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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

VOLUNTARY CONSOLIDATION
IN RURAL OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS:
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF STRATEGIES
THAT FACILITATE THE PROCESS

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Education

BY
RANDALL CRAIG CUMMINS

Norman, Oklahoma

1997

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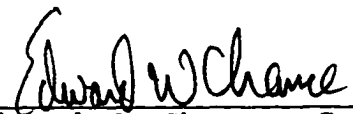
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A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
AND POLICY STUDIES

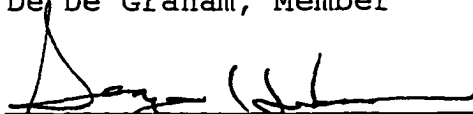
BY


Edward W. Chance, Co-Chair


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This dissertation is dedicated to my wife,
Millie Carol Cummins,

and our daughters,
Carissa Carol and Caley Nicole

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This research study was conducted and completed with the help and encouragement of many significant others.

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VOLUNTARY CONSOLIDATION
IN RURAL OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS:
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE STRATEGIES
THAT FACILITATE THE PROCESS
BY: RANDALL CRAIG CUMMINS

MAJOR PROFESSORS: CHARLES BUTLER, Ed.D.
EDWARD W. CHANCE, Ph.D.

The study was a descriptive, qualitative one. Its purpose was to identify the strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents involved in a voluntary school consolidation process since H.B. 1017. Data was collected on eight voluntary consolidations. The data included semistructured interviews with the superintendents serving the districts at the time of consolidation. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Other data included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Data analysis was performed following Holsti's (1969) four-step procedure for content analysis. The four steps include: (1) selecting a sample of data, (2) selecting content categories, (3) comparing the categories, and (4) drawing inferences (pp. 25-27). The emerging themes were identified as the strategies utilized by superintendents experienced in voluntary school consolidation to enhance the consolidation process.

Through data analyses, thirteen strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process were identified.

The thirteen strategies were utilized in at least five of the eight consolidations studied. Table 15 provides an outline of the significant strategies and the consolidations in which they were utilized. These identified strategies, if implemented appropriately, could provide for a more collegial, efficient consolidation process.

Clearly, more research is needed in the area of strategies utilized by superintendents that facilitate and enhance school consolidation processes. Research populations should be broadened to include school annexations and forced consolidations. A more in-depth study of a single consolidation may be productive in providing additional strategies, also. As the researcher found no other study of this type on the topic of school consolidation, the strategies reported, if implemented appropriately, may be used by school districts, State Department of Education personnel, and university professors to prepare for an enhanced school consolidation process.

VOLUNTARY CONSOLIDATION
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

School consolidation has been part of the American education milieu for almost as long as there have been schools. Potter (1967) reported as early as 1874, that Quincy, Massachusetts began transporting students from small schools to large graded ones. Webster (1981) defined consolidation as the joining together into a whole, strengthening, or merging, "a public school formed by merging other schools" (p. 240). Isenberg and Taudien (1964) suggested that the latest overhaul of rural school structure began about 1935 when the nation was in the midst of a serious economic depression.

Although America is no longer a predominately rural nation, "the majority of its school districts are located in very small towns and rural areas" (Glass, 1992, p. ix). Overall, small districts, those having fewer than 3,000 students (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992), constitute approximately 75 percent of districts in the nation and provide the schooling for about 30 percent of the elementary and secondary school-age population (Schmuck and Schmuck,

1992). Fifty-one percent of all districts are both small and rural (ERIC, 1991; Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992). Chance (1994) reported that between March 1980 and March 1988, the number of rural farm children decreased by 25 percent from 1.6 million to 1.2 million.

School consolidation has been the most frequently implemented educational trend in the 20th century (Sher and Tompkins, 1976; Stern, 1994). In fact, "in the 28 years from 1932 to 1960, 117,000 operating school districts have been reduced to a little over 35,000--a drop averaging over 3,000 school districts a year or about $2\frac{1}{2}$ percent a year" (Rhodes, 1962, pp. 11-12). Between 1955 and 1960 the rate of decline averaged about six percent a year (Rhodes, 1962).

Since 1970, however, the rate of school consolidation has decreased (ERIC, 1990). Of the 15,912 school districts nationwide in 1981-82, 97 percent (15,577) were still operating in 1987-88 (U.S. Department of Education, 1989).

Changing Communities

"As rural and small schools are typically the target of school consolidation, the threat of school closures persists as perhaps the most important concern in many American rural communities" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 1). Seal and Harmon (1995) indicated that "changing schools means changing the community and its culture" (p. 119). The schoolhouse is more than just a place for children to receive instruction, it is also a place for many adult

activities, such as social gatherings, political rallies, and dances (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Tyack, 1974).

Andersen (1993) suggested that although the buildings and conditions within the schools were often very primitive, local communities were very fond of their schools and had great faith in the education their children received.

Link (1971) thought rural school districts had done little to keep up with the changes this "sophisticated world is thrusting upon us" (p. 2). He argued that rural schools do not have the ability to provide for the needs of their students, thus the trend toward consolidation. Nachtigal (1994) suggested rural education is often irrelevant.

However, in recent years rural student performance on selected national assessment tests has risen. Although scores have remained below suburban student scores, they are above scores of urban students. When rural students are compared to students with similar economic backgrounds, there is little difference (Stern, 1995).

Benton (1962) observed "consolidation is a subject most small, rural communities approach gingerly, if at all. Citizens have too much emotion invested in the local schoolhouse, the sports teams, and the community's education heritage to do otherwise" (p. 1). Opponents of consolidation argue it is difficult to place a monetary value on such strengths of rural schools as the involvement and support of parents and the community, individualized

instruction, and wide-spread student participation in school activities made possible by small school and class size (Stern, 1994).

Benton (1962) suggested that communities consolidate only under duress and stated that "they'll fight bitterly all the way" (p. 1). Link (1971) stated that "arriving at agreements between administrators and boards of education is almost insignificant when compared to the job of selling the consolidation package to the public" (p. 21). Consolidation exposes districts to "legal action, press attacks and political pressure more than almost any other issue aside from major desegregation efforts" (Blizzard, 1987, p. 7). School closure decisions "test the boundaries between the school system, the local government, and the community" (Blizzard, 1987, p. 7) in which it exists. Stern (1994) surmised in this context that the school has become an important symbol of the community. This symbolism helps explain the fierce resistance to school consolidation and school district reorganization (Stern, 1994).

Community Concerns

Why then, if consolidation can offer broader curricular opportunities, better qualified teachers, better buildings and more instructional materials, as Isenberg and Taudien (1964) indicated, and at a lower cost per pupil as Link (1971) stated, are so many communities fearful of consolidation? Isenberg and Taudien (1964) proposed "the

most commonly expressed reason for opposing consolidation was that of taking control of the school away from the local people" (p. 3). Since rural schools first opened their doors, state governments have tried to remove control from the local residents (Andersen, 1993). Brenner (1967), in his analysis of the Otega-Unadilla Central School District reorganization, described these reasons local citizens oppose consolidation of their schools:

1. Concern with increased costs,
2. Prospective loss of local control,
3. Transportation issues,
4. Preference for an alternative plan,
5. Resistance to change,
6. Conflicts among prospective districts, and
7. Internal controversy (p. 13).

Communities change considerably after consolidating with another district (Seal and Harmon, 1995). Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) reported listening to board member after board member discuss the inevitable consequence of district consolidation, which was the loss of community identity. All 28 board members on which the Schmucks (1992) reported believed "consolidation was the most troubling issue they might have to face" (p. 149). Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) further contended:

Because of depressing economic times during the 1980s, schools in small districts all over America were undergoing a continuous drain on their resources, both physical and human. Their decaying buildings were

barely adequate, new books and educational materials were not being purchased, new teachers with fresh ideas were not being hired, and experienced teachers were overloaded with teaching, counseling, committee work and extracurricular activities. On top of that, many families were caving in because of unemployment or underemployment, and the stress of poverty was bringing on drinking, spouse beating, child abuse, and divorce (pp. 56-57).

NATIONAL SCHOOL REFORM

Reform is not new to public education. Schools have been changing for many different reasons for almost as long as they have been in existence. Educational reform seems a continuous cycle. In fact, Chance (1992) wrote that "each cycle creates new problems, resurrects old ideas, places blame, and too often seeks easy, simplistic answers concerning complex issues" (p. 4). Chance (1992) also stated that reform cycles come and go; some have an impact while others do not.

The most recent reform movement ostensibly began with the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (1983) A Nation At Risk. This and the plethora of commissioned reports and publications that followed were the principal catalysts for educational reform in the 80s (Chance, 1992; Murphy, 1990). At a White House press conference in April 1983, with President Ronald Reagan at the podium, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) released its report titled, A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform (1983). Sergiovanni and Moore (1989) stated that "this ushered in what has since become known as the year of the educational reform reports" (p. 13). Other

1983 reform reports included: Educating Americans for the 21st Century, Action for Excellence, and High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education was created as a result of Education Secretary T.H. Bell's concern over the widespread public perception that something was seriously remiss in the nation's educational system. According to some, this country's once unchallenged lead in commerce, industry, science, and technology was being overtaken by other nations, especially Japan and Germany (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Consequently, the early 1980s brought a concerted effort of reform to America's schools. Murphy (1991) suggested that the impetus for the attempts was primarily economic. Stakeholders in America's children, their education, and the country's future were beginning to call for a change in the schools' downward direction. Business leaders, parents, and politicians were most often identified as the primary stakeholders in this latest reform movement. The reform movement dominated the country's agenda for over a decade and Murphy (1990) asserted that non-reform issues were being pushed aside.

Reform in the Early 80s

Since 1983, the country has been struggling with the most recent educational reform effort. The movement began initially by focusing on policy concerns. It later

addressed the roles and responsibilities of teachers, then called for the restructuring of schools, and finally a complete overhaul, or redesign, of the services delivered to children (Chance, 1992; Murphy, 1990). Chance (1992) thought the uniqueness of the reform movement was its longevity and its impact on public and higher education. Murphy (1990) agreed that this reform agenda had sustained longer than previous reform efforts. He contended that reform had moved through three waves or stages during the 80s. The waves and Murphy's description of each are outlined below:

Wave 1: 1982-1985; "Fixing the Old Clunker",

Wave 2: 1986-1989; "Getting a New Car",

Wave 3: 1988- ; "Rethink View of Transportation",
(Murphy, 1990, p. 22).

