good because there wasn't a whole lot of kids in the classes and you
>
> knew all the teachers and everything and you could get really close with
>
> the teachers. It wasn't so hard to know what someone else was talking
>
> about with the teacher and to know what to expect [from] them.

Joyce also related the now familiar tale about the tradition in this small community. She

described football at Henry as a sport that "everybody really loved. We had a really good

football team. A lot of the people's families went there like great grandma and way back,

so they were really proud to be there. It was like a tradition." This, according to Joyce,

does not compare with the football team at Clayton, which won only one game the first

year.

> As was true for the other student participants, the first day of class at Clayton

County High School was scary for Joyce. She remembered thinking

> oh my gosh. It is so big. I will never remember where anything is. That
>
> was before anything was put in. It was just a bunch of hallways.
>
> Everything looked the same. I was really worried I was going to forget
>
> where every single one of my classes were. Then I was excited because I

heard of all the new programs, like FFA, and I looked at the band room

and it was amazing.

Initially in the first year, Joyce noticed that "teachers have to put up with more

kids. They don't have enough time for the big projects because they don't have time to

grade all of them. It makes work not as fun. It's hard for me to do work unless it is really

fun or if the teacher is really strict." Joyce claimed that during the first year teachers

favored "cheerleaders and people who have money. People who hang out with the jocks

and stuff like that." Like other participants, Joyce's opinions of Clayton's teachers

changed somewhat in the second year.

Factors Enabling Success

Agriculture – CTE Classes – and Advanced Placement Courses. Joyce wasted

no time letting me know that she would not return to Henry if she was given the chance.

She remarked that "she likes the new people that I met here. I have met a lot of people

from different schools, and I'm good friends with them and all the opportunities, and the

agriculture classes, that is the major thing. I wouldn't want to give that up." According to

Joyce, Clayton has

so many more things you can do, and you realize there are so many more

things out there, instead of the things you see at a smaller school. You are

like, "that is something that I never thought about," and you have all the

opportunities to get to that.

Joyce praised Stone, Clayton's agriculture teacher, and referred to him as

"awesome." I had to laugh when she explained that Stone is

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one of the youngest teachers. It makes him easier to connect with the kids.

He can get down on our level. He knows how our train of thoughts go. He

knows how to talk to us and calm us down just by the way he says stuff.

Joyce, a good student at both Henry and Clayton, explained that she made mostly

A's and B's, even though her grades dropped slightly when she received a C in AP

English. According to Joyce, the classes at Clayton are challenging. She understood that

the principal and teachers were stressing high expectations:

The teachers challenge you more than they used to. I think they want to up

the standards, because West Virginia is so low down and [Clayton]

County is the lowest in West Virginia. I think they are just trying to up it

so we don't look like the big rednecks anymore.

One example of the challenging classes was Joyce's science class. Clayton

County High School has double blocked periods in the afternoon. This extra time allows

students to participate in reading and writing, along with lab activities. She excitedly

reported that students in her class had the opportunity to dissect different types of

animals, along with the identification of animals. Joyce was also excited when she

discovered that there was a new agriculture program at the new school, noting that when

she heard that the new school would have such a program, she "was on board." She loved

animals, and hands-on learning, which includes working in the greenhouses planting and

tending flowers.

Another example included the foreign language classes now offered at the new

school. Previously, Henry High School had a Spanish class that was available only on the

computer. However, Joyce explained that Clayton now has a "real" Spanish class, along

with Chinese. Like Carol and Nancy, who is profiled in the next section, Joyce showed excitement as she discussed her foreign language classes and AP classes now offered at the school. Also like Carol and Nancy, she recognized the importance of taking higher level classes in preparation for a post-secondary education.

Like other teachers and students interviewed, the band director noted that the new consolidated school offered more advanced classes and extracurricular activities than the former four schools. She explained that teachers who taught advanced level classes at Henry often used to have to travel from one school to another teaching half days at each. Clark smiled as she talked about her large classroom, music class, band program, and instruments at Clayton. She continued by describing the new auditorium as a "godsend" for her students, who rarely performed before outside a cafeteria or gym. In fact she "couldn't ask for it to be any nicer." Clark stated that she "was more excited [about the school consolidation] than dreading it. I guess I was ready for a change."

At Henry, Clark was limited in the classes she taught, as well as the length of the classes. She taught grades seven through twelve and therefore was "locked" into teaching general music classes. For the past two years, students at Henry had only twenty minutes for band class, but this year students now have "real band classes."

Participation in Band. Joyce also experienced success as a band member. She explained that the band was "way better than we ever expected." Joyce's face beamed as she talked about the band's success and about her band director. She attributed the band's success to the people who *really* want to do it. We want to prove that just because we came from different schools, we can do it." She also acknowledged that she loved her band director, whom she had known since seventh grade. In fact, Joyce explained that

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this teacher "knows all the problems we go through" and she will talk to students when she hears "in the grapevine" that they are having problems. But, she also pushed students to do better "without making you feel bad." Being a member of the band was very important to Joyce:

It is really important. Pretty much all of my time goes into it. It's very time consuming. I started in the seventh grade, and it was the first thing I ever really got into. It's pretty much like a big family. You get to know everybody so well. Everyone cries when they turn a senior and hugs the band director.

During the second year, both students and teachers reported that the students were "blending" well. Joyce's explanation of the band's role in making that happen involved students working as a team. Joyce tried to explain that band is more than one person doing well. It is a team effort, and because of that students can not think of it as four different schools competing against each other. Instead, "we put it behind us, and we might as well make the best of it."

Clark noticed a difference between students who participate in some type of extracurricular activity and those who do not. She explained that students who are involved in activities other than "their regular classes take more ownership at the school and have more pride in the school." Clark stated that "if you observe children [who] just come to school," and then go home with students who "go to a practice, and get to perform on Friday nights, or [be] part of the FFA, those children…see [the school] differently."

As a band director, Clark spends many hours with the band members. She explained that she knows these students "on a different level than other kids." Because of this familiarity with the school and with the teachers, Clark believed that these students "feel more like, yes this is my school. I'm part of it."

According to Clark, one of the "downfalls" of the band in the "public's eye" is the size of the band. Most people believed the band should be larger, but she explained about the difficulties of recruiting band students from the small, almost nonexistent middle school programs. In its last year, Hanover High School had eight band members. Five of those graduated, three decided to attend a school in a nearby county, and one transferred to Clayton. On the other hand, most band students transferred from Douglass to the new school, but the majority graduated last year. Clark reported that the other two band programs at the junior/senior high schools consistently experienced problems keeping a band director.

Positive Relationship with Principal. Joyce too, gave recognition to Smith for making the school a success, and she "liked him as a principal. He is tough when he needs to be but in a nice way…He wants to be a good principal and be nice but disciplined." Intermixed with Joyce's praise, was a hint that perhaps she had experienced first-hand Smith's role as a disciplinarian. Her band director, Ms. Clark, commented that Joyce could be somewhat "adventurous," which recently had gotten her into trouble at school.

Nevertheless, Joyce complimented Smith on his ability to "[keep] us really structured. Without him, we would have fallen apart by now. He knows just the things you should build and some you need to take down." This statement appeared to refer to

Smith's ability to view obstacles as challenges and to change rules and policies if the circumstances necessitate.

Like most participants in this study, Clark would not return to her former school if given the opportunity. She explained that she "really likes" the new school, and gave credit to Mr. Smith for making a "huge difference." She described him as

top-notch. He was a major reason that I came here. He listens to you. There

is a major difference between hearing and listening. He just doesn't hear us,

he listens. He values what we have to say, listens to the children, and cares

about them. He is very very open to new ideas, and he's supportive of this

program.

Nancy's Participant Profile

Nancy is the only student participant who has not been a member of either resiliency program. Neither the BRP or GRP included students who formerly attended Hanover High School; therefore, Nancy was identified by Carol for inclusion in this study. Nancy is one of only nine Hanover High School students remaining who either began school at Clayton in fall 2006, or in fall 2007. Smith noted that at one point there were "52 eighth graders last year in May and 28 signed up to go to [the regional school]. The others were coming to me. When school started, that didn't happen." Students began school at either a nearby county regional school, graduated, or transferred to the regional school after a brief enrollment at Clayton. Nancy, along with Carol, takes nursing classes in one of the school's CTE programs. I interviewed Nancy in February 2008. Throughout the interview I appreciated her calm demeanor as she described leaving Hanover High

School without many of her close friends. Her friendly smile and easy disposition hid any signs that the move was difficult.

Nancy, 16 years old, is a junior at the new school. She grew up as an only child living in the Hanover area. Nancy's mother works in the town of Henry which eliminates the long bus ride that some other students from Hanover experience. Until recently, she cheered at the basketball and football games at her former school. Unfortunately, during the first football game of the 2007-08 season at Clayton she received an injury that sidelined her for the remainder of the year. She hopes to continue the cheerleading sport she dearly loves during her senior year.

Nancy spoke highly of her "homey" rural community and the small school she left behind. She explained that she liked living where she was born, and "wouldn't change it." However, she had nothing but praise for Clayton adding positive comments about the teachers and other students. She referred to Principal Smith as a "sweetheart," and appreciated his efforts to make her feel welcome when many other Hanover students returned to attend the closer regional school.

Analysis of Nancy – "I Had to Make the Friends"

Nancy was the only student in this study who formerly attended Hanover. There were three factors that enabled her success at Clayton County High School: (1) nursing – CTE classes and advanced placement classes; (2) participation in cheerleading; and (3) Principal Smith's welcoming ways.

Nancy referred to Hanover High School as "homey," and like the other five student participants she described her former school in terms of familiarity:

I knew all of the people all my life. I grew up with all of the kids and the

teachers had my mom in high school and they all knew who I was. I

wasn't new like I was here. It was like I am going to be with all the kids I

already know and already acquainted with. I cheered at junior high before

I went to high school. Before I went to [Hanover], I knew all the people

already and played ball…The [teachers] all knew me. They were always

sweet and we always had something to talk about. I liked it. I just felt

comfortable.

Because Nancy was one of only a few Hanover students at Clayton, I thought it

was important to understand what it was like for her attending a school without many of

her former friends. She described her first days without her friends and I realized just

how difficult it must have been:

In cheerleading it made me sad because everyone sort of had their own

little group. Like the [Henry] group, the [Douglass] group, and I was kind

of like the only one by myself. I was the only [Hanover] cheerleader, so I

had to *make* the friends. When the groups finally split up and everybody

split then it was fine. I do miss my friends back then, because it is really

sad. I only get to see them once or twice a year now. When I go to the

games that we play against the [regional school], I get to see them or at the

[Hanover] junior high games I get to see them.

Fortunately for Nancy, her mother worked in Henry and dropped Nancy off at

Clayton every morning. Therefore, she was saved from having to ride the school bus the

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approximately 30 miles each way to school. Principal Smith acknowledged that Nancy's mother "really puts her time and effort into [Nancy]."

When the four schools consolidated Nancy initially opted to attend a nearby regional school instead of Clayton County High School. But three weeks before the fall 2006 semester, Nancy chose instead to attend Clayton. She thought perhaps if she did not like the new school she could transfer to the other school. Upon entering Clayton, Nancy feared that students and teachers would treat her as an "outcast" and she would not be treated as an equal; however, everyone was "over-the-top friendly."

Smith explained that before Clayton opened, "we went to [Hanover]. They didn't feel like they were welcome. We went overboard for those folks. We said, "Hi, how are you. My name is Mr. [Smith]. She was with her mother [and] we connected. So anytime she had a problem, we told her you bring it to us. That is what we are here for."

Factors Enabling Student Success

Nursing – CTE Classes and Advanced Placement Classes. The previous four junior/senior high schools did not offer an expanded curriculum; in fact, opportunities to take AP classes or CTE were nonexistent. Therefore, Nancy took advantage of several advanced classes and health science technology, a CTE class, now offered at Clayton County High School. Nancy described her classes at Clayton as more advanced than what she was accustomed to at Hanover. According to Nancy, students are viewed more from an academic standpoint at the new school and teachers "push us harder." Regardless of the school's attempt to increase students' academic achievement, Nancy maintained her 3.7 or 3.8 Hanover grade point average. She explained that maintaining her high GPA was difficult, especially when she was still involved in cheerleading:

Sometimes I would be up late studying or I would have to get up early in

the morning and do my homework. When I was hurt during cheerleading,

I would sit in the bleachers doing homework during practice…My mom

worked until 5:00 and I got off cheerleading at 6:00, and then we just went

on home it was like 7:30 or 8:00 and by the time I got out of church, it was

like 9:00 or 10:00 when I got home at least. To study and take a shower

and to try to do what you wanted to do like watch TV, or something it was

really hard. You just didn't have enough free time.

Nancy further elaborated on the commute from home to school. She explained

that it was difficult going to school, playing sports, and completing homework, and

getting up the next day to make the long journey to Clayton. She stated that

Some of my classes are a little more advanced. It is hard to study and do

sports and then get home real late to do your homework, and then take

your shower and then get up for the next day. At [Hanover], I didn't get up

until 7:00 and then we had to be there at 7:30. It was maybe five to seven

minutes form the school, and over here I have to get up at 6:30 or 7:00 and

we have to be there at 8:00. I don't like the drive over here everyday, but

it's all right.

Despite the difficulties Nancy associated with attending the school she had more

praise than complaints. She excitedly described her AP classes and the available

equipment in her chemistry class. She noted

I guess they [classes] are more advanced. They have more equipment to

use and they are more high-tech. My chemistry lab is nothing like the

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before schools had. We have the sinks at each station. At [Hanover] we had some sinks and we had the wash-out if you got the chemicals in your eyes, but they didn't have all of the computers at your desk, like the SmartBoard where you can see what you are doing right in front of you, and all the storage space. Everything would have been cluttered [before] and like in cabinets. It is just nicer.