Murphy (1990) used the metaphor "Fixing the Old Clunker" to describe Wave 1. He pointed out this approach assumes that the conditions of schooling are a result of poor teachers with inadequate tools, and they are subject to revision through mandated, top-down initiatives, "especially those from the state" (p. viii). Use of the bureaucratic model led to an emphasis in early reform efforts on policy mechanisms, such as "prescriptions, tightly specified resource allocations, and performance measurements that focused on repairing components of the new system and raising the quality of the workforce by telling employees

how to work" (Murphy, 1991, p. viii). Sergiovanni and Moore (1989) found that excellence came to mean higher standards. Higher standards meant "tougher academic requirements, reduction or elimination of electives (especially 'soft subjects'), more mathematics and science, more homework, more tests, tighter disciplines, and longer school days and school years" (Sergiovanni and Moore, 1989, p. 16).

Chance (1992) argued this initial stage of the reform movement accepted too enthusiastically the industrial model where "the end product is all that matters" (p. 7). Murphy (1991) showed that the critics of Wave 1 reform agreed that educators were being led down the wrong road, the road to the quick fix and that Wave 1 measures were using inappropriate policy tools to improve schooling, especially mandates from the top.

Mid 80s Reform Efforts

Murphy (1990) noted that "no sooner had the ink dried" (p. 25) on Wave 1 reform initiatives than critics began to attack them. This second stage of reformers "clamored for fundamental revisions in the way schools were organized and governed" (Murphy, 1990, p. 25). Wave 2, according to Murphy (1990), began in 1986, and was aptly compared to "Getting a New Car" (p. 25). "Thus, it was that the second wave came into existence with a call not for changing policies but for changing the very structure of schools themselves" (Chance, 1992, p. 6).

Chance (1992) proposed that if the second wave was to succeed, more stakeholders must understand it. He characterized this second stage as attempting to empower and restructure from the bottom up, while the first wave sought change by dictating from the top down. Murphy (1990) outlined three broad content areas stressed in Wave 2:

1. The professionalization of teaching,
2. The decentralized school management systems, and
3. The enactment of specific reform topics overlooked in the early 80s (such as programs for at-risk students) (p. 28).

Sergiovanni and Moore (1989) acknowledged that the educational reform reports during the late 80s were all concerned with "bringing about changes in teachers and their preparation and in the conditions of teaching" (p. 20).

Third Wave Reform

Murphy (1990) identified a third wave reform effort that began in 1988. The movement looked "significantly different from the reform agenda of the early and middle 1980s" (Murphy, 1990, p. 21). Unlike measures in the first two waves, Murphy (1990) found those in this era went beyond schooling "to encompass a comprehensive system for the delivery of services to children" (p. 29). Thompson (1994) surmised that after a decade of marginally effective reform, diverse stakeholders (local, district, and state) were demanding that the system itself be fundamentally changed.

Murphy (1990) described this third wave as rethinking the entire view of schooling. He wrote that "there is a widespread belief that schools must respond to the expanding demands and expectations of society by completely overhauling the way they are organized and governed" (Murphy, 1991, p. 6). Chance and Deering (1992) addressed restructuring of the learning environment. They proposed providing innovative projects to replace traditional organizational structures.

According to Murphy and Hallinger (1993), third wave reform efforts are a collection of strategies that have been most often labeled, restructuring. One of the key ingredients to school restructuring is a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of professional staff (Murphy, 1991). Chance (1992) noted that true reform would happen only if administrators took on new roles as leaders first, and managers, second. Covey (1989) wrote that effective leaders are proactive, interdependent, and think "Win-Win." Covey stated:

Leadership is not management. Management is the second creation...But leadership has to come first. Management is a bottom line focus: How can I best accomplish certain things? Leadership deals with the top line: What are the things I want to accomplish? (p. 101).

Glass (1992) summarized by saying superintendents must prepare "to be executive leaders in the 1990s to help schools and society meet the challenges in the decades

ahead" (p. xiii). Teachers, too, take on additional responsibilities in restructured schools. They often become the school's instructional leaders and decision makers (Chance, 1992).

Systemic Reform

Thompson (1994) suggested that it is important to remember that systemic reform (total systems change), as seen in Murphy's Wave 3 and beyond, "is not so much a detailed prescription for improving education as a philosophy advocating reflecting, rethinking, and restructuring" (p. 1). He contended that much of the current reform push stems from a recognition that the social and economic structure has changed. Whether the emphasis is on policies, teachers, organizational structure, or administrators, the bottom line in reform effort is whether it improves the educational opportunities for children (Chance, 1992). Thompson (1994) extended the notion by promoting a system that ensures students are taught how to apply what they learn in education and life. The underlying philosophy is that children should be empowered to "contribute successfully to the needs of a rapidly changing society" (Murphy, 1990, p. 29). Whereas all three waves of reform in the 1980s were concerned with helping children, the primary activities of the earliest waves centered on conditions that would lead to improved situations for

children, and Wave 3 was centered directly on children (Murphy, 1990).

The consolidation of schools has played a major role in school reform. Consolidation as a reform strategy has recently been encouraged and financially rewarded in Oklahoma by the passage of H.B. 1017. Yet, it is often met with anxiety and hostility from stakeholders. Rural communities across Oklahoma fear a loss of identity without their schools. This study was designed to collect information through semistructured interviews with selected Oklahoma superintendents experienced in school consolidation. The data was used to identify strategies that enhance the consolidation process.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study identified effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to identify strategies Oklahoma superintendents utilized in order to provide a more efficient, productive and less threatening consolidation process. Peshkin (1987) reported that qualitative research is productive in finding "peculiar factors" (p. 7).

The purpose of this study was to identify strategies which significantly enhance the consolidation process,

particularly which strategies work and which strategies do not. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explained that one of the objectives of qualitative research is to reveal understanding, not pass judgement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study examined the strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents experienced in voluntary school consolidation that enhance the consolidation process. The focus was on answering the following seven questions:

1. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?
2. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?
3. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the students?
4. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?
5. What strategies did the superintendents who have

participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?

6. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?
7. What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

POPULATION

Since the passage of H.B. 1017 in November 1989, there have been 51 school consolidations reported in Oklahoma by the State Department of Education (1995) (Appendix A). Nine of the 51 school consolidations were voluntary, that is, the districts merged free of local, state, or federal mandates to do so. The schools and the new districts formed are identified below:

1. Carter G. Woodson and Porter formed Porter Consolidated School on January 9, 1990,
2. Fairfax and Ralston Schools became Woodland School, July 1, 1990,
3. Mountain View and Gotebo consolidated into Mt. View-Gotebo on July 1, 1990,
4. Blue and Bokchito became known as Rock Creek School, July 1, 1991,
5. Binger and Oney joined to become Binger-Oney on

July 1, 1991,

6. Fort Cobb and Broxton formed Fort Cobb-Broxton, also July 1, 1991,
7. Ames and Lahoma merged to become Cimarron, date July 1, 1992,
8. Burns Flat and Dill City became known as Burns Flat-Dill City on July 1, 1993, and
9. Helena-Goltry and Jet-Nash formed Timberlake on the same date, July 1, 1993.

This study included data collected through the use of semistructured interviews with the superintendents involved in eight of the voluntary school consolidations since H.B. 1017. Nine voluntary consolidations have been reported (Appendix A) but one consolidation was not used because a superintendent involved in the process could not be found. This lack of data would have caused inconsistencies in the content analysis. The methodology required contrasting and comparing the data from both superintendents involved in a consolidation. With data from only one participant, this step of the content analysis could not be performed. Consequently, the consolidation was omitted. The superintendents from the other eight voluntary consolidations since H.B. 1017 agreed to participate. Other sources of data included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the State Department.

Borg and Gall (1989) cautioned that selecting a sample was "critical to the whole research process" (p. 215), and they surmised that in many cases small samples were more appropriate than studying a large population, especially when in-depth interviews were employed. In fact, the two researchers stated that "a study which probes deeply into the characteristics of a small sample often provides more knowledge than a study that attacks the same problem by collecting only shallow information on a large sample" (Borg and Gall, 1989, pp. 236-237). Lincoln and Guba (1989) suggested that the usual criteria for objectivity is intersubjective agreement. The smaller sample was selected in quest of improving the probability that findings would be credible by triangulating the data from different participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Borg and Gall, 1989).

The eight selected school districts were contacted by telephone in order to inquire about the superintendents serving the districts during the consolidation process. The superintendents were identified through the telephone calls and information acquired as to his or her present status. The superintendents were then contacted by phone and asked if they would participate in the study. Four of the voluntary consolidations since H.B. 1017 occurred in the southwest quadrant of the state. The northwest section of the state experienced two of the voluntary consolidations. In the northeast quadrant of the state, one voluntary

consolidation was used. The southeast quadrant had one voluntary consolidation. This design of using several sites in different quadrants of the state for collection of the data enhanced the external validity of the study (Cronbach, 1960; Borg and Gall, 1989).