Nancy described her advanced chemistry class as "really hard. Sometimes it is hard to grasp, but I do good in there. I have an A. It is really hard. It is a lot, just really hard, just really advanced." During her sophomore year at Clayton, Nancy was enrolled in Advanced Biology where "you got all the animals to dissect. More than just a frog, they had worms and all the different things. They had more money for us to buy more equipment for us to use."

Eagle, Nancy's biology teacher, graduated from Douglass High School and later returned to teach science at his alma mater for ten years before coming to Clayton. Interestingly, Eagle taught in a larger school in North Carolina, grades 10-12, with 1,400 students. Nancy is a student in Eagle's Advanced Chemistry class. He described Nancy as "above average. She is very conscientious of her work and she has persistence."

Eagle noted that students encountered few obstacles in the transition from a small school to a larger school. He explained that students struggled with "getting the right schedule, getting the classes they need." But, he stated that students in any school face some of those same problems. He continued by saying that students have "blended really well. I know the staff has. I do regret that we have lost a lot of students from both ends of the county." He explained the economics of losing students to another county: "The

economics of it means we are going to have to eliminate the county political lines and have [generally] district schools." Previously, several participants discussed Clayton's loss of Hanover students to a school in a nearby county; however, Eagle stated that the Douglass area has also lost a number of students to another nearby county as well. He noted that parents chose to send their children at an early age to the other schools in order to have continuity with their peer group. He contended that parents knew years ago that school consolidation was imminent; therefore, he estimated that as many as 200-250 students from Clayton County have transferred to other schools.

Unlike at their former schools, Eagle explained that students at Clayton now have "some degree of anonymity," since not all teachers know all of the students in the school. But, what students have gained "when the scheduling is done correctly" is teachers who have fewer preparations. Eagle claimed that students such as Nancy, received better instruction as a result of teachers' fewer preparations:

> I now have two, whereas before I had five [preparations]. Nobody can effectively plan for five high school subjects a day…That is a real plus. The instruction in the classroom has improved because of a lesser degree of preparation. We can actually talk to the people who teach the CT [CTE] classes. It's wonderful in that respect. They have to do a lot of improvement to get their numbers up. We should have more kids at that end of the building than we do. It's not that taking that class is leaving something out.

Eagle also praised the CTE programs now offered at Clayton. Eagle claimed that students receive better instruction as a result of taking both general and CTE classes.

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Eagle too, would not choose to return to Douglass High School if given the opportunity: "Given everything that I know now, no." He explained that he was committed to the new school and it will only continue to get better.

Participation in Cheerleading. Nancy, sole student participant from Hanover High School, proudly stated that she was the first cheerleader from Hanover to cheer at Clayton County High School, and it was "kind of cool that I was the first [Hanover] varsity cheerleader here...I was one of the first to sing the National Anthem here. It is neat to say the little things I have done that was the first!" Nancy also played softball at Hanover, but her love was cheerleading. A cheerleader for 10 or 11 years, Nancy received an injury during the first game of the 2007 football season. She was told by doctors that she could "probably break my collar bone or fracture more disks. I said I would rather quit and do it next year than not to ever be able to cheer again."

It was important to Nancy that Hanover's basketball team be the "best in the county. It was just fun to cheer. We had a chance of winning. [Hanover] would always go to the state tournaments before and people were always saying, 'I hope our basketball team is good enough to go again.'" Like the other three schools, school spirit was stronger at Hanover when compared to Clayton:

> Even though we were losing by 25 points, our fans would still be standing
> in the stands, because [Hanover] would always come back. Even if they
> were losing, they would come back and give you a good game. When they
> were like blowing you out of the water, our crowd would still stand up and
> cheer. Here [Clayton] if they are not winning, they just kind of get up and
> walk out. They don't support your team like they should.

Nancy never used the word "tradition" as she described her cheerleading activities at Hanover. However, that was exactly what she seemed to mean as she described her love and pride for a sport she hoped to return to next year. At the new school, Nancy explained that she

> can say "I was one of the last varsity cheerleaders at [Hanover]." My
> dream when I was little was to be a [Hanover] varsity cheerleader. I loved
> to watch the [Hanover] cheerleaders! I loved to watch them. I guess
> because our crowd was always so great. I love the cheerleaders and they
> could really get into it. In my ninth grade year I remember when I made
> varsity cheerleader. I thought "Oh wow, I get to do this for four years;
> then I only got to do if for one."

Being a cheerleader provided Nancy with opportunities to meet other students in the school. Being that she was the only cheerleader from Hanover, she thought perhaps she would be treated unfairly. Without her former friends, Nancy admitted she

> had to go to the other groups and make friends. Like the first day of
> cheerleading practice, we all got paired off with friends and it had to be
> from another school. We had to know their name, what school they were
> from, how long they cheered, and learn a cheer they were going to teach
> you. If you were partners, you got graded on it. I was with a girl from
> [Henry], and I thought that's great. [Henry] hates [Hanover]. This is not
> going to be fun, but she was really nice, and it was really fun…I knew
> somebody before the first day so I had somebody to talk to besides the two
> or three girls that came with me [from Hanover].

Principal Smith's Welcoming Ways. Principal Smith directly or indirectly

enabled five of the six students to experience success at Clayton. However, Nancy

identified Smith as more of a significant factor in her success. His dedication to make

Hanover students feel welcome aided Nancy in her decision to attend Clayton rather than

enroll in a nearby regional school. Nancy referred to Principal Smith as a "sweetheart."

As one of the few Hanover students at Clayton, Nancy worried that she would be treated

differently. But, she noted that Smith was "friendly. He made me feel so welcome, like

everyone else did, but he was probably the one person that stood out more than

anybody…[Teachers] did not show any favoritism." Initially Nancy chose to attend a

nearby regional high school instead of attending Clayton, but when she visited the new

school and talked to Smith she changed her schedule, and "I just love Mr. [Smith] and

have loved it ever since."

Principal Smith also praised Nancy for her success at the new school. He

described her as "one of my high flyers. She is taking AP courses…She's in the social

clique. She is one of the top students." At one point during the school year Nancy was

struggling with her AP classes. Smith explained that they

> had a long discussion about the AP class, and [how] she was really
>
> struggling. She wanted out, and I said "Well [Nancy] a C in a AP
>
> class…means absolutely nothing. A 4.0 is a subjective number. When you
>
> take your ACT, that will be a real live picture of what you can do. She said
>
> "She need[ed] to talk to the [AP teacher]." She did and he let her make
>
> something up, and she went from a C to a B, and that was real good. If she

is not treated fairly she is going to let you know. She was really

frustrated…But she will be fine.

Nancy congratulated Smith on the success of the new school. She stated that Smith "used

to say you are not four high schools, you are just one. You are not [names of the four

prior junior/senior high schools]…Everybody is equal. It makes everybody feel more

welcome. No one has anymore say so."

It appears that Smith was instrumental in making Nancy feel at home and

comfortable in the new school. So, when I asked if Nancy would return to Hanover if

given the opportunity, she responded

Actually, I am not sure. I miss my friends there. Now I have friends here I

would really miss. I have been here for two years, so I had to get close to

somebody. My best friend came from Fort Knox, so she was new here too.

So the first couple of days we met we first talked. We were just friends.

Not really somebody else from my group. She was somebody else that

thought she was going to be an outcast, but she wasn't either.

Despite Nancy's success with advanced level classes and with cheerleading,

living in Hanover made it difficult for Nancy to develop her new friendships beyond the

school. She discovered that it was difficult to stay overnight with her best friend, who

lived in the Douglass area. She admitted that

we haven't actually been to each other houses. We like to meet in the

middle and go shopping. We've tried but something else has come up. We

live so far away, we just don't know how we can meet up with our

parents. That's because neither one of us drive yet. That is probably one of

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the hardest things is not being able to go to her house and not spending the

night, and just do whatever.

It was also complex to visit her previous friends in her rural community. Time committed

to traveling to and from school made it hard to maintain her childhood friendships. She

admitted that perhaps it was time to make some changes. Perhaps the desire for a change

in school and friends made the transition smoother:

> They told me I was crazy for coming over here. I just kind of had friends
>
> over there that wasn't the nicest bunch of people and I kind of wanted to
>
> get away from them so I wouldn't get the name that they had. So I came
>
> over here and I just had a fresh start and nobody knew anything about me.
>
> I got away from the friends that I had just trying to do better. I never did
>
> anything bad. They just acted too grown up with boys, and I just didn't
>
> want to get that reputation.

Nancy certainly seems to have made the best of the situation. Regardless of the

fact that most of her former friends either elected not to enter Clayton and instead attend

the new regional school, or transferred to the regional school after a brief stint at Clayton,

Nancy maintained a positive attitude about Clayton. She explained that "it's not what I

thought it would be. They welcomed me way more than I thought they would. I like it

here a lot better than I thought I would, a lot better. I thought it would be really hard to

get used to, but after a couple of weeks, I was fine."

Conclusion

At the consolidated school, Sam experienced higher academic achievement and

personal satisfaction than he had in his former school; teachers at Clayton worked with

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him to remain "calm," a major accomplishment for a boy who "never did like anybody having authority over [him]. He also enjoyed his CTE courses in building technology and welding. Carol too, blossomed at Clayton. Her love for learning prompted her to take AP classes and she enrolled in nursing classes in a CTE program as well. Carol planned to attend college after graduation because she "want[s] to be a doctor." Likewise, Joyce's "love [for] the band" enabled her to succeed as she transitioned to the new school and as she prepared for college in two years. She described the classes as challenging and understood that Clayton County High School was trying to "up the standards." Finally, Nancy, one of only nine Hanover students still attending Clayton at the time of this study, exhibited excitement about the new school, expanded curriculum, teachers, and the principal who welcomed her to the consolidated school. She appeared well-adjusted and mature as she explained that she "had to *make* the [new] friends" when most of her prior friends chose to transfer to a school in a nearby county instead of attending Clayton.

Chapter five contained single case analyses of four students identifying factors that enabled their success at the consolidated school. In chapter seven, these enabling factors will be revisited as part of a cross-case analysis. Before that, however, chapter six presents single case analyses of two students identifying factors that constrained their success at the new, rural consolidated school.

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CHAPTER SIX: SINGLE CASE ANALYSIS OF CONSTRAINING FACTORS

FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS

This chapter contains single case analyses of two students identifying factors that constrained their success at the new consolidated school. Unlike Sam, Carol, Joyce, and Nancy, Brad and Rusty continue to struggle in making the transition from a small school to the new, larger consolidated school.

Brad's Participant Profile

Brad described Clayton County as a place that is "easy to grow up in…It was peaceful." But what he liked most "are the quiet nights, no disturbances, fishing spots." I later learned in a subsequent interview that this simplistic, tranquil description of Clayton County somewhat described Brad, a student who viewed himself as "pretty much a real quiet person. I'm pretty much like a lone wolf," a person who does not like to be the center of attention.

I first met Brad when he was a freshman and in his third year in the BRP. It was then that I learned that he had problems keeping his anger under control. Simply, Brad said that "he was pretty violent before joining the program." He explained that the BRP helped him and gave him "something to do [and] that he is not as angry as before."

Brad attended Douglass High School before entering Clayton County High School. Brad is a sophomore who turns 18 years old at the conclusion of the 2007-08 school year. I interviewed Brad twice and observed him two other times at after-school activities. I first met Brad in 2007, when I transported BRP boys to an after-school swimming activity in Charleston, the state capital. Instead of jumping in the pool with the

other boys, he sat with me at a table where I interviewed him individually for the first time. As we began to talk about the pilot study, I could not help but notice his large tattoos on both arms. Brad had just returned his consent forms for the pilot study and was excited to participate. He appeared nervous but more than willing to answer my questions about the school consolidation.

This self-proclaimed "lone-wolf" had a hard time controlling his anger when confronted with unfamiliar circumstances. One of his concerns when he heard that the four schools were consolidating stemmed from his belief that "most of the schools hated each other. I knew as soon as it was going to happen everyone was going to get into a big old fight. That's something I can't handle." In an attempt to refrain from getting into fights, Brad does not "pay attention to that stuff. I just try to stay away as much as I can." There are times in which Brad's anger gets out of control. Just last year the AWLP director took Brad and several other boys on a camping trip. While there, he "almost attacked these drunks. I almost ripped a two by four out and chased them." The director remarked that "[Brad] had a hard time dealing with those situations."

Brad also had difficulty handling people he described as the people who "always make fun of people." For example, "They called this one dude retarded and it set me off and later on in the year, this dude hit a girl which really set me off…[the AWLP Director] found out real fast how I think about people hitting girls." According to Brad, his large stature causes others to pick a fight with him, and "they just normally get me in trouble." Just last year a student hit Brad's girlfriend resulting in a fight in which Brad injured the student to the extent that he was sent to the hospital. As a result, he was suspended for a week, the third suspension that year. Previously at Douglass, he had never been

suspended. According to Brad, this suspension could have been much worse if the student pressed criminal charges.

My second interview with Brad transpired after school one day as he ate an early dinner at a local diner. Brad appeared hungry as he ate mashed potatoes, green beans, and country steak. Throughout the interview Brad seemed nervous as his right knee bounced up and down forcing the seat to vibrate. His love for playing football was obvious as he explained that he could no longer play because of his failing grades and lack of transportation to practice and games. His nervous smile punctuated his comments as he talked about his 63 year old father, who at that time was in a hospital approximately 30 miles from home. His father's terminal illness made attending school difficult. In fact, Brad missed school often and his grades suffered. In order for Brad to visit his father in the hospital he walked a considerable distance to catch a bus.

According to Brad, his mother ceased any contact with him when he was 11 years old leaving him to live with his father. When Brad talked about his ailing father, he gave him credit for keeping him in school: "My dad…because he always wanted me to graduate." Unfortunately, less than two weeks after the second interview, Brad's father passed away. I now wonder if Brad will finish high school without his father's support. I worry that without support Brad may continue missing school and drop out when he turns 18 in summer 2008.

Because Brad missed several days of school when his dad was in the hospital and then later passed away, I was unable to follow-up with a second individual interview. Therefore, the data on Brad is not as extensive as Sam's.

Analysis of Brad – "The Lone Wolf"

In addition to his father's illness and death, there were three factors that constrained Brad's success at Clayton County High School: (1) loss of familiarity with former school and teachers; (2) lack of participation in football; and (3) lack of transportation to after-school activities. However, there was one factor that enabled Brad to achieve some success at Clayton: his CTE agriculture classes.

It was evident from the beginning that Brad did not like Clayton County High School. He told me during the first interview that he "thinks the teachers are snobby [and] they judge you on how you look. A couple of teachers told [me] they didn't like [me], because of who [I] hung out with." Brad described himself as a "nerd" when he attended Douglass, who "didn't do anything besides school work. I didn't really hang out with anyone." But, since attending Clayton County High School, Brad describes himself as a "laid back person, that doesn't really care about anything anymore…Everyone is mean. I'm starting not to care about anything. Why should I care when they don't respect me?" Furthermore, he characterized himself as "a real quiet person. I'm pretty much like a lone wolf – put it that way." Smith noticed that Brad sat by himself at lunch, and "there may be a couple kids that filter in but I don't think there is interest in making friends." Smith also noted that of the six students in this study, "They all have their hook [interest] now, except for poor ole [Brad]. They have something that interests them, to make them feel part of the group."

Factors Constraining Success

Loss of Familiarity with Former School and Teachers. It appeared that meaningful relationships in schools were instrumental for two students' success. Sam

discovered that his relationship with teachers and principals improved as a student at

Clayton. On the other hand, because Brad experienced a better relationship with his

teachers at Douglass, he encountered constraints as he struggled to adjust to the new

school. Throughout the interviews with Brad, he made comments that suggested he has

difficulty with change and finds solace in being surrounded by the people he knows. The

discomfort and unfamiliarity of being a student in a new school began on the first day

when he

> first went there, they gave me my schedule, and I had to ask everybody
>
> what the letters on that meant, and I didn't understand one thing that was
>
> on my schedule. I didn't know where the lunchroom was or my
>
> classrooms…I felt confused.

Brad, a sophomore at Clayton County High School, previously attended Douglass

High School, a place he described as a "small school….where they actually made it fun

for you….and I pretty much preferred it than Clayton County High School." Brad

explained that his school work at Douglass was easier because the "teachers weren't so

strict" and "because [he] was around people that [he] knew really really good….I really

just wanted to be around people I actually knew. It's easier to get around so you wouldn't

be tardy or anything." His comfort and familiarity with Douglass helped Brad to maintain

a GPA of 2.0 to 3.5; whereas, at Clayton he received mostly Ds, a GPA of 1.2 to 1.5.

Brad's loss of familiarity with his former teachers and school affected his

relationships with the teachers at Clayton. Brad maintained that if his current teachers

were asked what type of student he was, they would respond, "horrible. Not getting good

grades on his class work assignments and they don't think I commit myself to work."

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Since Brad does not feel comfortable asking his teachers questions, he spends a considerable amount of each 50 minute class period trying to understand class assignments; therefore, rarely does he get to finish. This uneasiness to ask questions stemmed from his perception that "they are hateful teachers, and they really don't like me that much." Brad described a day in most of his classrooms:

> They give you the work, and they just walk out of class, and not come back until the end, and you can't really ask them for help anyways. They are never in the classroom and every time they are they are either on the phone, or doing something else and they don't want to help you.

Brad described what changed him from a student who did well at Douglass to the student who was now struggling at Clayton. The high expectations that enabled other students to succeed at Clayton proved to be a roadblock for Brad. He attributed his change in the first year to "the advanced subjects that they have. I really didn't understand one bit of it, and I was really confused every time I tried to do it and none of the teachers were going to help me out." As a freshman at Clayton, Brad was placed in advanced algebra, where he had "no clue [to] what [he] was doing." He was also placed in advanced science and advanced English, which frustrated Brad further. Principal Smith acknowledged that Brad struggled with these advanced level classes, but Brad "wouldn't tell anyone." According to Brad, his math grades at Douglass were much better because

> Miss _____, my algebra teacher helped me out, and when I got to the new school they speeded it up a whole lot more, and I couldn't learn anything, and when we took our mid term test, I did real bad and got bad grades.

Every teacher that Brad mentioned as being helpful at Douglass did not transfer to teach at the new school. Therefore, without some connection to his prior teachers, "it was kind of hard to get adjusted to." Unlike other students' opinions of Gateway's teachers, Brad believed that he was a better student at Douglass because of his relationship with the teachers: "The teachers at Douglass actually try to be your friend, ones at this new school doesn't." After his remark, I added this observer comment: "Perhaps Brad needs encouragement. He knows that he is not doing well, and it appeared Douglass teachers gave him encouragement and helped him. [Clayton] County High School teachers do not appear to be meeting that need." Brad appreciated the teachers at Douglass because they noticed when he was struggling and offered assistance. He liked it when Miss _____ at Douglass sat with him or when she had another student help him; whereas, teachers at Clayton "don't do anything." His perceived lack of support left Brad feeling "like a prisoner at a prison," in a school where no one was going out of their way to offer support.

When asked to describe Brad as a student, Principal Smith painted a disturbing picture:

He is one of those kids that is in the cracks…Doesn't say much. A gray area kid. [He] hasn't made an impact one way or other. He is one of the norm. If I didn't know he was from my area, he could have walked across the stage at graduation and I wouldn't have known him. He is one of those kids that stays in the shadows.

Isner, an English teacher at Clayton, had Brad in a flex rotation for six weeks. She described him as "low functioning, and as a good natured kid." She explained that like

Rusty, who will be introduced in the next section, Brad does not like school. Isner offered

an explanation of why some students may be struggling now with Clayton's demand for

higher expectations:

> If you listen to what the students are saying, [They] "came to school 90
>
> percent of the time, and didn't cause a whole lot of trouble. Did some
>
> work and got passed." Those kids are very much struggling…But, we
>
> have to move forward if these kids are going to be successful.

I could not help but sense Brad's loss of familiarity when he talked about his

former school and his wish to return: "It's a whole lot smaller, and everyone at

[Douglass] is a whole lot more fun than everyone in the whole county and I would be

back with actual people I know."

Lack of Participation in Football. Football was important to the students and

community at Douglass High School, and fortunately for Brad he had the opportunity to

play one year. Brad remarked that everyone in his family had played and he expected to

follow in their footsteps. Unlike Sam who explained that playing football motivated him

to attend school and to keep his grades up, Brad stated that playing football did not affect

his grades; however, I learned later that football did fulfill a particular need. As a

sophomore at Clayton, Brad failed to submit his physical in time for tryouts because "I

was a day late in turning in my physical, which is kind of hard because no one is really at

my house to take me anywhere." He explained further that when he lived close to

Douglass transportation was not such a problem when he played football, because "my

brother had a car at the time and I could go places, but now every single car at my house

is broke down, and I can't seem to get around." It was evident that Brad missed football and the role it played:

> It meant a lot to me because it's the only time when I feel like myself. If I'm at school, I have to be real quiet, and everything because I don't like being the center of attention, but if I'm at football I can pretty much take out my anger on the other team….Where I can't play at all, it makes me kind of crazy. It makes me have mental issues. I can't go places or anything or actually do something that I love.

After interviewing Brad, it was evident that even with the required GPA Brad could not play football. In other words, even with the required GPA Brad's lack of transportation prohibited him from seriously considering the possibility of playing.

Lack of Transportation to After-School Activities. As a student at Douglass High School, Brad relied extensively on school buses to take him to school. Prior to Clayton, it took him approximately a half hour to get to school, but Brad explained that because of the mountainous terrain it could take up to two hours to cross the mountain in the snow on the way to Clayton. In fact, he recalled twice his bus almost went over the hill trying to maneuver the wintry roads. The last time was during the 2007 winter when the roads were icy and the bus slid as it crossed the mountain and almost went over a hill. He described how the younger elementary school students cried as the bus teetered on the side of the road close to a guardrail. The bus driver screamed, "We are all going to die." To level out the bus, all students moved to the other side of the bus. Brad remarked that it took a tow truck approximately two hours to arrive and transfer the students to another bus.

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During the early months of 2008, Brad's father spent a considerable time in the hospital battling a terminal illness; therefore, Brad relied on the school buses to attend school. He explained that it takes "a whole lot longer. It takes an hour to get to school from my house, which it's a good thing for me because I can sleep longer." The bus is Brad's sole method of transportation; therefore, if he missed his bus he had no choice but to stay home. He missed several days throughout the winter of 2007-08. Unfortunately, since he will turn 18 years old before becoming a junior, Brad may not have enough time to finish school explaining that "Right now if I don't fail anymore, as soon as I graduate I will be 21. If I fail they won't let me back into that school."

Keiffer, a teacher at Clayton, acknowledged that long bus rides to and from school do present a challenge. Some students at Clayton wait in the morning for busses to pick them up from home, then debus, then wait again for the second bus to finally take them to school. To return home, the students begin the process again at the end of the school day. As a result, Keiffer had students who

> complain and say they are tired that they had to get up early to catch the
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> bus [and] they still hadn't gotten warm because they had to get off one bus
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> and wait 25 minutes for another bus to pick them up, and they have to do
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> that everyday…One student said he catches the bus at 6:40, and he gets
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> here right when the bell rings at 8:10 or 8:15 to go to class.

Clark, Joyce's band director, also identified transportation as an obstacle that students face. She described a former Hanover student's transportation problem when coming to school and to the 7.00 a.m. band practice on Saturdays. He rode a bicycle each day out of his holler, left the bike, and then caught his bus to school. According to Clark,

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the boy often had problems with his bike and had to walk out the hollow instead. She described this student as "very dedicated."

Factors Enabling Success

Agriculture CTE Classes. The Agriculture classes at Clayton County High School have been somewhat of a bright spot in Brad's sophomore year. Like the other four students, Brad enrolled in a CTE program. Like Rusty and Joyce, Brad enrolled in agriculture. He described this class as

> fun in a way. It's mostly hands on experience things, like the [February] 26th , I have to go up to the county fairgrounds for a meeting, because I'm supposed to raise a lamb and auction it off. It's given me good money opportunities.

However, Brad seemed unsure whether he would be able to buy and raise the lamb. Due to financial difficulties now that his father passed away and without reliable transportation he questioned how he could buy the lamb and get it home. At the time of this study, Brad was waiting to hear if his agriculture teacher had found a solution.

Brad appeared to like his agriculture teacher who "shows you how to do something then he walks off, and then comes back and observes to see if you are doing good then he goes to someone else." Stone, the agriculture teacher, referred to Brad as "quiet. He only speaks when spoken to, or if you ask him a question. I have noticed him to be very interested in the activities that my program offers. I have never had a bit of problem, discipline out of him." Stone also commented that Brad enjoyed the agriculture classes and had previously participated in a Future Farmers of America (FFA) leadership

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conference activity. However, Stone did point out that Brad experienced problems with writing in this class.

Rusty's Participant Profile

Rusty is 16 years old and a sophomore at Clayton County High School. He previously attended Gateway High School before the schools consolidated. I interviewed Rusty twice and observed him once at an after-school activity. The first interview took place in January 2008, when the BRP Director arranged to pick Rusty up after school and bring him to a local café for dinner. The second interview transpired at his school in a conference room in February 2008. During the first interview, this 16 year old described his life and the challenges he faces living without both parents.

When most teenagers are thinking about dates, ballgames, and life after high school, Rusty worries about his fourteen year old brother with medical problems, and about the likelihood of whether he can remain living with this 26 year old brother and 29 year old sister-in-law. Rusty was just five years old when his father suffered a heart attack and passed away, and in 2004, Rusty's 56 year old mother died after a three-year battle with cancer. At the age of thirteen, Rusty faced a life without parents and life in the foster system. He transferred from one foster home to another before coming to live with his two brothers and sister-in-law over four years ago. The changes in foster homes, located throughout the county, forced Rusty to attend at least four elementary or junior high schools throughout his foster system experience. Rusty admitted that he "got into a lot of trouble when he was in the foster system [and] it was just a bad time in my life."

In addition to the loss of his father and mother, his younger cousin "got hit by a car, a woman hit her. I have been trying to keep up with her mom, but it is sort of hard

the way it is now. I get freaked out myself." He appeared guarded in his optimism about his future. He "hopes to do like my brother. Oil rigs and gas rigs. It's not the kind of life he wants from me, but if it is something I do with my hands and stuff, I will be able to do it."

Rusty's dark, curly hair parted in the middle as the curls fell past his forehead. His dark eyes peeked out from the tips of the curls. His love for music was apparent as I glimpsed a Kiss t-shirt peeking out from his zip-up fleece jacket, and as he talked about his plans to start his own band playing guitar. He appeared somewhat shy and he seldom made eye contact as we spoke at both the local café and at school. Rusty is no different from many boys his age – he loves potatoes. During the first interview, he ordered both mashed potatoes and French fries with his ham dinner. He laughed as he told me that he "could live off of mashed potatoes."