All of the superintendents participating in the study were guaranteed anonymity and that no individual, school, or school district would be identified in any report of the data analysis. In order to provide anonymity, fictitious names were provided so that the readers of this research might not tell where and from whom the data was collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was a descriptive, qualitative one. The data collected was "in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers" (p. 30). Its purpose was to identify the strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort that enhanced the consolidation. The identified strategies may support a superintendent's efforts in designing a voluntary school consolidation process. The strategies were identified from data collected through semistructured interviews with Oklahoma superintendents experienced in a voluntary consolidation process since the passage of H.B. 1017. Other sources of data included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles,

consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories told by participants (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). "They are also concerned with understanding behavior from the subject's own frame of mind" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 2). A phenomenological approach was utilized in order to better understand the meaning of the events and the interactions of the people involved in the consolidations (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Baden (1994) wrote that qualitative designs allow participants to talk in their own words and at their own level of understanding. The interview method was the primary tool of data collection for this study. Good (1972) found that 90 percent of social science research is based upon interviews and questionnaires. Whereas, questionnaires are not a part of this research design, other means of data collection were incorporated. Researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the State Department of Education were utilized for data analysis. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) concurred that "the use of multiple-data-collection methods contributes to the trustworthiness of the data" (p. 24). Triangulation of the data from these multiple sources also improves the validity and credibility of the information (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

This study reflected a problem orientation, that involved identifying strategies utilized to enhance an often threatening, fearful process, school consolidation. Bridges (1982) proposed:

If the researcher sought to identify the practical problems confronting school administrators, to uncover the various ways in which administrators deal with these problems, and/or examine the relative effectiveness of these administrative practices in alleviating these problems, the researcher was regarded as having a problem orientation (p. 16).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described the applied research design as one which seeks findings that can be used directly to make practical decisions about programs or practices. The identified strategies utilized by the participants of the study may well be used to improve school consolidation practices, thus establishing this study as applied research. Borg and Gall (1989) developed the notion that applied research focuses on structures and processes as they appear in education practice "with the goal of developing knowledge that is directly useful to practitioners" (p. 32).

The primary tool of data collection for this study, as mentioned previously, was semistructured interviews with Oklahoma superintendents experienced in voluntary school consolidation. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and analyzed. Other data utilized included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Intrarater

reliability was established by analyzing the data as soon as it became available and then reanalyzing it approximately ten days later (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

An interview guide (Appendix B) was developed to help lead the researcher and "offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 92). As qualitative interviews vary in their degree of structure, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) contended:

In keeping with the qualitative tradition of attempting to capture the subjects' own words and letting the analysis emerge, interview schedules and observation guides generally allow for open-ended responses and are flexible enough for the observer to note and collect data on unexpected dimensions of the topic (p. 77).

Interview guide questions were maintained as the central theme for each participant interview.

The validity of the interview questions were strengthened through the involvement of others in the content analysis (Holsti, 1969) (Appendix C). First, the questions were sent to three University of Oklahoma professors for evaluation of content and construction. The process then involved soliciting input from three university professors in educational administration in other states who utilize qualitative research extensively. The third step included two Oklahoma superintendents experienced in school consolidation since H.B. 1017. They were given copies of the questions and asked to analyze them for clarity, appropriateness, and validity. All of the comments and

suggestions from these experts in the field were used to improve the content of the interview questions, thus strengthening the validity of the questions (Holsti, 1969).

One technique for insuring against flaws in the research design is a carefully planned pilot study (Borg and Gall, 1989). Pilot studies may identify biases in interview technique, question type, or question structure. Borg and Gall (1989) surmised:

A preliminary trial of research measures and techniques is essential to the development of a sound research plan. Whenever possible this preliminary trial should be enlarged into a pilot study...Pilot studies are carried out with fewer subjects than will be employed in the main study (p. 54).

An Oklahoma superintendent experienced in school consolidation since H.B. 1017 was used in the pilot study of this research. The semistructured interview was conducted in a manner similar to the actual research interviews. The interview followed the interview guide. It was taped and transcribed.

Upon completion of the pilot study involving the Oklahoma superintendent, the data was analyzed. Comments and suggestions were solicited from the participant and revisions in research design appropriately made. Adjustments in probing strategies and questioning sequence were considered. Pilot studies are the best insurance "against bias and flaws in design" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 464). Having others critique the pilot study and

data collected enhances the validity of the study (Borg and Gall, 1989).

Good (1972) stated that "the dynamics of interviewing begin with the concept that the interview is a process of communication or interaction" (p. 238). Gaining access to an educational institution can be a challenge (Reynolds and Wineburg, 1987). Many times the superintendents in small, rural schools have varied responsibilities and are too involved with other tasks to attend an interview. Reynolds and Wineburg (1987) suggested that establishing rapport is a necessary part of gathering data from busy superintendents.

A written statement informing the superintendents of the purpose for the study (Appendix D) was provided (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The statement provided focus and structure for the interviews. A signed written consent to participate in the study (Appendix D) was required of each participant (Borg and Gall, 1989). The consent included the permission to tape record the interview. Borg and Gall (1989) suggested that using a tape recorder has several advantages, one being the reduction of the danger of bias. In fact, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) recommended tape recording when "interviewing is the major technique of the study" (p. 218). The tapes were transcribed for data analysis.

During the semistructured interviews, the researcher listened carefully to the information presented and tried to understand the perceptions of the participants (Wolcott,

1990). The researcher's goal was to understand the subjects from their point of view (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

Researcher notes were also used as a data gathering technique. The researcher notes provided an additional source of data to support the interviews and other records and documents collected for the data analysis.

The confidentiality of the participants, the schools, and the communities was protected. Borg and Gall (1989) stated that "whenever possible, names of subjects should be removed from data-collection instruments and replaced by a code" (p. 87). Fictitious names were provided for the people, places, and things so that the readers of this research might not tell where and from whom the data was collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

"The worth of a study is the degree to which it generates theory, description, or understanding" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 46). This study identified strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents experienced in voluntary school consolidation that enhanced the consolidation process. This researcher found no other study of this type on the topic of voluntary school consolidation.

The reported data served both practical and theoretical purposes. The strategies reported in this study could benefit Oklahoma superintendents who must address the issues of consolidation. Applied research seeks findings that may

be used "to make practical decisions about or improvements in programs and practices" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 199). The findings could also aid higher education's efforts in preparing candidates for the superintendency in rural schools. "If we are to begin seriously reconsidering the way we prepare our educational leaders, then this is the appropriate time to seriously reconsider the way we intend to prepare them to serve our rural districts as well" (Jacobson and Woodsworth, 1990, p. 41).

The data collected from this research could aid Oklahoma superintendents, school board members, community leaders, parents, teachers, and others faced with a school consolidation issue. Losing the school may be the most traumatic experience a community ever faces. These identified strategies, if implemented appropriately, could make that process less traumatic.

The availability of strategies that enhance the consolidation process and the assurance that these strategies have been researched and documented could provide some relief to an otherwise stressful experience. Although consolidation is at the forefront of many school reform efforts, how much it has actually improved schools is still being debated. Regardless whether it is or is not advantageous to young people's education, once the decision to consolidate has been made, these strategies could play a major role in providing an efficient, collegial, and productive process. "Win-Win" strategies are difficult to

construct, but in the case of school consolidation, it can be done. It was the intent of this researcher to provide strategies to support a superintendent's efforts in developing a cooperative school consolidation process.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) acknowledged that a study's potential significance is something to consider. Also, the point must be made that research almost always draws political consequences. School consolidations are processes of give and take; they require political strategies. This research indicates some of those strategies.

A superintendent's decisions should be based on sound education theory. Applying theory and current research to practice is a challenge facing all leaders of education. It was the intent of this researcher to provide reliable research for practical application. Borg and Gall (1989) showed that the significance of research is contributing to the knowledge base of education. "There is the satisfaction in thinking that our work may one day influence the practice of teacher education" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 39).

LIMITATIONS

At the passage of H.B. 1017 in November 1989, Oklahoma ranked sixth nationally in the number of local school districts in the state. Because of this ranking, consolidation and annexation were often topics of reform debates across the state (Chance and Deering, 1993). One limitation of this study may be the researcher's personal biases toward the subject of small, rural schools and school

consolidation. Since qualitative researchers view themselves as a primary instrument for collecting data (Borg and Gall, 1989), the values and experiences of the researcher could bias the study. This bias was controlled by enhancing the reliability of the data. Intrarater reliability was strengthened by analyzing the data more than once with a significant period of time between the two analyses (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Reliability was further enhanced by utilizing multiple data collection techniques and by triangulating data collection and content analysis (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992).

Borg and Gall (1989) exposed another limitation of research that could be relevant to this study, and that is response effect. "Response effect is the tendency of the respondent to give inaccurate or incorrect responses, or more precisely, is the difference between the answer given by the respondent and the true answer" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 448). Whether or not people will tell the truth is a risk that may be a factor in collecting responses from a participant. Risk is defined by Borg and Gall (1989) as the exposure to the possibility of physical, psychological, or social harm as a result of participating in a research project. While codifying the data will protect the participant somewhat, no study is fully without risk. These external risks lend themselves to weak internal validity. Internal validity of qualitative research has been

criticized for distortions to data caused by extraneous variables (Borg and Gall, 1989).

External validity may also be a limitation to the study. Generalizing to a population from which the participants were drawn should be done with caution. The methods of descriptive research, especially interviewing, are subject to weak external validity. The degree to which the data can be generalized to the population, called "population validity" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 404), may be a limitation to the study. Firestone (1993) contended that "one criticism about qualitative research is that it is difficult to generalize findings to settings not studied" (p. 16). Also, the fact that only voluntary consolidations were utilized in this research could be a limitation. Forced consolidations and school annexations were not used as part of the sample population.

Other potential limitations to this study may include the interviewing skills of the researcher, the use of a tape recorder and its influence on the respondents, the smallness of the sample size, and the researcher's ability to accurately synthesize and report the data. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) concurred, "part of demonstrating the trustworthiness of your data is to realize the limitations of your study" (p. 147).

DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purpose of this study the following definitions were used:

Analytic Induction: A process of focusing on some specific problem, question, or issue in order to collect data, analyze it, and develop a descriptive model encompassing all cases (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

Applied Research: Research which seeks findings that can be directly used to make practical decisions about the subject being researched (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

Content Analysis: A research technique "for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Bereleson, 1971, p. 18); applying empirical and statistical methods to textual material (Lindkvist, 1981).

Content Validity: The degree to which a study or test measures that which it is designed and intended (Borg and Gall, 1989).

External Validity: A process of generalizing to and across populations of study; finding results that are reproducible (Shofield, 1990).

Descriptive Research: Research in which the data collected are "in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 30).

Internal Validity: Credibility; relates to the following questions: Does the data stand for what we think it stands for; Does the research test what we want it to? (Langenbach, Vaughn, and Aagard, 1994).

Intrarater Reliability: The agreement of a rater with himself when he performs an analysis of the same data

at different times (Bowers and Courtright, 1984).

Phenomenology: The understanding of an event from the viewpoint of the participant (Barritt, Beekman, and Mulderij, 1985).

Qualitative Methodology: Research methods that seek to make sense of personal stories; an umbrella term for various philosophical orientations to interpretive research (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992).

Rural School: A school district, grades K-12, having fewer than 1,000 students and being geographically isolated by more than 25 miles from the nearest urban center (ERIC Digest, 1988; Stephens and Turner, 1988).

School Consolidation: The act or process of merging two or more schools into a single school or school district (Blizzard, 1987).

Semistructured Interview: An interview designed to allow the participant to respond in his/her own words; it has the advantage of being reasonably objective while still permitting a thorough understanding of the participant's responses (Borg and Gall, 1989).

Superintendent: The chief executive officer of the school who has the authority to direct and control the personnel, resources, and decisions within the school (Davidson, 1987; Knezevich, 1975; Wirt, 1990).

Triangulation: The strategy of using several different kinds of data collection instruments and/or sources, or

collecting the same data from different samples (Borg and Gall, 1989).

Validity: That which is concerned with the accuracy of research findings; establishing validity requires determining how findings represent reality and assessing whether constructs represent human experience (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984).

Voluntary Consolidation: The merger of two or more school districts free of state, local, or federal government mandates to do so.

SUMMARY

This study was designed to collect data through semistructured interviews with superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since H.B. 1017. Qualitative methods were utilized in order to collect the information. Interviews were used as a means of data collection, as well as, researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed along with the other data collected.

Clearly, more time should be spent examining the voluntary consolidation process, especially the strategies utilized by superintendents which enhance the overall activity. Data on the strategies utilized by

superintendents in other areas needs to be investigated. With additional data, a more comprehensive collection of superintendent strategies for enhancing the voluntary consolidation process could be developed.

This first chapter provides an introduction for the study. The chapter includes sections on national school reform, the statement of the problem, the methodology to be utilized, the significance of the study, and the study's limitations. The remaining chapters will include a broad review of the literature, a detailed purpose for the study and methodology, the analysis of the data, the conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written, studied, read, and researched about the consolidation of schools. As early as 1874, smaller schools were merging into larger ones (Potter, 1967). In the 1930s "there were 128,000 school districts and over 238,000 schools in America. By 1980, however, the number of school districts had dropped to 16,000 and schools to 61,000" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 1).

In 1968, a Texas governor's report (1968) recommended every operating district should contain a minimum of 2,600 children in average daily attendance in a 12 grade system. Since 1970 there has been little consolidation (Migyanko, 1992). According to Herzog and Pittman (1995) rural education did not get much attention in the national reform movement that began in the 80s.

Stern (1994) acknowledged that past Education Secretary T.H. Bell's report, "Rural Education and Rural Family Education Policy for the 1980s," issued in 1983, was a response to a congressional directive. The report was specific in its intent that rural schools should receive an equitable share of the resources, that is, information, services, assistance, and funds provided to education through the U.S. Department of Education (Stern, 1994).

One of the latest reports coming from the current reform movement was former President George Bush's "Initiative on Rural America." Stern (1994) stated the report was "a multi-faceted undertaking that promotes economic development" (p. 25). Stern (1994) also supported rural economic development needs by stating:

Rural America has been buffeted by powerful economic and social forces during much of the last decade. These forces have shaped the experience of the country's rural population, bringing about significant demographic change. This change is a story of economic disruption, significant outmigration, and growing poverty-particularly affecting children. The education ramifications for school planners, practitioners, and policymakers are immense (p. 7).

SCHOOL REFORM

Reform is not new to public education. Schools have been changing for many different reasons for almost as long as they have been in existence. Educational reform seems a continuous cycle. "Each cycle creates new problems, resurrects old ideas, places blame, and too often seeks easy, simplistic answers concerning complex issues" (Chance, 1992, p. 4). Reform cycles come and go; some make an impact while others do not (Chance, 1992).

Early Reform Efforts

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, small rural schools were highly criticized and always under close scrutiny. Consolidating small schools into larger ones was common practice. "Reformers imposed schooling on rural America via consolidation, and the number of rural one-and

two-teacher schools declined by about 90 percent between 1910 and 1960" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 11).

Reformers interested in improving rural schools, generally believed improvement could happen only in one of two ways:

1. Rural schools would disappear as continued out-migration removed children from rural places, or
2. Rural schools could be made to look and operate more like urban ones (DeYoung, 1993, p. 11).

Mabel Carney, an early rural school reformer, believed the consolidated school could bridge the gap between rural and urban education. Consolidated schools were the best means of upgrading and specializing rural teacher training (Carney, 1993).

Small, rural schools were under attack. The National Education Association in 1907 reported on a number of rural school shortcomings (Carney, 1993). These included "incompetent teachers, poor physical equipment, and mediocre support from among the residents of the community" (Carney, 1993, p. 96). The demand for trained teachers was greater than the supply to rural communities (Carney, 1993). The Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association was organized to address some of these issues.

National Reform

The most recent reform movement ostensibly began with the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (1983)

A Nation At Risk. This and the plethora of commissioned reports and publications that followed were the principal catalysts for educational reform in the 80s (Chance, 1992; Murphy, 1990). At a White House press conference in April 1983, with then President Ronald Reagan at the podium, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) released its report titled, A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. "This ushered in what has since become known as the year of the educational reform reports" (Sergiovanni and Moore, 1989, p. 13).

The National Commission on Excellence in Education was created as a result of Education Secretary T.H. Bell's concern over the widespread public perception that something was seriously remiss in the educational system. According to the report, the country's once unchallenged lead in commerce, industry, science, and technology was being overtaken (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Consequently, the early 1980s brought a concerted effort of reform to America's schools. The impetus for attempts was primarily economic (Murphy, 1991). Stakeholders in the children, their education, and the country's future were beginning to cry for a change in the schools' downward direction. Business leaders, parents, and politicians all had stakes. This latest reform movement has dominated the country's agenda for over a decade. Nonreform issues are pushed aside (Murphy, 1990). There is

now a greater attention than ever before and a wider coalition of "reform actors" (Murphy, 1991, p. 6).

Reform in the Early 80s

The reform movement of the early 80s began initially by focusing on policy concerns. It later addressed the roles and responsibilities of teachers, then called for the restructuring of schools, and finally a complete overhaul, or redesign, of the services delivered to children (Chance, 1992; Murphy, 1990). The uniqueness of this newest reform movement was its longevity and its impact on public and higher education (Chance, 1992). Murphy (1990) agreed the reform agenda had sustained longer than previous efforts. He contended it shifted through three waves or stages during the 80s. The waves and Murphy's description are outlined below:

- Wave 1: 1982-1985; "Fixing the Old Clunker",
 - Wave 2: 1986-1989; "Getting a New Car",
 - Wave 3: 1988- ; "Rethink View of Transportation",
- (Murphy, 1990, p. 22).

Murphy (1990) used the metaphor "Fix the Old Clunker" to describe Wave 1. He pointed out this approach assumes the conditions of schooling are a result of poor teachers with inadequate tools, and they are subject to revision through mandated, top-down initiatives, "especially those from the state" (p. viii). Use of this bureaucratization model led to an emphasis in early reform efforts on policy

mechanisms, such as "prescription, tightly specified resource allocations, and performance measurements that focused on repairing components of the system and raising the quality of the workforce by telling employees how to work" (Murphy, 1991, p. viii). A Place Called School (1984) and Educating Americans for the 21st Century (1983) were two of the reform reports presented at this time. Action for Excellence (1983) also played a role in the early 80s reform efforts. Sergiovanni and Moore (1989) found excellence came to mean higher standards. Higher standards meant "tougher academic requirements, reduction or elimination of electives (especially 'soft subjects'), more mathematics and science, more homework, more tests, tighter disciplines, and longer school days and school years" (Sergiovanni and Moore, 1989, p. 16).

Chance (1992) argued this initial stage of the reform movement accepted too enthusiastically the industrial model where "the end product is all that matters" (p. 7). Critics of Wave 1 reform agreed that educators were being led down the wrong road, the road to the quick fix. Wave 1 measures were using inappropriate policy tools to improve schooling, especially mandates from the top (Murphy, 1991).

Mid 80s Reform Efforts

Murphy (1990) noted that "no sooner had the ink dried" (p. 25) on Wave 1 reform initiatives than critics began to attack them. This second stage of reformers

"clamored for fundamental revisions in the way schools were organized and governed" (Murphy, 1990, p. 25). Wave 2 began around 1986 and was aptly compared to "Getting a New Car" (Murphy, 1990, p. 25). Time for Results (1986) was published and the second wave was underway (National Governors' Association). "Thus, it was that the second wave came into existence with a call not for changing policies but for changing the very structure of schools themselves" (Chance, 1992, p. 6). Other reports during this second wave included the 1986 Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy report, A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century.

If the second wave was to succeed, more stakeholders needed to understand it (Chance, 1992). This second stage was characterized as attempting to empower and restructure from the bottom up while the first wave sought change by dictating from the top down (Chance, 1992). Murphy (1990) outlined three broad content areas stressed in Wave 2:

1. The professionalization of teaching,
2. The decentralized school management systems, and
3. The enactment of specific reform topics overlooked in the early 80s (such as programs for at-risk students) (p. 28).

Sergiovanni and Moore (1989) acknowledged that educational reform reports during the late 80s were all concerned with "bringing about changes in teachers and their preparation and in the conditions of teaching" (p. 20).

Third Wave Reform

Murphy (1990) identified a third wave reform effort that began in 1988. The movement looked "significantly different from the reform agenda of the early and middle 1980s" (Murphy, 1990, p. 21). Unlike measures in the first two waves, Murphy (1990) found those in this era went beyond schooling "to encompass a comprehensive system for the delivery of services to children" (p. 29). Thompson (1994) surmised that after a decade of marginally effective reform, diverse stakeholders (local, district, and state) were demanding that the system itself be fundamentally changed. Murphy (1990) described this third wave as rethinking the entire view of schooling. He wrote that "there is a widespread belief that schools must respond to the expanding demands and expectations of society by completely overhauling the way they are organized and governed" (Murphy, 1991, p. 6). Chance and Deering (1992) addressed restructuring of the learning environment. They proposed providing innovative projects to replace traditional organizational structures.