Ryan has struggled since being at the consolidated school. Actually, Ryan told me that "at the beginning of this year, I thought about quitting, especially when I turn 18. I've thought about it quite a bit this year. It seems like things are getting tougher and tougher."

I first met Rusty in October 2006, when I chaperoned seven BRP members to Charleston for an after-school activity and dinner. As we departed the game center and returned to Clayton County, the AWLP director asked me to drive Rusty and another boy home. This began my eye-opening tour of Clayton County. After taking the first boy home, I religiously followed directions taking Rusty to meet his brother and sister-in-law. I feared getting lost and later wrote in my fieldnotes:

As I proceeded to drive we saw a sign, *Closed Road. Open to Thru Traffic Only*. What the heck did that mean? For all I knew, it was a dead end. I

didn't know whether to go on and take a chance. But, at that point I did not have a place to turn around. I have never, and I repeat never, been on a road as narrow and as curvy as that one. I topped a hill only to see the paved road end and a gravel road up ahead. But that wasn't the worst part. The gravel road had completely vanished on the left side. I proceeded slowly as far to the right as I could. Thankfully, the gravel road ended and once again we were on a paved road. When we finally made it to the main road, I could have kissed it.

Rusty lived at the end of a long holler from which he walked each day to catch the bus. He walked with his younger brother trying to "keep him out of the weather so he don't get sick." Each morning the bus passed Rusty's holler twice, giving him an extra chance to get to school. However, he admitted there are times they miss the bus leaving them no other choice but to walk back up the holler asking his sister-in-law to drive them to school. Rusty returned home each day after school to watch his brother and eight year old nephew until his brother or sister-in-law came home from work.

Analysis of Rusty – "It's Hard to Stay Focused"

There were two factors that constrained Rusty's success at Clayton County High School: (1) trouble staying focused in classes with high expectations; and (2) lack of participation in football. However, there were three factors that enabled Rusty to achieve some success at Clayton: (1) agriculture – CTE classes; (2) friends; and (3) a positive relationship with principal.

Rusty admitted that when he first heard that his former school was going to be consolidated with the three other county schools, he did not know what that meant:

When I first heard about it…we were sitting around and they had a big

billboard up and they had donations and something about stop

consolidated schools. At the time, I didn't even know what consolidation

was. I asked my brother's girlfriend what it was, and she told me what it

was. In a way it sounded cool, but then again it was a new school.

Factors Constraining Success

Trouble Staying Focused in Classes with High Expectations. When Rusty

discussed his previous school, Gateway High School, he immediately mentioned Mr.

Summer, "one of the fun teachers. They get where you are coming from and they get how

you learn." During our second interview Rusty explained further:

Where certain people they have to have hands on stuff. Well he does a

mixture of everything. He is right there helping you if you don't

understand it. Most teachers they try to help you but they don't get to you.

Somehow he gets to you.

Like Brad, Rusty had never been suspended from his prior school. He did,

however, receive detention on several occasions. Rusty described himself as basically "a

decent behaved kid there." At Gateway High School, he felt comfortable talking to his

teachers about any of his problems and to "tell them what was going on, because they

were there when my brother went to school. They were pretty much like family to me.

Which I did have a teacher that was kin to me."

Rusty encountered problems transitioning from his small, community school to

the larger school. He recalled how big the school was and how easy it was to get lost. For

example, on the first day of school he found himself in the community college wing and had to be redirected to the second floor.

There was also an increase in the number of teachers at Clayton County High, more than Rusty was accustomed to at Gateway. He recalled having problems with two teachers, "but the principal told me it probably was a personality conflict. I have been trying to get all the work done, but you can't make the grade if they don't give you all the points [that] are needed." However, Isner, Rusty's English teacher, reported that he did not like school and lacked the motivation to succeed. Rusty, however, thought that one particular teacher treated him unfairly:

I have asked my teacher twice in a row. I do all my work. I make like a 49

in there, and if I don't do my work, I make like a 52. It seems like the

harder I try, the worse I do…They [say] I just don't do my work.

According to Rusty, he has trouble staying focused in classes. Prior to the school consolidation Rusty encountered problems behaving in class, which often led to a trip to the principal's office. One of Clayton's assistant principals worked previously at Gateway, and Rusty emphasized that the principal did not like him very well. One of the most heated discussions between Rusty and the principal happened at Gateway when a boy said some derogative remarks about Rusty's mother, who died approximately three years ago:

The most time I ever got into trouble was one day this boy was talking

about my mom and stuff and I went to hit him and that was about the time

the principal called me down to the office. He asked, "Are you going to do

anything?" I said, "If he says anything about my mom again I will." When

I didn't say anything, he said, "I want a yes or no answer." This went on

for about ten minutes, and I was about ready to walk out of the room. I

didn't say anything and finally I said "no. But if he says something about

my mom I will." Yeah, I just had to have the last word.

Rusty experienced problems when classrooms had "a lot of stuff posted on the

wall. [It] catch[es] my eye and I look around and read it." As a result, Rusty explained

that his biggest obstacle to overcoming his problems at school is "staying focused. I have

a real hard time staying focused. It just happens about anytime." Isner, one of Rusty's

teachers at Gateway, is now teaching English at Clayton. He sheepishly told me that Mrs.

[Isner] would probably say that "I goofed off a little in her class but I tried to do my work

and stuff…She was a pretty good teacher." When asked what made this teacher special,

Rusty replied:

Her perspective is when she sets her mind on something to teach you, she

teaches you. She is not like some of the teachers that tell you to do it and

that is it. If you have a question, and you ask her, she will help you out.

Rusty argued that all classes need two teachers. He suggested that if there were

two teachers, especially in math, one could "help you with the ones you didn't learn." He

explained that he "trie[s] to figure out the stuff I am confused on." For example, Rusty

frequently talked about his failure to answer the Bell Ringer questions posted on the

board each day. He attributed his slipping grades to his inability to answer these

questions. In fact, he implied that to get better grades, "I guess I could start cracking

down on the books a little bit more and actually start trying to look for the Bell Ringers."

According to Rusty, "You have to look them up. They don't put the page number. They

just put the question on the board and you don't know where to look them up. I can't do something I don't know." It appeared that Rusty panicked when it came time to answer the questions. Perhaps not looking for the answer is better than looking and not finding it: "I try to look for them but I can't really find them, so I usually just sit there." Because of an increased use of Bell Ringers in the classroom, Rusty suggested that he needed help with answering these questions because

> some of the stuff it is getting harder as you go along. They say some of the stuff you should have learned in sixth grade that you haven't learned yet. Because now [that] the educational level keeps going up, they say you have to know it.

Rusty's problems with staying focused proved to be a challenge in meeting the school's high expectations. Because things are getting tougher and expectations are higher, Rusty, too, has thought about dropping out of school. His brother, himself a dropout, pressured him to remain in school, explaining to Rusty that he does not want him making the same mistake getting and holding a job without a high school degree. Rusty admitted that getting good grades "is real important to me, [but] it is a lot more important to my brother…He is really wanting me to do better than him." Rusty acknowledged that his elementary and junior/senior high school did not prepare him for high school: "Some of the things they said we should have learned in third grade, I never learned it. They changed it. In high school, you already should have learned things you should know in that grade." Because the school is promoting higher expectations for students and Rusty is falling behind in his classes, his GPA is approximately 1.1. In the first year of the consolidation, his GPA was 2.0, but since has steadily declined. Rusty

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attributed this decline to a "new school and new teachers." However, he admitted to "slacking off:"

> At the beginning of this year, I have had what they call a bunch of personality conflicts…They are saying I argue with the teachers just a little too much, and I get on their nerves and such. I am one of those hard headed people. I get upset when I know I am right. When people tell me something and I know I am right, I argue. Then I get sent down to the office.

Isner also taught at the career technical center and at Gateway High School before arriving at Clayton. She was not born in Clayton County, but Isner interestingly noted, 90 percent of Gateway's faculty graduated from Gateway and returned to teach in the school. Isner's knowledge of five of the six student participants provided rich data.

We began by discussing Rusty, whom she had when Rusty was in seventh grade. She described Rusty as someone who "needed monitoring, and I still think he needs that monitoring…I know academically he still struggles. He tells me that. Socially he has grown. He's the same old [Rusty]." She continued by explaining that "academics is not important to [Rusty]…He is low functioning, and [has] very little motivation as well." She continued by stating that some of the problems stem from inclusion of students in all classes. She described Rusty as someone who needs more one-on-one attention, because he does not like school.

In regards to the consolidation, Isner "miss[ed] the feeling of a small school, and the colleagues that were next door." For the most part, she believed that most students felt the same way. However, she explained that she has gained knowledge from her

colleagues which has strengthened her teaching and allowed her to share information with others in her department. If given the chance, Isner would not return to Henry; however, she noted that the school makes entirely too many changes. For example, in Clayton's first year there were seven periods a day; whereas, the second year had nine, but according to Isner, the school next year is returning to seven periods. She contended that to make academic gains, we have to "get a set pattern for the students."

Isner however, spoke highly of Principal Smith. She congratulated him on the work he has accomplished making the school a success. She explained that

> Smith has done a real good job of building from the ground up. He is an
> easy person to work with, because I don't think he has any
> preconceptions…He has tried to pull us together. Our gripe as a faculty is
> that we don't have time to socialize together. There are people in this
> building that I may not see until Faculty Senate. Kids seem to respect him
> a lot. I think he tries to put everyone on a fair and equal playing ground.

Rusty experienced monumental changes in his young life – deaths of his mother and father, foster homes, brother's heart attack – therefore, it is understandable that he has experienced academic difficulty and trouble staying focused. Regardless, he explained that Clayton County High School was "a pretty good school, but everything still has to be worked on quite a bit. Kids and stuff to get them together. Everything is still hectic, because it is a new school."

Murphy, a behavioral disorder teacher also explained that Rusty struggled in school. He acknowledged that

If you prompt him to get back on task and keep him focused, he will work

for you, but he really struggles the whole time he is working. He always

has a problem, like at home…I think he spends a lot of time with his

brother that is working and out of town. If he needs to get to the doctor, it

is hard for him to get to the doctor. He has been trying forever to get to the

eye doctor. He has been saying he needs glasses.

Stone, Rusty's agriculture teacher, also reported that Rusty complained about not being able to see the board and that he needed glasses.

Keiffer, a civics teacher at Clayton, confirmed Rusty's perspective that Principal Smith stressed the importance of high expectations for both teachers and students, but suggested that after-school tutoring could help students with academic problems. At the beginning of the first year, Smith "asked teachers to stand by their doors between classes, and I think it has cut down on problems immensely." He also reported that "from the beginning, we all came into a new school, and we were all told we had to have higher expectations and we carried it out." In order to assist struggling students, such as Rusty, Keiffer suggested that the school

offer more tutoring after school, and they could ride the activity bus home

or to a drop off point and let the parents pick them up. I think it would

help a lot of students that are having trouble that do want to learn, but

[have] no help at home.

Yet, Keiffer noted that the "parents that won't or can't help them with their academics are not willing to pick them up somewhere either. They are not willing to drive seven or eight miles to pick them up."

Smith described Rusty as "a bit ornery," but he acknowledged that Rusty had

several friends. However, as a student, Rusty struggled with high expectations:

[As a principal at Gateway], I [did] not have any run-ins with Ryan. He

seems to have a good social network. He has friends. He has a group of

people that he hangs with. [But]…I think that from the old high school,

they knew that he was coming here, so there wasn't a whole lot of

expectations.

Lack of Participation in Football. Like Sam and Brad, Rusty found pleasure

from playing football, junior varsity level, at his former school. He went in great detail

about the last play of the last game, beginning the story from the moment he fractured his

arm on the field and ending with his visit to the hospital. Once the football season ended

however, Rusty struggled to maintain his grades. He explained, "I have to have

something to work up to. I think I was just barely a 2.2." His current grades also prohibit

Rusty from playing football at Clayton.

Perhaps because Rusty experienced problems with the transition from Gateway to

Clayton, he returned to something familiar when I asked "If given the chance, would you

go back to Gateway High School?" He responded by saying, "In some ways, yes. That is

kind of like your roots. Like your family went there. Your parents went there. Your

parents' parents went there. It is like your roots." Rusty illustrated what it meant to attend

a traditional small, rural school, following in his family's footsteps:

Well, all my family has played football for them. My dad, my brother. My

brother didn't last long. When he went there for awhile he was having

trouble. But, when I first went there I was hoping to do like what all my

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other family did – play football for them the whole time. It was more like

a tradition. I guess I would go back for the traditional purposes. But, the

new school there is more stuff to do. Mechanical stuff, more hands-on

stuff, there is more there than Gateway.

Factors Enabling Success

Agriculture CTE Classes. Rusty also enrolled in career and technical classes. He

is currently in Veterinary Science, an agriculture education course. Rusty exhibited

excitement describing this course offering "hands on with the animals…Mr. [Stone] has

taught us how to give dogs and cats their injections, their temperature and everything…I

am better with hands on stuff." He described the teacher as someone who "you can relax

with. If you mess up, he isn't going to jump down your throat. He said you can try to do

better next time." The agriculture course offered students the opportunity to raise pigs,

sheep, poultry, and cattle. They also have two greenhouses in which students plant seeds

and grow flowers. Perhaps because of Rusty's unstable family life and the changes that

transpired, he seemed hesitant about taking on the responsibility of raising an animal:

Being my first year and all, I don't think I am going to be doing anything.

I'm still trying to get settled into it. I was going to go on and raise a pig

and take it to the fair, but I decided not to. I have raised pigs and stuff

before and it is a lot of work and I have to get used to it now. My brother

works in and out of the state, and he never knows what is going to happen.

I didn't want to get it and start raising it. You never know what is going to

happen. I don't want to start to raise an animal and then have to leave.

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Stone, Rusty's agriculture teacher, described Rusty as "detached" and slow at the beginning of the year." He also described Rusty as a student who is "hard to motivate. He is probably a student that could give us problems, but I have never had any problems." He explained that Rusty was making a D average at the beginning of the year, but when Stone introduced more hands-on activities in the agriculture class, Rusty responded well. Rusty is also assisted by Murphy, a special education teacher, in his English classes. Both teachers viewed Rusty as a struggling student challenged by the loss of his family and a lack of transportation to school and other activities.

Stone agreed with some of the students' perspectives that the school is stressing higher expectations.

We see the pressure in our classrooms, whether or not that is completely translated to the students or not. You hear students talking, and [in] some classes they don't feel like they get as much out of it as they could. Then other classes they are just hounded, hounded, and hounded. Then you say, "Well who do you have?" The same teachers keep coming up…For these extracurricular activities that are being offered with the high school also comes with higher expectations because now they are required to obtain a certain grade point average…we are now catering to more students.

Both teachers and students feel the pressure of higher expectations, but Stone described the biggest challenge as students' "lack of internal motivation or the cognitive knowledge that they have to know this for their future. They are living in the moment and they are not looking beyond." Murphy agreed when he explained that students face challenges due to "their home life. These kids with parents that struggle and didn't make

it through high school. We have a lot that dropped out. There is not a lot of motivation, to push them to go to school and do their best."

Friends. Similar to Sam and others as well, friends are important to Rusty. He regrets however, that he does not get the opportunity to talk to some of his former Gateway friends, now that they are in a bigger school. He explained that he has several friends from Gateway, Douglass, and Henry, but currently does not know anyone who attended Hanover. In fact, he remarked that he has friends from all but one of the cliques in the school. He referred to the cliques as: the "hot" blondes, cowboys, Goths, and the EMO people, who he described as the people who cut themselves. Some of these friends, as well as other family members, play in a band in which Rusty plays electric and acoustic guitar:

> I have four friends, but two of them I have known for a long time, but one of them I have known them since I was about five years old. We still talk about stuff we used to do. We are trying to get a band together now. We haven't thought of a name yet, but his weekend I am supposed to go up there to see if we can come up with a name.

Regardless of Rusty's claim that he has several friends from Gateway, Henry and Douglass, there was one teacher who still noticed a division among some of the students. Elliott, the nursing instructor, explained, "Gateway and Henry students have blended well. Douglass still stays by themselves. Many do well in class and socialize, but as soon as lunch time comes, they group together. Students from Douglass seem more connected to [the next county] than to other students in the county."

Positive Relationship with Principal. Rusty described Principal Smith as someone who "actually pays attention, [and] he means what he means, but he makes sense. He jokes but not too much." Rusty discovered that Smith was "actually easy to get along with," because it appeared that Smith possessed the ability to talk and reason with students on their level. When Rusty experienced a confrontation with a teacher, Smith made an effort to remedy the situation. For example:

> He looked at me and asked me what I was going to do for the future. I told
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> him, "I wanted to be an oil rig mechanic." He said, "Do you think you can
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> be an oil rig mechanic staying in the office?" [I replied], "Truthfully, no. It
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> is just me and that teacher can't agree on anything. He said, "Well, I will
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> try to get you switched out of there."

Conclusion

Chapter six provided single case analyses of two students, Brad and Rusty, who struggled in their transition from their former small, rural schools to the larger consolidated school at Clayton. Both had played football at their former school, but currently lack the needed grade point average to participate in extracurricular activities.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CROSS CASE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Chapters five and six featured individual case analyses of what enabled and constrained six students' success and transition to a larger school. In this chapter I will present a cross case analysis of those cases. Although the students' experiences of school consolidation are diverse and multifaceted, looking at the six cases as a group, some common themes can be seen. I discovered that most of the identified factors could be seen as both enablers and constraints – depending on the participant. Specifically, throughout the data interpretation phase I have identified three themes in this cross case analysis that enabled and/or constrained student success: (1) relationships with a principal, teachers, and others; (2) expanded curricular opportunities; and (3) participation in extracurricular activities.

A discussion of the three themes follows. In addition to a summary of the study's findings in relation to each theme, each section includes a discussion of the findings in relation to prior research on that theme, especially in the school consolidation literature. As previously mentioned in chapter one, the evidence in support of small schools clearly outweighs the research on the benefits of school consolidation. Some of the findings in this study are similar to those of other studies on school consolidation. However, other findings may be new contributions to the existing literature. For example, this study's findings are inconsistent with research showing disadvantages of school consolidation, especially for economically marginalized students. The Matthew Project, a series of studies that explored the relationship between student achievement and SES, showed that

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smaller school size tended to benefit students in impoverished communities, but larger size tended to benefit students in more affluent communities (Friedkin & Necochea, 1988; Howley 2000; Howley, et al., 2000; Howley & Bickel, 1999). However, in this study four of the six economically marginalized students thrived as they transitioned from their former rural, small junior/senior high schools to Clayton County High School, a larger consolidated high school. While a significant amount of prior research explored the impact of consolidated schools with large student enrollments, this study took place in a rural school with a student enrollment of approximately 850 – 900 students, well within the 600 – 900 range recommended by Lee and Smith (1997).

Supportive yet Challenging Relationships with a Principal, Teachers, and Others

Summary of Study's Findings

The six students in this study formerly attended one of four small junior/senior high schools in a rural West Virginia county. During the first year of the school consolidation, five of the six students frequently described their former teachers as caring, helpful, and familiar – almost like members of their family. Only Sam admitted that he did not get along with his former teachers or principals.

Because of these prior close relationships, students were scared and apprehensive when they were forced to leave their small community schools and attend a larger one with other students throughout the county. Since most students valued those close relationships with their former teachers, it came as no surprise that the students who appeared to thrive in the transition reported that positive relationships with their new principal, teachers, and others were instrumental in their success.

For example, five of the six students identified Principal Smith as someone who directly or indirectly made a difference as they transitioned from their former small school to the new consolidated high school. Five of the students also identified one or more teachers who contributed, at least to some degree, to their success – whether academically or personally in the new school. A one-school philosophy, higher expectations, and responsiveness were three aspects of the close relationships among the principal, teachers, and students in this study. First of all, the one-school philosophy promoted by Principal Smith and followed by teachers appeared to seep into the students' consciousness toward the conclusion of the first year. Until that time, students' comments about the new school were pessimistic and unenthusiastic. Students' allegiance to their former schools was strong and most viewed others only in relation to their former school. Although Smith promoted the new school as one school for all, it was not until those last few weeks before the beginning of the summer break that students began to see one another as Clayton students rather than as Douglass, Gateway, Henry, or Hanover students. It was also during this time that students began discussing the more positive aspects of attending a larger school.

In addition to the one-school philosophy, higher expectations fostered by Principal Smith and his teachers further enhanced positive relationships within the school. From the beginning, Principal Smith encouraged teachers to hold higher expectations for students. It appeared however, that he also had high expectations for the teachers and for himself as the principal of the new school. He knew because of the four schools' prior low statewide testing scores that major changes had to be implemented. He began by offering teachers professional development opportunities before the opening of

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the school. As the principal and teachers sought to increase students' academic achievement, students began to report that their classes were getting harder. However, four of the six students did not necessarily view that change negatively. In fact, they seemed to thrive as they worked to live up to the higher academic expectations. In some cases grades fell, but these students believed they were actually learning more. Interview data suggest that teachers demonstrated concepts, provided extra help with assignments, answered questions, and perhaps more importantly, contributed to a "better environment" in the school and in the classroom.

Further, a major component of this "better environment" was Principal Smith's responsiveness to students' needs. Both students and teachers reported that Smith heard, listened, and responded to their concerns. Smith's desire to make decisions with students' best interests in mind is exemplified in his comment that he would do almost anything in his power not to suspend a student. As we have seen, it was not uncommon for Smith to remove a student from a particular class and put him/her in a different one if the circumstances warranted such a change. Smith recognized that a personality conflict between a teacher and a student could lead to bigger problems. When problems arose, students explained that he often invited both the teacher and student to the office to discuss a possible solution. If it was in the student's best interest, Smith did not hesitate to remove the student from the classroom and enroll him/her in another class. Apparently this differed from how such problems were previously handled at the former schools. Students reported that it was not uncommon for teachers to send students to the office without any prior attempt to seek a solution. One student referred to this change in behavioral management as "try[ing] to help the kid more than just send[ing] him on."

Students commended Smith and the teachers on their responsiveness to problems without sending them to the office or suspending them unnecessarily.

Smith's attitude regarding student suspensions helped me to understand how important it was to him for students to stay in school. Smith explained that it is like "going to a race track and not getting in the car. You are supposed to be here for a reason. What we do is to educate the child, and [if] you send him home that is part of the problem." Perhaps Smith's advocacy for students served as the foundation for four of the students' changes in attitude toward the new school.

In addition to listening to students' problems, Smith listened to students' and teachers' ideas. Specifically, it was reported that Smith has never lost sight of who he is working with; both teachers and students. As earlier reported, Smith does more than hear; he listens, values, and cares about others' ideas. This was evident when Smith accepted students' recommendations to leave lunch five minutes early in order to relieve the congestion in the hallway. When Smith accepted students' suggestions he seemed to be attempting to give a voice to those students who, at their former school, may have had little or none.

As reported earlier, students liked the "smallness" of their former schools and the fact that everyone knew everyone. Perhaps Smith' response to students losing this small community atmosphere was his attempt to become familiar with all students within the school. Throughout the two interviews with Principal Smith, I was impressed with his knowledge of students' identities as evidenced by his comments regarding their specific individual circumstances, both personal and school related. In 2007-08, there were over

800 students attending Clayton County High School; however, this did not thwart Smith's desire to know each and every student's name.

Smith's efforts to communicate with both students and faculty were noticed by teachers as well. One of Clayton's music faculty described him as "top notch" and a major reason why she chose to teach at Clayton. The teacher valued his supportiveness and more importantly, his ability to listen to students and faculty. She had not experienced this type of leadership at her prior school, and therefore commended Smith for making both students and teachers feel welcome at the new school.

It is important to reiterate that relationships with the principal and teachers were a source of support for four of the six student participants in this study; conversely, the other two students lacked any observable personal support system. Consequently, they received no significant encouragement as they struggled with the transition to a larger school with higher expectations. These two students were discouraged and at times appeared on the verge of dropping out of school.

For these two participants the transition was difficult as they left behind their small community schools with the familiar surroundings. Both reported that they were more comfortable with their previous teachers and they appeared to have enjoyed a better relationship with those whom they had known for years. Since those teachers had known the students' personal and family histories, students felt comfortable asking them questions and requesting assistance when needed. The students frequently mentioned teachers' names as we discussed their former schools, but when asked if I could talk with them to gain their perspectives on the student, I was told that several had remained behind to teach at the middle school. Therefore, those prior relationships had been

severed, and at the conclusion of this study it appeared that these students, who had not

formed a relationship with the principal, teachers, or others at the new school, struggled

the most.

Finally, the data also showed that students' relationships with other individuals

and groups were important sources of support as they transitioned to the larger school.

Parents, siblings, and in one case, a girlfriend provided support systems for four of the

students as they transitioned to the new school. Unfortunately, during this study two

boys' fathers passed away leaving one student to rely on a girlfriend and the other with

no one to fill the void. This boy continued to struggle as the second year of the

consolidation drew to a close. Throughout his dad's illness Brad's attendance suffered,

and to my knowledge, no administrator, teacher, or other school official knew about

Brad's circumstances. Unfortunately, he was hidden "in the cracks" just as Smith

described and without any obvious support person or school interest – extracurricular or

academic – Brad lacked a connection to the school. At the conclusion of this study, I

wondered whether he would remain in school past his 18th birthday.

In contrast, Nancy's mother brought her to school each day and picked her up

afterwards. However, she too experienced some difficulties with transportation.

Moreover, since Nancy lived in the Hanover area it was difficult for her to develop

friendships beyond the school. So far, she had not been able to either visit or stay

overnight with her new best friend, who lives in the Douglass area. Nancy explained that

"we live so far away…That is probably one of the hardest things is not being able to go to

her house and not spending the night." Nevertheless, it appeared that Nancy did have a

strong relationship with her mother who provided support. Neither Brad nor Rusty had the benefit of such support.

I wondered if Nancy's mother had not been so supportive of her decision to attend Clayton if she would have experienced the same student success. Both Brad and Rusty lacked parental guidance, positive relationships with principal and teachers in the new school, involvement in any extracurricular activity, and satisfaction with coursework. On the other hand, Nancy – who lived with a mother who seemed to serve as a support system – achieved academic achievement and enjoyed participating in cheerleading.

Prior Research

I was unable to find prior research about the role of a principal in a consolidated school. However, Crenshaw's (2005) study found that self-efficacy, teacher caring, and school culture were paramount in academic success in schools. Also, Nettles and Herrington (2007) argued that there is "ample evidence in the body of research and in educational practice to confirm that the school principal is regarded as critical to school success and student achievement" (p. 729). However, Heck, Larsen, and Marcoulides (1990) cautioned that researchers "are not sure whether the association between effective principal instructional leadership and student achievement reflects a cause and effort or coincidental relationship…" (p. 95). Therefore, after a partial, post-study review of the literature it was evident that some research suggests a direct effect, and other research shows no correlations between the variables.