According to Murphy and Hallinger (1993), third wave reform efforts are a collection of strategies that have been most often labeled as restructuring. One of the key ingredients to school restructuring is a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of professional staff (Murphy, 1991). Chance (1992) noted that true reform would happen

only if administrators took on new roles as leaders, first, and managers, second. Leaders for America's Schools (1988) was released by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration in support of this view.

Covey (1989) wrote that effective leaders are proactive, interdependent, and think "Win-Win". He stated:

Leadership is not management. Management is the second creation...But leadership has to come first. Management is a bottom line focus: How can I best accomplish certain things? Leadership deals with the top line: What are the things I want to accomplish? (p. 101).

Glass (1992) summarized by saying superintendents must prepare "to be executive leaders in the 1990s to help schools and society meet the challenges in the decades ahead" (p. xiii). Teachers, too, take on additional responsibilities in restructured schools. They often become the school's instructional leaders and decision makers (Chance, 1992).

Systemic Reform

Thompson (1994) suggested that it is important to remember that systemic reform (total systems change), as seen in Murphy's Wave 3 and beyond, "is not so much a detailed prescription for improving education as a philosophy advocating reflecting, rethinking, and restructuring" (p. 1). He contended that much of the current reform push stems from a recognition that the social and economic structure has changed. Whether the emphasis is on policies, teachers, organizational structure, or

administrators, the bottom line in reform effort is whether it improves the educational opportunities for children (Chance, 1992). Thompson (1994) extended the notion by promoting a system that ensures students are taught how to apply what they learn in education and life. The underlying philosophy is that children should be empowered to "contribute successfully to the needs of a rapidly changing society" (Murphy, 1990, p. 29). Whereas, all three waves of reform in the 1980s were concerned with helping children, the primary activities of the earliest waves centered on conditions that would lead to improved situations for children, and Wave 3 was centered directly on children (Murphy, 1990).

State and National Concerns

State and national governments are increasingly taking control of local schools. Many times, funding, or the loss of it, is tied to state and federal mandates. Without the funding, most small, rural schools could not survive. "Though once the center of most social activities in many rural communities, public schools (and the ideas, values, and skills they convey to children) have become objects of state and national concern" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 3). Rural schools are often priorities for campaign platforms. Economy of scale versus loss of community identity; it seems most have an opinion. "Factors other than community identity enter into the equation as well.

Rural schools and school districts often play an important role in the economic life of their communities and are thus not readily relinquished. This role can be significant, as the school is often one of the largest employers in the community" (Stern, 1994, p. 22).

Herzog and Pittman (1995) contended future state and national concerns will deal with higher unemployment in rural areas, lower family incomes, and higher rates of poverty than metropolitan areas. They suggested "most rural students will come from economically impoverished backgrounds, and fewer will come from homes in which the parents have professional or managerial positions" (Herzog and Pittman, 1995, p. 115). Stern (1994) declared "for Rural America to be revitalized, attracting and keeping enough of the more educated and talented individuals who have high aspirations for themselves and their communities is essential" (p. 71). With the departure of the young people from rural communities, the people fail to get a return on their educational investment (Stern, 1994).

The state would like to extend its control over the rural schools in order to curtail expenses and tighten the connection between schooling and economic prosperity (DeYoung and Howley, 1992). Seal and Harmon (1995) pointed out that "rural residents have watched education dollars become redirected toward state goals rather than locally perceived needs" (p. 122). Rural communities feel they

can best use the financial resources available. Stern (1994) felt the "cultural and social health of America's rural sector depends on how it participates in the national and global economy" (p. 4).

Another concern over state and national control of local schools and the consolidation issue is the lack of follow-up or evaluation once a consolidation plan has been implemented. DeYoung and Howley (1992) found "almost all jurisdictions that force consolidation subsequently fail even to document the improvements they allege to result from closings, let alone evaluate for them" (p. 14). Much like a staff development issue, the maintenance of efforts to change practice in schools will not endure in the absence of sustained support and attention (Wood, Killian, McQuarrie, Thompson, 1993). School consolidation and the incurring practices must be monitored, supported, and evaluated to ensure long-term success.

DeYoung and Lawrence (1995) explained "because the mission of the U.S. public schools is to socialize children into adult life and because our schools were once under direct community control, the changing nature of our communities in this century has profound implications for educators" (p. 105). The same is true for state and national policymakers.

RURAL BELIEFS AND VALUES

An interesting concept when discussing rural school reform and consolidation is the distinction between the

place called school and schooling (DeYoung and Howley, 1992). DeYoung and Howley (1992) presented schools as "important places in which people construct a social reality" (p. 5) and "schooling as an attempt at systematic instruction of predetermined bodies of knowledge" (p. 5). In 1992, DeYoung and Howley asserted that the failure of rural school reformers to understand this distinction may be one of the reasons disputes frequently erupt when plans to consolidate schools are presented. Cypher (1995) and Nachtigal (1982) described small schools as friendly places where teachers are part of a family and an effort is made to make all members feel welcome. Stern (1994) surmised "Rural America may be seen as offering one of the important spiritual and ethical anchors for the nation" (p. 1).

The Schoolhouse and Schooling

The schoolhouse has always been an important place for rural communities. "For many small towns, the schoolhouse has been the symbolic focus of the town and the center of community life" (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995, p. 11). "It was viewed by many settlers as a symbol of the vitality of their community and served not only as a school but also as a center for community events" (Andersen, 1993, p. 5). Tyack (1974) found during the nineteenth century the country school "belonged to the community" (p. 15), and in more than one sense. "It was frequently the focus of people's lives outside the home" (Tyack, 1974, p. 15). The family, the

church, and the school have been at the heart of rural America since this country was settled (Stern, 1994). Despite the "resistance to taxes for schooling, and despite skepticism toward 'too much book-learning', rural Americans in the nineteenth century valued schools as sites of all manner of community activities" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 8).

Buildings and equipment manifest the community's commitment to itself (Stern, 1994). Rural elementary schools often attract more than 80 percent of parents and a large contingent of grandparents to open houses and evaluation conferences (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992). In more than half of small districts, elementary and middle schools are used in the evenings for recreation, adult education, and the community meetings (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992).

Although rural Americans in the late nineteenth century valued schools, schooling was not the most important local issue. Many rural people had mixed feelings about education beyond the eighth grade. Rural economies usually did not require workers with advanced academic training (DeYoung and Howley, 1995). Rural parents clung to the belief their children should remain close to home, and the further they advanced in school, the more likely they were to move away from home (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995). "Teachers' sense of noble service to the community clashed with their realization that what teachers do to help students learn was

not being valued by townspeople" (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992, p. 54).

Nineteenth-century teachers in rural schools valued education. Most had advanced degrees and saw education as an opportunity for a better life. Rural students did not always share that value. DeYoung and Lawrence (1995) wrote that only those students wanting to "leave the community in search of further education or employment" (p. 107) adopted the teacher's value of schooling. At the same time, they glorified rural childhood. Few educators wanted to spend their professional lives in the countryside. City schools lured ambitious men, for there one could find career ladders, decent pay (for administrators, at least), and prestige (Tyack and Hansot, 1982). In 1987-88 there were 560,000 elementary and secondary teachers (about 24 percent of America's more than two million public teachers) employed in rural settings (Stern, 1994).

Schools and schooling have distinctly different meanings (DeYoung and Howley, 1992). Schooling is the process of educating students, whereas school is a building or physical plant. In rural communities much more than schooling takes place at schools. It is the local schoolhouse where many ties to community, place, and family are formed and solidified (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995).

Curricular Values

According to DeYoung and Lawrence (1995) "the

curriculum of rural schools in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was often limited to character training and basic literacy and numeracy" (p. 107). Rural parents wanted schools to be godly places that practiced prayer, taught creationism, and fostered other religious beliefs (Seal and Harmon, 1995). Stern (1994) reported throughout most of this century, "the trend has been to have rural schools become more like urban ones in size and curriculum" (p. 27). As "small districts have become fewer, attention has turned away from them; they are seldom studied and infrequently written about" (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992, p. 2).

Rural parents believed their children could best be prepared in small isolated, protected schools that concentrated on fundamental teachings (Seal and Harmon, 1995). Rural areas have a long tradition of beliefs in the dignity of hard work, long hours, and strong patriotic and pro-military attitudes (Seal and Harmon, 1995). Rural curricula still support those beliefs. Large schools tend to use technology, and "small schools use the more traditional approaches; however, small schools are friendlier places to learn and work" (Cypher, 1995, p. 387). Rural students share certain attitudes and values that are not as common among nonrural students (Stern, 1994).

In comparing rural youths to urban and suburban youths, Seal and Harmon (1995) suggested rural youths value their jobs more than academics, and friendships more than money.

Standards for student achievement and school accreditation are not priority for rural youths or parents when considering consolidation; a winning football team or shorter bus rides would be of greater local interest (Seal and Harmon, 1995). The local school's influence has been pervasive, often determining the vitality and character of a locality. The school's athletic team and cultural activities create a gauge by which community comparisons are made (and often rivalries born). When the athletic team wins, the whole community wins (Stern 1994).

Economic Variables

Herzog and Pittman (1995) have suggested rural areas are often depicted in unflattering terms. According to the researchers, elementary social studies texts are an example. From one text, a third grade student recalled urban as being "skyscrapers and people prancing around in fur coats", while rural meant "barns and girls with pigtails" (p. 114). Stern (1994), too, found that over the past quarter century rural schools have been confronted with curricula that have an urban orientation. In reality, rural areas have "a higher proportion of the working poor who are stuck in low-wage, low-benefit jobs" (Herzog and Pittman, 1995, p. 115). Herzog and Pittman (1995) suggested "poverty is more prevalent in both the general and school-age segments of the rural population than in the metropolitan population" (p. 115). Non-metropolitan poverty rates are found to be 50

percent higher than metropolitan rates (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995). The scarcity of human and fiscal resources and accelerated pace of change have strained the capacities of many rural school districts, especially those already impoverished (Stern, 1994). Chance (1994) reported "the economy is perhaps one of the most important components to be studied in looking at rural areas" (p. 6).