One of the most recent studies that examined a relationship was conducted by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) who found a positive correlation between 21 principal leadership responsibilities and student achievement. This study conceptualized

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'balanced leadership' and explained that "effective leadership means more than simply knowing what to do – it's knowing when, how, and why to do it" (http://www.rdc.udel.edu/policy/briefs/v24_April.pdf).

Marzano, et al. (2005) explained that effective leaders must first identify and focus on changes that are most likely to have a significant impact on student achievement. This study described change as two-fold. First-order change is taken in small steps such as achieving a short term goal. In contrast, second-order change involves more dramatic steps in finding solutions. All 21 principal leadership responsibilities are involved in the day-to-day first-order changes in the school, and seven of those responsibilities are emphasized as second-order changes. Three of the responsibilities were especially consistent with factors identified by students and teachers in relation to Principal Smith's leadership and in his initiatives to improve the educational system in Clayton County, thereby promoting student success: (1) change agent; (2) communication; and (3) visibility.

Change Agent. According to Marzano, et al. (2005), a change agent is a "school leader [who] embodies a disposition to challenge the status quo" (http://www.rdc.udel.edu/policy/briefs/v24_April.pdf). A leader who exhibits the ability to challenge the status quo is a leader who is comfortable with driving the change, and is a leader who is seeking new and better ways of doing things (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). For example, at the conclusion of the first year of the consolidation in June 2007, Smith reminisced about his first year as the principal at Clayton County High School. I thought perhaps he began to challenge the status quo concerning Clayton

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County's educational system when he referred to the event as a "reconfiguration" rather than a school consolidation.

From the beginning, Smith acknowledged that the county's previous educational system did not work and therefore something had to be done. In this way, he exhibited evidence of being a change agent when he considered a new and better way of educating the students in the county. He explained that building only one school for the students in this rural community was not his idea of the best solution, but he stated that if that was what the county had to work with, then they had to make the best of the situation. For example, Smith was well aware of the literature showing that lower SES students perform better in small schools; furthermore, he also knew that the county's schools were not adequately educating its students. Hence, his claim that something other than the norm had to happen if the county's students were to compete for 21st century jobs.

Hines (2002) indicated that a strong presence of community is typically evident in a rural school. Accordingly, Leisey, et al. (1990) reported that residents in rural communities fear a loss of identity when schools consolidate. Therefore, Smith recognized that students needed a sense of belongingness when Clayton's doors opened. His efforts to make the students feel as if they belonged in this larger institution could be seen as an example of the "first-order" changes described by Marzano, et al. Smith was aware that students not only left their small school environments to which they felt connected, but they also left their schools' histories and traditions – traditions that included environments in which "everybody knew everybody." They also left their sense of comfort in approaching teachers with any problems, many of whom they had known for years.

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A second-order change involved the more complex steps of ensuring student success at Clayton. Smith argued that the county's struggle to increase student achievement had to take center stage if teachers were to ensure that students gained the needed skills for the 21st century. To do that, specific issues had to be addressed. Smith never appeared to be nervous about making those changes, and he did not waver in his determination to demand more from teachers and students. Perhaps it was because he knew that his decisions were made with the students' best interests in mind. For instance, this change agent made a decision to eliminate a flex period that was intended to assist students, a class period perhaps misused by teachers and hated by students. In the second year of the consolidation, Smith's focus shifted to the implementation of a ninth grade academy in the school. The ninth grade academy was intended to provide these young students a support system. According to Smith the academy is working well, but one of the teachers interviewed was more guarded in his comments, inferring that the academy was not working as intended. Regardless of the academy's status, Smith seemed to be aware of the need for students to form relationships with teachers that would perhaps last throughout their four years of high school.

Smith's initiation of these changes appeared to stem from his desire to help students succeed in their transition. However, the change initiatives did not stop with the students. Smith encouraged the teachers at Clayton County High School to raise their own professional standards, and there is evidence that teachers slowly bought into his philosophy. I saw evidence of this shift when students began to report that classes were harder and that they were learning more.

Miller's (2007) study also explored the relationship between a principal and his/her students' achievement. This study investigated Title I principals' perceptions of attitudes, policies, and practices believed to increase student achievement for economically disadvantaged students. According to Miller's study, effective "principals are perceived by [the] staff as values-led, people centered, and passionate about making a difference" (p. 54). It could be argued that Principal Smith embodied similar characteristics when students described Smith as easy to get along with, student-centered, and when teachers described him as someone whose greatest asset was his "people skills." These traits were apparent from Smith's communication with students and teachers.

Perhaps one of the best examples of Smith's role as a change agent surfaced during our second interview. He refused to hide behind the rules when he tried to find the best solution to one student's problem:

> We have a kid that almost failed last year, good kid, bright kid, horrible home life…He was two credits short. He was going to [return to school] and the Army recruiter said, "I would like to have you. You just need that diploma." We determined that he needed more than to sit in his classroom an entire year so we did a credit recovery. You come to school, you put [in] the seat work in your English Class; you put [in] the seat work in your History class. [Then] let me put you on this computer to find out the exact skills that you are not getting. Once [he] passed that, the Army said "we will take you."

Smith appeared to plan each activity, each change, and each initiative with students' needs in mind. Regardless of their level of academic achievement, five of the six participants commented on Smith's positive demeanor and his ability to get along, communicate, and work with students.

Communication and Visibility. Not only was student success at Clayton promoted by the principal's desire to institute positive changes, but also by the principal's visibility, accessibility, and strong communication with and between teachers and students. According to Marzano, et al. (2005), effective communication take place when "the school leader establishes strong lines of communication" with others, and when the principal is accessible to anyone within the school. Visibility, on the other hand, is a byproduct of a school leader who "interacts with teachers, students, and parents" (http://www.rdc.udel.edu/policy/briefs/v24_April.pdf), visits the classrooms, walks through the school, and maintains contact with the students.

Smith began communicating with students before the new school opened. He visited the four former high schools to talk with students about the new school. His visibility within those schools gave students the opportunity to get to know him long before the opening of Clayton. During his discussions with students, Smith encouraged students from Hanover to attend the new consolidated school instead of transferring to a school in a nearby county. As described earlier, this gesture did not go unnoticed by the lone Hanover student in this study. According to the student, Smith was probably the "one person that stood out more than anybody" when she decided to attend Clayton rather than attend the other school. Smith's visit to Hanover appeared to make a difference when it came time for Nancy to make the decision regarding whether or not she would

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attend the new school. This school leader established a line of communication that continues to remain open with both teachers and students.

Any agreement on optimal school size is nonexistent in the literature, but it has been noted that an enrollment of 600 – 900 is well within the desired range (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002). Clayton County High School's 2007-08 student enrollment was approximately 863 – excluding Hanover students attending another county's school. Therefore, the new school is within that optimal range. Principal Smith believes that the school must maintain those close relationships between students and teachers, students and the principal, and principal and teachers in order for students to succeed in this new school. With a school size between 600 – 900, Smith can maintain these relationships. According to Ready, Lee, and Welner (2004), students encounter more positive relationships in small schools, and according to Garbarino (1995), and Lee and Smith (1995) students also benefit from smaller learning communities as opposed to larger communities. This supports Smith' stance that a larger school could succeed, if a small community environment existed within the school.

Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Summary of Study's Findings

When Clayton County High School opened in fall 2006, the six students in this study were scared of leaving their small, community schools and transferring to a larger consolidated school located farther from home. Negative comments regarding the school, teachers, and other students were heard throughout the first year. It was evident that students missed their former schools and the teachers who remained behind at the middle

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schools to teach. Brad and Rusty, however, suffered a loss that extended beyond the teachers in the classroom.

At one time or other, at their former school or at Clayton, five of the six students participated in some type of extracurricular activity, either sports, band, or cheerleading. Rusty played junior varsity football before coming to Clayton. Brad played at Douglass High School and Sam played football at Clayton during the 2007-08 school year. Joyce was a member in the school band, and Nancy had enjoyed cheerleading since the age of eleven. Two of the students admitted that playing sports motivated them to attend school on a regular basis and to maintain the required GPA. In that respect, sports played a significant role in students' sense of belongingness at the school. The boys admitted that playing sports kept them out of trouble and in school on a regular basis.

Playing football was important in both the Douglass and Gateway communities. It was also important to Brad and Rusty who had previously enjoyed playing junior varsity football at their respective schools. In the rural communities of Clayton County a football tradition exists, providing a social network within the school and community. Students exhibited pride as they described their former schools' games with standing-room only attendance.

Brad sensed a connection to the school when he played football. He explained his grades were higher and when he played "he could feel like [himself]." Perhaps he hid behind the pads and helmet, because this self-proclaimed "lone-wolf" did not like to be the center of attention, and without any support system it was easy for him to remain in the shadows. It appeared that playing football meant more to Brad than just scoring touchdowns or tackling the other teams' players. As a player he was part of a social

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network, but at the same time, he was able to be himself without drawing attention to his actions. Brad's uniform provided armor so to speak – shielding him from others.

On the other hand, when the football season ended or when they no longer maintained the required GPA to play, the boys appeared dejected as they spoke of this time honored tradition called football. As they mentioned their fathers and brothers who had played football at their small community schools, they spoke as if they too were expected to play – as if it was not an option. This sense of dejection seemed to permeate their other school activities. For example, grades declined, behavioral problems somewhat increased, and the boys struggled to remain in school.

Band and cheerleading were other extracurricular activities that helped Joyce and Nancy transition from a small school to a larger school. Students' love of their particular extracurricular activities surfaced throughout the interviews. A sense of tradition was ever present as students discussed their dreams of playing football, participating as a band member, or cheerleading at the schools where their parents and siblings attended. However, these same extracurricular activities provided a "hook" for students in the new consolidated school, increasing their interest in school and academics. Sports provided students an opportunity to excel in something other than academics, and when this was no longer an option, as in the case of Brad and Rusty, it left a void that had not been filled.

Out of the six students in this study, it appeared that Brad and Rusty struggled more – academically, socially, and personally. Their grades were low, transportation was difficult, and both experienced problems communicating with the teachers – especially

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Brad who kept to himself. As we have seen, not playing football may have contributed to their lack of success in school.

Prior Research

As early as 1964, Roger Barker and Paul Gump found that both the number and selection of extracurricular activities in which students participate are considerably higher in small schools than in large ones. Barker and Gump also reported that the types of extracurricular activities in schools are consistent, regardless of school size, but the number of available positions in these settings is a function of size" (cited in Morgan and Alwin, 1980, p. 243). Additional studies (Cotton, 1996; Fowler, 1992; Stockard & Mayberry, 1992) discovered that students participate in extracurricular activities at a higher rate in small schools when compared with large schools. This was not true for three of the six students in this study. In fact, Sam reported that opportunities for participation in sports at his former school were limited, and coaches had their favorite students who they put on the teams.

Rombokas' (1995) research found that extracurricular activities are the only component that makes some students stay in school and attend regularly. This seems to be the case with Rusty who was without parents as he struggled to finish his second year at Clayton. He admitted that he often thought about dropping out of school, and that it was more important to his brother than to himself that he not drop out. Rusty's brother often worked away from home, and it appeared that Rusty worried about having to move yet again. Because he struggled with his academics and with his personal life, it seemed essential for him to have some sense of connection to the new school, but without the grades and transportation it was impossible for him to join the team.

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Mahoney and Cairns (1997) also found that students who dropped out of school were those who participated in fewer extracurricular activities, even several years before actually dropping out, which according to Gilman, Meyers, and Perez (2004) "supports the assumption that school disengagement begins well before actual dropout" (p. 35). This was supported by my study as well. Neither Brad nor Rusty was engaged in school activities. At the same time, neither of the students did well in school and both seemed to have little interest in staying in school. Also consistent with this finding is Marsh's (1992) study that used data from the High School and Beyond (HSB) study to look at variables that influenced growth and change in educational outcomes in the last two years of high school. Marsh "suggested that identification with the school and school-related values is fostered by extracurricular activities" (p. 5). This seemed to be true with Brad and Rusty in my study. Without the opportunity to play football, they ceased to have any extracurricular interest providing a sense of connection to the school, or any motivation to improve their grades. In my study, it seemed that this issue was part of a cyclical process – low grades resulted in Brad and Rusty not playing football; not playing football resulted in them not feeling a connection to the school; no connection to the school resulted in Brad and Rusty not caring enough to study or to seek tutoring to improve their grades.

Students who struggle to remain engaged in school and in school-related activities are at risk for negative consequences. According to Gilman, Meyers, and Perez (2004), "negative outcomes can occur when an adolescent is not part of a social network…" (p. 33). Low grades are not the only obstacle to participating in extracurricular activities. It was also reported by Riele (2006) that the lack of bonding that extracurricular activities

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provide results in marginalized students failing to achieve in school "not through their personal characteristics but through their relationship with schooling" (p. 129). Finn (1989) explained that "students who identify with schools have an internalized sense of belongingness – they are discernibly part of the school environment" (p. 123), and Holland and Andre (1987) found that participation in athletics is "related to aspirations and attainment. This appears to be especially true for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds" (cited in Rombokas, 1995, p. 7) and it was true for two of the three students in this study who were not involved in extracurricular activities. An "alienation from the school environment is a bad outcome itself, and is connected with other undesirable outcomes – lack of confidence and self-esteem, lack of responsibility for self-direction, absenteeism and increased dropout rates" (Bailey, 2000, p. 2).