"The percentage of school-age children in poverty remains essentially the same as it was 20 years ago" (Herzog and Pittman, 1995, p. 115). In 1986 one of every four rural children in America was living in poverty (Stern, 1994). Even full-time workers in service industries have extremely high poverty rates (DeYoung, 1993). Rural farm workers account for less than three percent of today's laborers (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995), and more and more families are moving closer to metropolitan areas in order to seek employment (DeYoung, 1993). The economic outlook for non-skilled, low-educated workers is bleak. The rural scene is not a positive picture and neither may be the outlook in the city.

The system of school finance in the states leaves property poor school districts at a disadvantage in providing adequate support for schools (Stern, 1994). Lower salaries and fewer benefits to teachers are common and "the supply of qualified teachers for rural schools has been a concern for some time" (Stern, 1994, p. 34). Stern (1994) added:

Teachers and principals in rural schools are generally younger, less well educated, and receive lower pay and benefits than their nonrural counterparts. Evidence suggests many leave the countryside for better paying jobs elsewhere" (p. 3).

Chance (1994) showed "in general, rural area salaries equal 70-80 percent of those received in urban areas" (p. 7).

WHY CONSOLIDATE?

Economy of Scale

Indicated by DeYoung and Lawrence (1995), school reformers throughout most of this century have attempted to create larger and more efficient schools. The reform likened "the 'laws' of school administration to the 'laws' of efficient industrial and agricultural production" (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995, p. 107). "School consolidations have been justified on two primary grounds: (a) the bigger is better philosophy, and (b) economic efficiency" (Migyanko, 1992, pp. 45-46). DeYoung and Howley (1992) suggested that state policymakers and educational leaders spearhead efforts to consolidate "as moves toward improving cost effectiveness or accountability" (p. 1).

According to Link (1971), there are eight reasons school districts consider consolidation. They are:

1. Social mobility,
2. Socioeconomic factors,
3. New educational priorities,
4. Upgrading staff qualification,
5. Curriculum development,

6. Meeting minimum state standards,
7. Physical plant changes, or
8. The economy (pp. 5-17).

Other reasons suggested by Link (1971) included greater chances for federal money, improved political environments, and more efficient pupil transportation systems. Blizzard (1987) surmised the major reason for consolidation of public schools was declining enrollment. Chance (1994) found roughly 6.6 million (16 percent) of the 40 million students enrolled in public schools attend rural schools.

Curricular Benefits

Although economy of scale is one of the main reasons for school consolidation, the curricular advantages must be considered. A consolidated school is one which is able to offer an expanded curriculum plus a more prominent identity in the community. Through consolidation, increased opportunities for students can be had at reduced costs (Migyanko, 1992). Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) revealed "outdated texts and the irrelevant curricula have become the norm in America's small-town schools" (p. 26). Rural school size and declining enrollments mean higher cost per pupil. Schools can not afford the varied curriculum, the teaching aids, and facilities which are generally available in urban schools (Andersen, 1993).

Covington (1994) contended that it has become increasingly difficult for small schools to meet state-

mandated curricular programs, especially when little or no funds are made available to support them. As a result, in the face of stiff opposition, consolidation has become a solution for state and local boards of education throughout the country (Covington, 1994).

Migyanko (1992) suggested consolidation enables schools to share courses and facilities. Sharing results in a more varied curriculum because fewer classes are dropped due to low enrollment. Stern (1994) found the depth and breadth of curricula in small secondary schools to be less than in larger schools, that is, there are somewhat limited opportunities for alternative and advanced courses.

Personnel Advantages

Consolidated schools save in many ways; personnel costs is one such saving. By increasing the number of students each teacher serves per day, a district can increase its teacher/student ratio. Through consolidation "fewer teachers need to be hired" (Migyanko, 1992, p. 46), thus saving the district money. There is evidence the teacher turnover rate is higher in a rural setting (Chance, 1994). Stern (1994) noted "teachers in rural schools were found to be younger, less experienced, and less likely to have completed advanced degrees than those in nonrural schools. Their salaries and benefits were less, with the salary differential worsening over time" (p. 39). In most small districts the superintendents and principals are having an

"onerous time hiring and retaining good teachers" (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992, p. 77).

Administrative personnel must also be considered. Combining schools lessens administrative costs, including personnel. School districts receive more for their money because consolidated schools, usually, do not employ as many administrative personnel (Migyanko, 1992). Because many of the small-district superintendents have only a secretary and a noncertified business manager, they are the district, picking up everything from the mail to a team without a coach. Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) asserted, "it is up to the superintendent, alone, to herald, loud and clear, the idea that small-district schools should be for everybody" (p. 120). Chance (1994) warned that because administrators in rural schools are fewer in number, they are often overwhelmed with everyday problems. Rural administrators may quickly find themselves as managers instead of leaders.

Physical Plant

Capital improvements and basic maintenance are reduced due to consolidation. Schools can share buildings. Creative use of the facilities is a powerful selling point to many constituents. Expenditures for capital improvements and basic maintenance may be reduced because there is less need to upgrade facilities or maintain duplicate plants (Migyanko, 1992). Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) indicated "it is particularly critical to America's decaying small towns

today to find alternative sources of financial support" (p. 37). Stern (1994) found facilities in rural schools to be "in great need of repair or replacement, but many districts are hampered in their ability to raise the necessary funds" (p. 69).

Social and Political Implications

There are many social and political implications involved in consolidation. Many are complex webs weaving elected officials, parents, educators, and retired persons together. Often the decisions to consolidate, or not to consolidate, are determined by those with no real vested interest (children) in the schools. Thus, small school districts burdened with providing adequate educational opportunities for young people are sometimes controlled by the older generation (Link, 1971).

It seems social and political circumstances provide more compelling explanations of school consolidation than the "advertised curricular, pedagogical, or administrative benefits" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 13). DeYoung and Howley (1992) contended the technical arguments (curricular, pedagogical, and administrative) for consolidation actually "serve to conceal the social, political, and economic agendas intended to change the behavior of the affected parties (communities, parents, and students)" (p. 13). They further pointed out that as social institutions, public schools have increasingly become "the target of reform

efforts tied to the principles of technical rationality" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 18). Yet, it is often the social and political arenas that determine the future of schools. Andersen (1993) wrote:

When one set of values is emphasized above another, we invite an imbalance between two different orientations which are both part of the Western heritage, namely, on the one hand, the rational, scientific, technological, and, on the other, the values inherent in human being: a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, of continuity, of community, as well as a sense of responsibility and caring. Unlike rational, scientific values, those expressed in human being, such as the above, do not lend themselves to precise definitions and measurements, but they are just as real (p. 2).

With so much depending on the community's social agenda, it is frightening to note that rural schools having difficulty providing educational resources equal those of affluent cities and towns are frequently those lacking active parent and community support (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995).

WHY NOT CONSOLIDATE?

Rural Resistance

Rural communities resist consolidation. In the early 1900s many farmers fought school consolidations because they wanted their school in their community (Carney, 1993). More importantly, according to Carney (1993), they did not wish to "relinquish power over their local school to other communities" (p. 89). Although many residents wanted better schools, they were not willing to cede power to others (Carney, 1993).

Since World War II, consolidation has become the most widely used form of restructuring schools in the U.S. (Sher, 1995). Sher (1995) contended:

Although amazingly "successful" (in the sense of being widely adopted), the industrial size schools and school districts created through this version of school reform have not proved to be inherently cheaper, more efficient, more educationally effective, or more equitable than their small counterparts (p. 145).

Yet "most rural communities in our metropolitan nation have waged a losing war over the control of their schools and the purpose toward which their children's education is directed" (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995, p. 107).

Other rural resistance "less frequently expressed but often more commanding is the fear that taxes will be increased" (Isenberg and Taudien, 1964, p. 3). This fear is often unjustified, because as Isenberg and Taudien (1964) found, for some "the tax for schools may well be less after consolidation" (p. 3).

Seal and Harmon (1995) suggested "many rural taxpayers fail to make the connection between higher taxes, better schools, and better jobs" (p. 122). They fostered the notion "increased funding for teacher salaries, employee benefits, and state-financed consolidated schools would not be approved if a local vote were taken" (Seal and Harmon, 1995, p. 122). However, if non-tax dollars, for example lottery funds, were used to put computers in an elementary school, now that would be acceptable (Seal and Harmon, 1995).

Concerned Educators

Rural educators, likewise, are concerned about consolidation. Economy of scale, teacher-student ratio, and decision-making issues have teachers and administrators fearful of consolidation. Teachers in small rural schools are often accustomed to almost a complete lack of supervision. Chance (1994) found rural teachers indicating they had greater control "than their urban counterparts over classroom and learning activities such as homework, teaching techniques, discipline, the selection of course content and skills to be taught, and textbook selection" (p. 24). Stern (1994) declared the data "bore out the common belief that rural teachers exercised considerable control over the instructional process in the classroom" (p. 35).

Teachers sometimes view consolidation as a threat to their freedom and flexibility (Isenberg and Taudien, 1964). Many are fearful of the problems larger schools normally carry. More discipline problems, greater student loads, and less preparation time are just some of their concerns. Cypher (1995) noted the number of discipline problems reported by student teachers in large schools were more than double those reported from small schools. Isenberg and Taudien (1964) stated many rural teachers are "totally without experience in a larger school system and fear whatever it is that is unfamiliar to them" (p. 3). Another point made by Isenberg and Taudien (1964) is some teachers

lack adequate professional preparation and would not be accepted in a consolidated school.

Administrators, too, are often opponents to consolidation. Fearful for their jobs, superintendents are "one of the most powerful forces against consolidation of school districts" (Link, 1971, p. 22). Link (1971) stated that "the very thought of school consolidation creates fear in the hearts of many superintendents of small school districts" (p. 1).

Small School Research

Fowler (1992) found in small school research a paradox. He explained:

The overwhelming weight of research studies confirm beneficial effects for small high school size, and detrimental effects for large high school size. However, for over thirty years, educators have been pursuing a policy of high school consolidation, which has lifted the average size of high schools well beyond that urged by the strongest advocates of larger secondary schools, and present policies suggest that the trend toward even larger high schools will continue (p. 16).