Keiffer, a teacher at Clayton, noticed that students who did not participate in sports, particularly football or baseball, at their former school are now playing volleyball or wrestling, sports that their former schools did not offer. He continued by explaining that those students now have something in which they are good and that motivates them to work in class. However, the nursing instructor reported that the competition to play sports at Clayton was greater than at the four former schools. She explained that "kids [who] have played all of their lives are not playing now, and students do not come back for [after-school] activities because it is too far to drive." Therefore, it came as no surprise when I sensed Brad and Rusty's sadness at not being able to play their favorite sport.

Another factor that may prohibit students from participating in extracurricular activities is the failure to get and maintain the required grade point average, as was the

case for Brad and Rusty. In relation to this issue, McNeal (1999) explained that "students with poor grades are substantially less likely to participate due to structural limitations (e.g., the grade-point-average rule), and students with certain skills (musical, athletic, and artistic) are more likely to participate" (p. 294). McNeal stated that a "reasonable hypothesis might be that schools with a heightened emphasis on achievement limit access to extracurricular activities for students not performing well academically" (p. 295). Furthermore, McNeal explained that this often prevents students from forming close relationships with both peers and teachers. It was also noted that students in rural communities lack alternative choices in nonschool related activities; therefore, rural students rely more on school activities for socializing and entertainment. This was the case for five of the six students.

   According to Holloway (2000), students who participate in extracurricular activities at school experience higher achievement, stay in school longer, have higher self-esteem, maintain regular attendance, and exhibit fewer behavior problems. This was found to be true for thee of the students in my study. Conversely, for two of the other three students who did not participate in extracurricular activities, grades declined, attendance decreased, and self-esteem decreased. Both Sam and Rusty admitted that when they played football they had to have something to work for. All three boys explained that as soon as the football season ended, they ceased having any type of motivation to maintain their GPAs.

   Joyce participated as a member in Clayton's band, and according to Zwart's (2007) study, "students involved in athletics and music showed that there was a statistically significant difference between athletes and non-athletes and music students

and non-music students in terms of GPA, math standardized testing, and English/Language Arts standardized testing" (Summary section, ¶ 1). Interestingly, Morrison (1994) explained that student participation in band has a positive effect on academics and self-discipline, and "excellence in music education and excellence in academics go hand in hand" (cited in Rombokas, 1995, p. 9). This was certainly true in Joyce's case. She achieved academically, took AP courses, and was described as a "top-notch" student.

It seemed that Joyce's involvement in band provided a small learning community that resulted in her excelling in both band and other classes. In the interview with Joyce, it was not long before I discovered that she considered her participation in the band as one way in which to connect to the school and to other students, and it was obvious that being a member provided the support Joyce needed to assist in the transition from the small school to the larger school. In that respect, she had not lost the small, friendly environment she loved at Henry, her former school.

When Clayton County High School opened in 2006, most students were forced to ride the bus for longer periods of time each day. This travel time can have an adverse effect on participating in extracurricular activities. Lawrence et al., (2002) reported that when students can either walk to and from school, or spend less than a half-hour on the bus for each trip, they have more time to participate in after school activities. Lawrence et al.'s, study also found that "students who spend less time on the bus are able to spend more time with family and friends, in community activities, and even on homework" (p. 13). The report also stated that parents, friends, and relatives attend events, classes, and other school-related activities when they live nearby the school. This was the case for

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Nancy who lived in the Hanover area. She reported that the long distance between

Hanover and Douglass makes it difficult for her to visit her new best friend. Nancy's

mother takes her to school and picks her up each day; nevertheless, she reported that

cheerleading, studying, and attending church take up much of her time.

Transportation also proved to be an obstacle to participants in extracurricular

activities in this study. The majority of the students, except those who previously

attended Henry High School, experienced a longer bus ride to and from the new school.

Therefore, for some of the study's participants attending any after-school activity was

difficult. Murphy, one of Sam's teachers, pointed out that Sam often lacked

transportation in late 2007, to football games and practices. He explained that he knew

Sam frequently had a "good walk" back home afterwards. Likewise, Brad experienced

problems with transportation. The only consistent transportation for Brad was the school

bus to and from school. He explained that every car at home was often broken down;

therefore, he had no way to attend practices and games even if his grades permitted.

Expanded Curriculum – CTE, AP Classes, and Technology

Summary of Study's Findings

Prior to the opening of Clayton, CTE classes were offered only at a separate

career center located in Henry. Students were surprised that at the new school building

technology, welding, agriculture, nursing, and other CTE classes were located in the

same building as their academic courses. Students reported that if they had remained at

their former schools, they would not have enrolled in CTE classes, left their school and

ridden another bus to the career and technical center.

CTE and AP classes were offered at Clayton County High School as part of a plan for an expanded curriculum. Classes in agriculture, health occupations, family and consumer sciences, ProStart (culinary arts), business education, and technical and industrial education are CTE programs offered at the new school. In addition to these CTE classes, the expanded curriculum included honors and AP courses. According to the 2007-08 General Information Data published by the West Virginia Department of Education, Clayton's schedule of AP classes included Calculus, English Language, English Literature, and Biology. The school also offered advanced biology, human anatomy, and chemistry. Classes in dance, music, art, theatre, as well as foreign language classes – Chinese and Spanish – are also included in Clayton's program of study.

Students reported that Clayton had more classes from which to choose as well as more teachers who taught the same subject. Choices in the type of classes and the number of sections available were especially important to Sam. He liked that he had more than one teacher from which to choose for his classes. Limited choices at Gateway meant he was often left in a class in which he disliked or clashed with the teacher. Because Sam experienced difficulties at his former school, he hated that he "had seven different teachers [where] it was the same situation with all seven. Now if he experienced problems it "would be with [only] one teacher." Sam admitted that he did not get along with any of his seven teachers at Gateway (one for each period in the day). Consequently, he was limited in his selection of teachers and had no other choice than to "deal with it." On the other hand, at Clayton Sam had more teachers from which to choose and therefore he only experienced problems with one or two. Along the same lines, Sam was able to

participate in Clayton's driver's education program. Previously at Gateway, Sam attempted twice to enroll in the program, but he explained that he was "never picked."

Each of the student participants reported taking one or more CTE classes. Sam was enrolled in building technology and welding. Brad, Rusty, and Joyce were enrolled in agriculture courses, and Carol and Nancy were students in the health occupations program. Sam explained that he was enrolled in CTE classes because the counselor believed he would benefit from the classes and Sam commended the counselors who worked hard to get him in so he could learn something about the occupations. He enrolled in building technology and welding, both CTE classes, because he liked the hands-on learning, and it "kept [him] occupied during the day." Without the opportunity to interview a counselor at the school, it was difficult to determine if Sam's reasoning was indeed true, or did it mean that the counselor only enrolled him in CTE classes because he/she believed that he could not succeed in other more academic classes?

Like Brad and Rusty, Joyce was enrolled in agriculture. She described her excitement when she heard that the new school included the program and Future Farmers of America (FFA), the co-curricular student organization: "I'm a hands-on person and we get to work in the greenhouses and we planted all kinds of stuff." Carol instead chose to enroll in nursing, a health occupations CTE program, another type of class utilizing hands-on learning activities.

Prior to attending Clayton County High School, three students, who are currently enrolled in AP courses, were not aware that this type of classes existed. Now Joyce reported that "there are so many more things out there instead of the things you see at a smaller school." Sam too, reported that there were more opportunities to take courses at

Clayton. The expanded curriculum options promoted higher expectations and a hands-on learning approach liked by all six students.

Also a component in the school's expanded curriculum is the increased technology resources available for teacher and student use. Five students mentioned Clayton teachers' use of technology in most of their classes. Carol described the COW (computers on wheels) that made it easier for teachers to use computers in the classroom, if they were not already installed. Students were aware of the SmartBoards and Responders in their classes.

Both Rusty and Sam noted that Clayton had a greater number of computers than their previous school, and classes were available at Clayton for students to learn how to build and repair computers. Rusty was aware of the available technology in both the classrooms and in the operations of the school. For example, he explained about how the lights turn on when you walk into a room and turn off when you leave. He also knew that the computer labs recently updated to Windows VISTA. Rusty proudly stated that he "loved working on computers, and [he] made the mistake of telling a couple of people [that he] work[s] on the computers." He continued by saying, "I have about ten computers I am working on now, and they want me to work on their computers. They buy the parts and I put it together for them." When Rusty told me that he often assists teachers in using the SmartBoards, I could picture him as he "fiddled around on it and learned everything on it. [He] showed teachers how to work on it and everything."

As discussed in chapter four, Clayton County Schools' statewide testing scores in math and reading were well below the state's average in 2005-06. However, the 2006-07 data show that even though scores are still below state average, scores in the low SES

subgroup in reading and math increased slightly when compared with scores from three

of the four former schools. Only in the non-SES subgroup did math scores decline from

52.33 to 51.41 percent. Perhaps the expanded curriculum – CTE and AP courses, along

with increased technology within the classroom – played a role in increasing students'

scores.

Prior Research

An expanded curriculum has often been reported as one benefit of school

consolidation**.** Burton (1989) reported expanded curriculum offerings after Alleghany

County and Clifton Forge City Schools merged, and Benton (1992) reported an increase

in curriculum offerings in an Arkansas school consolidation.

Proponents of large schools have argued that rural schools fail to assist students in

becoming marketable in the workforce and as a result students are not "adequately

prepared to take advantage of future educational opportunities like students in larger

schools" (Blake, 2003, p. 31). The findings of my study support this prior research.

According to all six students, the course selection at Clayton County High School was

superior when compared to the four former schools.

CTE courses typically promote a hands-on approach to learning. All six students

reported they learned best by participating in hands-on activities. Unlike some academic

courses where students reported that worksheets were frequently used, CTE classes

offered them chances to get out of their seats and learn by doing. Sam worked on

building and welding projects; Brad, Joyce, and Rusty learned by taking care of animals,

growing flowers, and at the time of this study, they are exploring possible ways to

generate alternative fuels through their study of bio-technology. This hands-on learning

approach is supported in CTE literature showing that students learn better when the material is personally relevant and contextualized (Maurer, 2000). This relevancy and contextualized learning was also explored in Boike's study (2007) of nine districts' experiences with school consolidation in Illinois. Teachers reported that a byproduct of consolidation were better instructional materials and equipment for use in the classroom.

Unlike what I heard from the principal, teachers, and students in this study , CTE frequently suffers from a negative image. In fact, according to Lewis (2001), counselors are sometimes viewed as barriers to a positive image of CTE. Lewis' study found that counselors "view CTE as a 'dumping ground' for problem or low achieving students" (p. 7). Regardless of Clayton's counselor's intent, Sam was pleased that she had enrolled him into the building technology program. His enthusiasm showed as he discussed an upcoming statewide Skills-USA, a co-curricular organization, masonry competition. It seemed that Sam was excited about the possibility of participating in this statewide competition. This was an opportunity that Sam would never have anticipated at his former school. This too, was a source of engagement for the students who learned best through hands-on activities.

Enrolling these six students into CTE courses and AP courses has enabled them to experience satisfaction and academic success. These classes also provided a "hook" for students to remain interested in school and not drop out. Unlike Lee and Burkam's (2001) study that reported that students have a tendency to stay in school where mainly academic courses rather than nonacademic courses are offered, three of the six students excelled in both AP and CTE classes. In fact, these three students were considered high academic achievers and planned to attend college after graduation.

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In contrast, in 2003, Levesque and Hudson found that "although CTE attempts to appeal to a wide range of academic performers, those students from the highest academic achievement groups were less likely to be in a CTE concentration" (pp. 35-36). This current study's data revealed that all six students were enrolled in one or more CTE classes.

Levesque and Hudson (2003) studied 1,998 high school graduates across the nation. They reported that students "identified as being in a lower economic category were found in higher concentrations in CTE than their non-CTE counterparts" (p. 36). Likewise in this study all six students enrolled in these courses were identified as economically marginalized. In addition, Gaunt (2006) explained that students who may lack the financial resources to take advanced postsecondary training may seek enrollment in CTE courses in order to gain the needed skills for employment.

In addition to the CTE and AP courses offered, students reported an increase in the number of sections of other academic classes. I did not locate in the literature any reference to the benefits of an increase in the number of teachers from whom to take classes. There is however, literature regarding the number of sections available to students in larger schools. Slate and Jones (n.d.) stated that larger schools have additional sections of courses, but not necessarily a variety of new courses. This did not prove to be the case at Clayton. The data revealed both additional courses and additional class sections at the new school.

I also was unable to find in the literature any reference to AP courses specifically in consolidated schools. However, there are annual reports published by the College Board (2008) that provided evidence that the offering of AP courses in West Virginia is

below the national average. For instance, according to *The 4th AP Annual Report to the Nation: West Virginia Supplement,* 15.2 percent of West Virginia's public high schools class of 2007 took at least one AP exam whereas 24.9 percent nationwide took an exam. In the 2007-08 school year, Clayton County High School offered four AP classes – half of the national average. According to the College Board's annual report, 60 percent of high schools offer AP courses, with an average number of eight such courses. These statistics are noteworthy considering the earlier report that Clayton County High School has a high percentage of low SES students. The majority of the study's participants believed that AP courses were not offered at their former schools; at least one however, thought there may have been one such course at her school. Nevertheless, this uncertainty is evidence that even if AP courses were listed in the program of study, these students were not made aware of this option. This is significant given Adelman's (2004) report noting enrollment in a AP class is a strong indicator of student's success in college.

Directions for Future Research

Because there is limited information on what it means to be an economically marginalized student in a rural consolidated school, this phenomenological case study was conducted to explore what enabled and/or constrained student success in school – academically (e.g. formal curriculum) and socially (e. g. extracurricular activities). This study also explored how students who previously attended small community schools adjusted to a larger school located farther away from home. There is also significant research reporting the possible correlation between low SES and student achievement, but there is a lack of qualitative research showing how or why that happens. It was the

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intent of this study to add to the body of knowledge concerning students' experiences of school consolidation in a rural community.

To my knowledge, follow-up (after the fact of consolidation) research using students' voices concerning school consolidation is nonexistent in the literature. While this particular study may not be replicated in its entirety, further research is needed to learn more about how students experience, or do not experience, successful transitions into consolidated schools. A more long-term study following students throughout their transition process might be conducted in elementary, middle, or in other high schools.

Investigating student success based on gender similarities/differences bears thought. In this study, all six students were enrolled in CTE courses; however, only the three girls were enrolled in AP classes. Future consolidation research based on gender might be valuable for schools.

Clayton County High School might also find value in conducting additional research following students who are, and who are not included in the principals' current and future implementation of changes. For example, research could focus on the students who were in the ninth grade academy during 2007-08. These small learning communities where the intent is for students to be known and encouraged by teachers, administrators, and community members could be studied especially with an eye toward understanding how the students experience them.

Curriculum research in advanced placement and career and technical education also bears investigation, specifically in relation to consolidation and/or school size. Instructional strategies, such as the hands-on learning approach utilized in the students'

CTE classes could be studied to understand how this approach helps student, who are at risk of school failure, experience student success.

A longitudinal case study of students' experiences in a larger rural, consolidated high school could provide pertinent data for policymakers and others as decisions are made about whether to consolidate schools. It is important for policymakers to understand that statistics alone can not provide a basis for making decisions about those directly affected by the closing of small schools. For example, Lawrence (1993) reported that we need a greater understanding of the impact that mandated policies have on both students and communities in the United States.

Further research could also explore more in-depth the principal's role in the success or failure of a school consolidation. Research could explore the effects of principals' leadership skills, curriculum theories, and learning philosophies on students' success. Additional issues that bear further investigation are the effects that family circumstances have on a student's school success. In this case study, Sam, Brad, and Rusty's personal and home lives were factors that constrained their success at the new school.

Implications for Practice

The following implications for practice are intended to relate the findings of this study to other school consolidations at the elementary, middle, or high school levels. Hopefully the results from this study will be useful for other researchers, policymakers, administrators, teachers, and other school personnel who work directly with students.

Principals', Teachers', and Policymakers' Roles

The principal at Clayton County High School was integral to the success of the students included in this study. The findings of this study suggest that administrators who exhibit effective leadership skills, specifically, high expectations – academically or otherwise, responsiveness/support, openness to change – can lead their faculty and students successfully through the transition period of a school consolidation. Principals exhibiting knowledge of the benefits and concerns of both small and larger schools may be able to guide others through this somewhat traumatic time. Students can strive toward and meet higher expectations if teachers, too, hold high expectations while also exhibiting responsiveness and supportiveness to students in the learning process. To aid students in this process, teachers should consider making use of hands-on instructional strategies incorporating contextual learning in the delivery of content. Professional development opportunities including training for teachers in differentiated instructional strategies can be applied to any content area thereby tailoring the instruction for individual student needs.

Also, these findings may be beneficial for schools seeking to enhance the success of economically marginalized students experiencing school consolidation. Economically marginalized students struggling with higher expectations may need support and assistance, for example transportation for after-school tutoring programs; thereby enabling these students to catch-up or maintain their academic achievement. Also, peer-mentoring programs could be established before the opening of the consolidated school. This would prepare students for the transition and perhaps make the event more acceptable. The ninth grade academy concept could be expanded to include other grades

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thereby promoting a positive relationship between teachers and students. Policymakers seeking guidance before making the decision to consolidate should understand the factors that may impact – adversely or positively – on these students' school success.

It was not apparent from talking with the students what sports are offered at the new school. They may not possess the knowledge to make an informed decision about participating in extracurricular activities. Clayton County High School and other schools could promote the various extracurricular activities targeting students who typically do not participate. Encouraging faculty to sponsor clubs and organizations that offer alternatives to playing sports would increase the number of activities available for students.

Limitations

Throughout this study I relied on self-report – primarily interviews with students and teachers. In earlier pilot work for the study, I conducted observations of in-school meetings and after-school activities. However, during the second year of the school consolidation, time and job constraints prohibited me from conducting additional observations, especially in the students' classrooms. It also bears mentioning that these students are only six of approximately 850 students who attended Clayton during 2007-08, but six of 495 who were identified as low SES. However, the extensive data gained from this small sample throughout the eighteen month period strengthens the validity of the findings. My long-term immersion in the field throughout the data collection, data analysis, and interpretation phases gave me the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of six students' experiences with and perceptions of school consolidation.

One can not generalize the findings from a qualitative study, even in this case to other economically marginalized students. That said, I have confidence in the validity and/or accuracy of the findings because as Eisner and Peshkin (1990) and others have explained, the goal of qualitative research is not to produce results that are standardized. Instead, it is to provide a description of the participants' perspectives that is accurate. The practice of triangulation enhanced this study's internal validity. All my findings or themes are supported and corroborated by several different sources of information: individual and focus group interviews, participant observations, and document reviews.

Final Reflections

Through this study, and the pilot work, I was introduced to Mr. Smith, Clayton County High School's caring principal, seven teachers, and six students all welcoming me into their school. Throughout the study's eighteen month period I was given access to teachers and students who took time out of their lunch periods or prep periods to answer my many questions. I want to express my appreciation for a caring principal, faculty, and staff as I collected my data.

I also met the director of the Appalachian Women's Leadership Project who allowed me to participate in in-school and after-school activities with members in the resiliency programs. Thanks so much for your time and patience.

But most of all, I met six wonderful, fun, and mischievous students who made this study possible. I will forever wonder what path their lives have taken.

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

Pilot Study Child's Assent Form
For Being in a Research Study Small Town Youth with Big Dreams: The [Clayton] County Resiliency Programs

Why am I here?

We are asking you to take part in a research study because we are trying to learn more about the [Clayton] County Girls' and Boys' Resiliency Programs. As a current or past member of one of the programs, we want to find out what you think about them.

Why are we doing this study?

This study is being done so we can learn more about youth programs in rural communities. We want to tell the story of the [Clayton] County Girls' and Boys' Resiliency Programs. By doing this study we hope to learn about what made the programs grow during the good times and what problems they had during the bad times. Hopefully what we find out will make the [Clayton] County resiliency programs stronger and will also be helpful to people who work with young people in other similar communities.

What will happen to me?

If you choose to be in the study, we will do a tape-recorded interview with you. The interviews will be conducted by a research assistant who is a student at Marshall University. In the interviews, she will ask questions to get to know you and to find out what you think about being in the resiliency program activities. For example, she plans to go to some activities. The observations will not affect the activities. She will simply be there, along with everyone else. After the activity is over, she will write notes describing the activity.

Will the study hurt?

There are no risks or pains from being in the study.

Will the study help me?

The study will give you a chance to tell your honest views about the program. Hopefully, this information will make the resiliency programs better and this would benefit you, as a program participant.

What if I have any questions?

You can ask questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can call Betty Sias at xxx.xxx.xxxx.

Do my parents know about this?

Because you are under the age of 18, your parents must give their written permission for you to participate. We have a parent permission form that explains the study. That form must have your parents' signatures in order for you to be interviewed.

Do I have to be in the study?

No, you do not have to be in the study. Even if your parents give permission, you will not be interviewed unless you choose to. No one will be upset if you don't want to be interviewed. If you don't want to be interviewed, just let me know. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

Putting a checkmark by the word YES and writing your name after that means that you agree to be in the study, and know what that means. If you decide to quit the study all you have to do is tell me.

I have talked to the researcher about this study. I have had all of my questions answered. I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and no one will be angry or upset with me. *(Check One)*

_____ **YES**, I want to be in the study.   _____**NO**, I do not want to be in the study.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Child *(Print)*   Signature of Child   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Witness *(Print)*   Signature of Witness   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher *(Print)*   Signature of Researcher   Date

APPENDIX B

Pilot Study Parental Consent/Permission Form
For Small Town Youth with Big Dreams: The [Clayton] County Resiliency
Programs

Introduction

Your child is invited to participate in a study of the [Clayton] County Girls' and Boys' Resiliency Programs sponsored by the Appalachian Women's Leadership Project. Your child may or may not receive personal benefits from being in the study. Participation is voluntary so please take your time to make your decision, and feel free to ask me (Betty Sias) to explain any information you do not understand. My contact information is provided on page 3.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

This purpose of this study is to learn more about youth development programs in rural communities. Specifically, the research is being conducted to tell the story of the [Clayton] County Girls' and Boys' Resiliency Programs. By doing this study we hope to learn about what factors enable such programs to be successful and sustainable as well as about obstacles such programs face. Most importantly, we hope to learn about what the programs mean to the young people for whom they are designed.

How Many Will Take Part In The Study?

About 40 young people (under the age 18) will take part in this study. In addition to the young people, the study will include Girls' and Boys' Resiliency Program staff members, Appalachian Women's Leadership Project board members, and other community members who have worked with the project in some capacity.

What Is Involved In This Research Study?

As a participant in this study, your child will be interviewed about her or his experiences with the resiliency programs. The goal is to understand what the programs mean to young people who are participating currently or have participated in the past. The youth interviews will be conducted by my research assistant, a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Services.

Also, your child may be part of a program activity that is observed as part of the study. The observations will not change the nature of the activity. The observer will simply be there, as part of the group, in order to observe the activity.

How Long Will My Child Be In the Study?

Your child will be in the study for about six to eight months. We plan to complete the observations and interviews between July and December, 2006.

You or your child can decide to stop participation at any time. If you decide to stop your child's participation in the study, it would be helpful if you would inform me (Betty Sias) about your decision.

What Are The Risks Of The Study?

There are no known risks to those who take part in this study.

Are There Benefits To Taking Part In The Study?

If you agree to allow your child to take part in this study, there may or may not be direct benefit to them. We hope the information learned from this study will benefit other people in the future. In addition, we hope that the process of being interviewed will benefit your child in that it will give her or him an opportunity to express ideas and feelings about the resiliency programs.

What About Confidentiality?

We will do our best to make sure that your child's interview responses are kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Federal law says we must keep the research records (observations and interviews) private. Nevertheless, under unforeseen and rare circumstances, we may be required by law to allow certain agencies to view your child's records. Those agencies would include the Marshall University IRB, Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). This is to make sure that we are protecting your child's rights and safety. If we publish the information I learn from this study, your child will not be identified by name or in any other way.

What Are The Costs Of Taking Part In This Study?

There are no costs to you for allowing your child to take part in this study. All the study costs will be paid for by the study.

Will I Be Paid For Participation?

You will receive no payment or other compensation for your child's participation in the study.

Who Is Sponsoring This Study?

This study is being sponsored by the Drinko Academy at Marshall University. The sponsor is providing money to help conduct this study. As researchers, we do not hold a direct financial interest in the sponsor or the study results.

What Are My Rights As A Research Study Participant?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to allow your child to take part or you may withdraw him or her from the study at any time. Refusing to participate or leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you or your child are entitled.

Whom Do I Call If I Have Questions or Problems?

For questions about the study or in the event of a research-related problem, contact Betty Sias at xxx.xxx.xxxx. You should also call me if you have a concern or complaint about the research. For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Marshall University IRB#2 Chairman Dr. Stephen Cooper at 304.696.7320. You may also call this number if:

- You have concerns or complaints about the research.
- The researcher can not be reached.
- You want to talk to someone other than the researcher.

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

I give permission for my child _____ to take part in this study. I have had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have those questions answered. By signing this consent form I have not given up any legal rights to which I am entitled.

_____
Parent Name *(Print)*

_____   _____
Signature of Parent   Date

_____
Person Obtaining Consent (Printed)

_____   _____
Person Obtaining Consent Signature   Date

APPENDIX C

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AP   Advanced Placement Classes

AWLP   Appalachian Women's Leadership Project

BRP   Boys' Resiliency Program

CTE   Career and Technical Education

GRP   Girls' Resiliency Program

SBA   School Building Authority

CURRICULUM VITAE
BETTY A. SIAS

EDUCATION

Marshall University
Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction, 2008
Marshall University
Master of Science in Adult and Technical Education, 1994
Marshall University
Bachelor of Arts in Marketing Education, 1992

CERTIFICATION

State of West Virginia, Secondary Teacher, 9-12
Specialization: Marketing Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1990	Co-Director, Marshall University Entrepreneurship Conference
1993 – 1994	Substitute Teacher, Cabell County Schools and Lawrence County, Ohio
1994	Trainer Consultant, American Red Cross of Huntington, West Virginia
1995 – Present	Instructor, Huntington Junior College, Huntington, West Virginia
1997 – 2007	Assistant Professor, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia
1997 – 2007	Coordinator, Marketing Education and State DECA Advisor, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia
1998 – 2006	Instructor, Marshall Community and Technical College, Finishing Trades Institute, Huntington, West Virginia and Baltimore, Maryland
2004 – 2007	Marketing Education Advisory Committee Member, Collins Career Center, Getaway, Ohio
2007 – Present	Coordinator, Marketing Education and State DECA Advisor, West Virginia Department of Education

HONORS AND RECOGNITION

1997	Lester E. Sanders Award, National Marketing Education Research Conference, St. Augustine, Florida
2006	National Who's Who Among America's Teachers