Sher (1995) showed that "of the past decade's flood of national reports calling for school improvement, not one recommends bigger schools and districts" (p. 145). In fact, Sher (1995) stated "when size is mentioned at all, it is to decry today's mega-schools and to applaud smallness" (p. 145). Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) suggested the work of rural schools and rural educators is not to emulate urban schools, but to "attend to its own place" (p. 135).

Student Concerns

In 1964 Kreitlow reported, relative to academic achievement, that "boys and girls of reorganized districts outperformed those in non-reorganized districts" (p. 10). He contended contact of students with greater opportunities made a significant contribution to their mental development.

However, Haas and Lambert (1995) suggested that students in small community schools fare better academically and personally than those in distant consolidated schools. Howley (1989) revealed "most studies (between 1924 and 1960) that looked at achievement did not recommend increases in school size" (p. 1). Howley (1989) expanded the notion by declaring "new studies suggest that small-scale schooling can have a positive influence on student achievement" (p. 1). Stern (1994) showed "student achievement in small schools equaled or exceeded that of students in large schools, suggesting that the climate in small schools may propel students to excel in spite of certain material disadvantages" (p. 57). Chance (1994) surmised "rural students who finish high school and elect to go to college do as well as their urban counterparts" (p. 21). Stern (1994) praised teaching practices in rural schools by stating:

Cooperative learning, multi-grade classrooms, intimate links between school and community, interdisciplinary studies, peer tutoring, block scheduling, the community as the focus of study, older students teaching younger ones, site-based management, and close relationships between teachers and students - all characterize rural and small school practices (p. 1).

Chance (1994) cautioned that, nationally, rural schools offer fewer advanced classes and fewer alternative programs than nonrural schools.

There are social benefits to students attending small rural schools also. The notion of manning, referred to by Fowler (1992), is perhaps the key to small school size and its effect on the social behavior of students. Manning occurs when few students are available for many activities. The students who would be marginal in larger environments are able to participate at the smaller school. The marginal student feels worth and a sense of belonging. The psychological benefits are enormous. The student, who would be lost in a larger school, feels a sense of achievement and belonging. With a heightened concern for others and a sense of community, deviant behavior declines (Fowler, 1992). While Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) agreed small-district adolescents differed from their urban counterparts in their "comfortable feelings of safety and security" (p. 19). They argued that "once their days as entertainers were over, they would not be able to find adult work" (p. 17).

Haas and Lambert (1995) acknowledged "young people whose education includes involvement in their communities do become competent citizens, capable of earning their own livings and participating in our democracy" (p. 141). Productive citizenship is a universal goal of education. Smaller school size may provide the environment to enhance that goal.

Further considering community involvement, Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) explained rural schools provide students more of an opportunity to become involved in their community. "The more students understand their community and its environs - its social structure, its economy, its history, its music, its ecology - the more they become invested in that community" (Theobald and Nachtigal, 1995, p. 134).

Bigger Is Not Better

Much has been said concerning school size and consolidation. It seems current research points away from today's mega-schools and applauds smallness (Sher, 1995). Tompkins (1995) suggested "many rural and small town school districts have an advantage over larger metropolitan centers with respect to school size" (p. 356). Opponents of school consolidation suggest combining schools often produces more harm than good (Kamerzell, 1994). Some of the harmful effects of consolidation, according to Kamerzell (1994), are the following:

- More bureaucracy,
- Less participation in decision-making by teachers and administrators,
- More tension between teachers and students,
- Fewer situations for bringing about change,
- More time, effort, and money devoted to discipline problems,

-Less parent-teacher involvement, and

-Less human contact (p. 12);

all producing "frustration and alienation and weakening morale of both students and school staff" (p. 12).

Fowler (1992) declared "it took the better part of half a century to make schools larger. If the next half century devoted itself to making schools smaller, the existing evidence suggests, it will be an effort well spent" (p. 16). In short, Fowler (1992) suggested "there is a natural predilection in America education toward enormity, and it does not serve schools well" (p. 16).

Rural Community Efforts

Benton (1992) stated rural communities will fight bitterly to keep their schools. Herzog and Pittman (1995) noted "it is curious that rural communities which for so long have been marginalized by the dominant culture, have precisely the qualities for which the critics of American schools are now looking" (p. 118). Sher (1995) contended "for whatever the reason, it is now open season on the industrial model of schooling" (p. 143).

If rural communities are to survive, according to Herzog and Pittman (1995), "they must develop new economies, attract working-age people, and redesign schools so that the students are not at a disadvantage simply because of geography" (p. 116). Seal and Harmon (1995) presented "changing schools means changing the community and its

culture" (p. 119). Rural schools can survive but they need to start making some decisions on their own behalf (Theobald and Nachtigal, 1995). "To appreciably attend to the 'needs' of students, schools must contribute to the re-creation of community" (Theobald and Nachtigal, 1995, p. 134).

Haas and Lambert (1995) found rural communities which still had their schools were healthier and stronger economically. DeYoung (1993) stated reformers have undercut the high value rural communities placed on traditional family relationships via school consolidation efforts dedicated to industrial values. Andersen (1993) concurred by stating:

The consolidated school offered a broader curriculum, better resources and facilities, and opportunities for both the respondents and their children to expand activities and friendships beyond the small communities. However, with the transition important values were lost. The schools no longer taught a sense of responsibility or caring, and offered no support for established friendships. The respondents felt they had no influence on the school anymore (p. iii).

Seal and Harmon (1995) predicted "future mergers of schools will be less common than the consolidation of programs and services...Technology will also link the rural school with a global network of information and resources" (p. 124).

Sullivan (1995) proposed active, two-way video for rural schools. He explained:

Full motion, two-way interactive video and audio is a networking of medial production and reception points - schools, community colleges, and/or universities - that have the technological capability for transmission and reception. This capability for transmission and reception is particularly relevant to small rural

schools, where populations are typically sparse and human resources are severely limited (p. 284).

Sullivan (1995) warned, however, that small communities frequently lack the technical expertise and financial resources needed to implement these advanced telecommunications technologies.

Suggested Practices

Covington (1994) provided ideas to enhance consolidation. He stated "each school consolidation effort must be considered within its own particular setting" (p. 199). Link (1971) recommended a general guideline written in reference-style handbook form be provided to decision-makers and stakeholders faced with consolidation. Covington (1994) urged that "school consolidation should not be a long drawn out process. As part of the consolidation, an implementation timeline should be developed and followed" (p. 201).

Stern (1994) asserted the modern approach to traditional rural school-community relations is characterized by "sustained interactions and involvement of the community in defining its needs" (p. 22). Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) reported small districts have the advantage over large ones in bringing administrators, parents, students, and teachers together in harmony. "Perhaps educators of small districts are unskillful at collaboration because they are overworked and stuck in routines and

rituals that keep them from cooperating" (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992, p. 94).

Students, too, should be involved in the future of the school. "Administrators and teachers should find ways for students to serve their communities" (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992, p. 36) and serving on a consolidation planning team could be a learning experience for both teacher and student.

SUMMARY

A review of the literature on school consolidation revealed closing small schools and creating larger ones have been an on-going practice for over 100 years (Potter, 1967). Research shows the number of schools in America dropped from 238,000 in the 1930s to around 61,000 in 1980 (DeYoung and Howley, 1992). Isenberg and Taudien (1964) suggested school consolidations in the 30s were justified as a cost saving measure. Economy of scale, curricular advantages, greater student opportunities, and better facilities were all arguments for consolidating the smaller schools (DeYoung and Howley, 1992; DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Link, 1971; Stern, 1994).

Recently, researchers have revealed that rural communities have more at stake than just "schooling" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992; DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995). Their schoolhouses are often the hub of social life and community activities (Tyack, 1974). Rural communities value their way of life and it is instilled in students at the

local school. Beliefs in hard work, high morals, and Christianity are developed via the small rural school (Seal and Harmon, 1995).

Since 1980 the number of school consolidations has decreased. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1989), of the 15,912 school districts nationwide in 1981-82, 97 percent (15,577) were still operating in 1987-88. Research has shown many advantages, although not economical, to small schools. Student achievement, once thought to be enhanced by greater student opportunity in large re-organized schools, now is considered higher in smaller schools (Haas and Lambert, 1995; Howley, 1989; Stern, 1994). Social benefits for students in small schools were also reviewed (Fowler, 1992; Haas and Lambert, 1995; Theobald and Nachtigal, 1995).

Although state and national funding policies make it virtually impossible for small schools to meet all the mandates imposed (Covington, 1994), Sher (1995) suggested the small schools convey the very values that large schools are now trying to recapture.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

School consolidation has been a tool for school improvement for over 100 years (Rosenfield and Sher, 1977). Potter (1967) identified Quincy, Massachusetts as one of the earliest schools, in 1874, to begin transporting students from schools to large graded ones. In the 1930s school consolidation hit its peak as the country was in the midst of an economic depression. Consolidation was considered a cost-saving strategy (Isenberg and Taudien, 1964).

The wave of small, rural school closings and consolidations continued until the 1980s when school consolidations began to decrease (DeYoung and Howley, 1992). School reformers began declaring "open season on the industrial model of schooling" (Sher, 1995, p. 143). Fowler (1992) stated that "there is a natural predilection in American education toward enormity, and it does not serve schools well" (p. 16). Fowler (1992) further contended "it took the better part of half a century to make schools larger. If the next half century devoted itself to making schools smaller, the existing evidence suggests, it will be an effort well spent" (p. 16). Sher (1995) concluded that current research criticizes today's mega-schools and applauds smallness. Opponents of school consolidation

suggest that combining schools often produces more harm than good (Kamerzell, 1994).

Regardless of the direction of school reform, school consolidation continues to be encouraged and financially rewarded by state and local governments. Migyanko (1992) pointed out that school consolidation is supported on two primary grounds: (a) the "bigger is better" philosophy, and (b) economic efficiency (pp. 45-46). Migyanko (1992) further contended that through consolidation, increased opportunities for students can be had at reduced costs. In addition to economic saving, Link (1971) suggested rural districts have "done little to keep up with the changes this sophisticated world is thrusting upon us" (p. 2). According to Link (1971), there are eight reasons school districts consider consolidation. They are:

1. Social mobility,
2. Socioeconomic factors,
3. New education priorities,
4. Upgrading staff qualifications,
5. Curriculum development,
6. Meeting minimum state standards,
7. Physical plant changes, or
8. The economy (pp. 5-17).

School consolidation will continue to be a tool for school reform in the name of efficiency and accountability. How can the process be enhanced and the fear and anxiety of communities toward consolidation be alleviated?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study identified effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to identify strategies Oklahoma superintendents utilized in order to provide a more efficient, productive and less threatening consolidation process. Peshkin (1987) reported that qualitative research is productive in finding "peculiar factors" (p. 7).

The purpose of this study was to identify strategies which significantly enhance the consolidation process, particularly which strategies work and which strategies do not. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explained that one of the objectives of qualitative research is to reveal understanding, not pass judgement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study examined the strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents experienced in voluntary school consolidation that enhanced the consolidation process. The focus of this study is on answering the following seven questions:

1. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?

2. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?
3. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the students?
4. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?
5. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?
6. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?
7. What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

POPULATION

Since the passage of H.B. 1017 in November 1989, there have been 51 school consolidations reported in Oklahoma by the State Department of Education (1995) (Appendix A). Nine

of the 51 school consolidations were voluntary, that is the districts merged free of local, state, or federal mandates to do so. The schools and the new districts formed are indentified below:

1. Carter G. Woodson and Porter formed Porter Consolidated School on January 9, 1990,
2. Fairfax and Ralston Schools became Woodland School, July 1, 1990,
3. Mountain View and Gotebo consolidated into Mt. View-Gotebo on July 1, 1990,
4. Blue and Bokchito became known as Rock Creek School, July 1, 1991,
5. Binger and Oney joined to become Binger-Oney on July 1, 1991,
6. Fort Cobb and Broxton formed Fort Cobb-Broxton, also July, 1991,
7. Ames and Lahoma merged to become Cimarron, date July 1, 1992,
8. Burns Flat and Dill City became known as Burns Flat-Dill City on July 1, 1993,
9. Helena-Goltry and Jet-Nash formed Timberlake on the same date, July 1, 1993.

This study included data collected by the use of semistructured interviews from the superintendents involved in eight of the voluntary school consolidations since H.B. 1017. Nine voluntary consolidations have been reported

(Appendix A) but one consolidation was not used because a superintendent involved in the process could not be found. This lack of data would cause inconsistencies in the content analysis. The methodology required contrasting and comparing the data from both superintendents involved in a consolidation. With data from only one participant, this step of the content analysis could not be performed. Consequently, the consolidation was omitted. The superintendents from the other eight voluntary consolidations since H.B. 1017 agreed to participate. Other sources of data included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Borg and Gall (1989) cautioned that selecting a sample was "critical to the whole research process" (p. 215), and they surmised that in many cases small samples were more appropriate than studying a large population, especially when in-depth interviews were employed. In fact, the two researchers stated that "a study which probes deeply into the characteristics of a small sample often provides more knowledge than a study that attacks the same problem by collecting only shallow information on a large sample" (Borg and Gall, 1989, pp. 236-237). Lincoln and Guba (1989) suggested that the usual criteria for objectivity is intersubjective agreement. The smaller sample was selected

in quest of improving the probability that the findings would be credible by triangulating the data from different participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Borg and Gall, 1989).

The eight selected school districts were contacted by phone in order to inquire about the superintendents serving the districts during the consolidation process. The superintendents were identified through the telephone calls and information acquired as to his or her present status. The superintendents were then contacted by phone and asked if they would participate in the study. Four of the voluntary consolidations since H.B. 1017 occurred in the southwest quadrant of the state. The northwest section of the state experienced two of the voluntary consolidations. In the northeast quadrant of the state, one voluntary consolidation was used. The southeast quadrant had one voluntary consolidation. This design of using several sites in different quadrants of the state for collection of the data supports evidence of external validity (Cronbach, 1960; Borg and Gall, 1989).

All of the superintendents participating in the study were guaranteed anonymity and that no individual, school, or school district would be identified in any report of the analysis. In order to provide anonymity, fictitious names were provided so that the readers of this research might not tell where and from whom the data was collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was a descriptive, qualitative one. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) explained that qualitative research is descriptive. The data collected are "in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers" (p. 30). Its purpose was to identify the strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation that enhanced the consolidation effort. The identified strategies may support a superintendent's efforts in designing a voluntary school consolidation process. The strategies were identified from data collected through semistructured interviews with Oklahoma superintendents experienced in a voluntary consolidation process since the passage of H.B. 1017. Other sources of data included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories told by participants (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). "They are also concerned with understanding behavior from the subject's own frame of mind" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 2). A phenomenological approach was utilized in order to better understand the meaning of the events and the interactions of the people involved in the consolidations (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Baden (1994) wrote that qualitative designs allow subjects to talk in their own

words and at their own level of understanding. The interview method was the primary tool of data collection for this study. Good (1972) found that 90 percent of social science research is based upon interviews and questionnaires.

Since questionnaires were not a part of this research design, other means of data collection were incorporated. Researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the State Department of Education were collected, studied, and recorded for later data analysis. "The use of multiple-data-collection methods contribute to the trustworthiness of the data" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 24). Triangulation of the data using these multiple sources also improved the validity and credibility of the information (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Content analysis requires that data be compared to other data (Holsti, 1969).

This study demonstrated a problem orientation, that is of identifying strategies utilized to enhance an often threatening, fearful process, school consolidation. Bridges (1982) proposed that:

If the researcher sought to identify the practical problems confronting school administrators, to uncover the various ways in which administrators deal with these problems, and/or examine the relative effectiveness of these administrative practices in alleviating these problems, the researcher was regarded as having a problem orientation (p. 16).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described an applied research design as one which seeks findings that can be used directly

to make practical decisions about programs or practices. The identified strategies utilized by the participants of this study may well be used to improve school consolidation practices, thus establishing this study as applied research. Borg and Gall (1989) developed the notion that applied research focuses on structures and processes as they appear in education practice, "with the goal of developing knowledge that is directly useful to practitioners" (p. 32).

Whereas, the purpose of basic research is to "add to our general knowledge" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 199), qualitative research is best suited for understanding what takes place in a particular situation (Firestone, 1993). The question is not whether the research is completely qualitative or not, but rather to what degree (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

This study was designed to develop a body of knowledge unique to each participant and situation studied and then to generalize from the collected data those strategies that enhance the school consolidation process. Borg and Gall (1989) referred to this type of analysis as inductive because the data is gathered first and then the researcher attempts to develop an understanding and draw generalizations. According to Borg and Gall (1989), "if the sample is unbiased, you can safely generalize the results to the accessible population" (p. 217). Borg and Gall (1989) stated that "the methods of descriptive research, especially

interviews and observation studies, are perhaps most susceptible to observer bias" (p. 188). Concerning inductive research, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) wrote that qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. They are not putting together the pieces of a puzzle where the outcome is already known. The qualitative researcher is developing the picture as the data is gathered and analysis performed. Flexibility and adaptability are important characteristics of qualitative researchers (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

The primary tool of data collection for this study, as mentioned previously, was semistructured interviews with Oklahoma superintendents experienced in voluntary school consolidation. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and analyzed. Intrarater reliability was established by analyzing the data as soon as it became available and then reanalyzing it after a significant period of time (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). For each case, the second data analysis occurred approximately ten days after the first analysis was conducted.

Semistructured interviews are generally the most appropriate type for interview studies in education (Borg and Gall, 1989). Semistructured interviews allow for structure, yet, flexibility. The researcher guides the interview, but allows the participant freedom to discuss topics he/she feels pertinent to the focus of the study.

An interview guide (Appendix B) was developed to help lead the researcher and "offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 92). In-depth interviews tend to be consistent with qualitative methods. As qualitative interviews vary in degree of structure, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) contended that:

In keeping with the qualitative tradition of attempting to capture the subjects' own words and letting the analysis emerge, interview schedules and observation guides generally allow for open-ended responses and are flexible enough for the observer to note and collect data on unexpected dimensions of the topic (p. 77).

Interview guide questions were maintained as the central theme for each participant interview.

The validity of the questions was strengthened through the involvement of others in the content analysis (Holsti, 1969) (Appendix C). First, the questions were sent to three University of Oklahoma professors for evaluation of content and construction. The process then involved soliciting input from three university professors in educational administration in other states but who utilize qualitative research extensively. The third step included two superintendents experienced in school consolidation since H.B. 1017. The superintendents were given copies of the questions and asked to analyze them for clarity, appropriateness, and validity. All of the comments and suggestions from these experts in the field were used to

improve the content of the interview questions, thus strengthening the validity of the questions (Holsti, 1969).

One technique for insuring against flaws in the research design is a carefully planned pilot study (Borg and Gall, 1989). Pilot studies may identify biases in interview technique, question type, or question structure. Borg and Gall (1989) surmised:

A preliminary trial of research measures and techniques is essential to the development of a sound research plan. Whenever possible this preliminary trial should be enlarged into a pilot study...Pilot studies are carried out with fewer subjects than will be employed in the main study (p. 54).

Another advantage to utilizing pilot studies is the discovery of biased viewpoints. The use of "emotionally charged words or slanted or intemperate language" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 77) is the most obvious indicator of this flaw in research design. The use of a pilot study may help correct some of those flaws before the actual research interviews are conducted.

An Oklahoma superintendent experienced in school consolidation since the passage of H.B. 1017 was used in the pilot study of this research. The semistructured interview was conducted in a manner similar to the actual research interviews. The interview followed the interview guide. It was taped and transcribed.

Upon completion of the pilot study involving the Oklahoma superintendent, the collected data was

analyzed. Comments and suggestions were solicited from the participant and revisions in research design appropriately made. Adjustments in probing strategies and questioning sequence were considered. Pilot studies are the best insurance "against bias and flaws in design" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 464). Having others critique the pilot study and data collected enhances the validity of the study (Borg and Gall, 1989).

Good (1972) stated "the dynamics of interviewing begin with the concept that the interview is a process of communication or interaction" (p. 238). Gaining access into an educational institution can be a challenge (Reynolds and Wineburg, 1987) stated that establishing rapport is a necessary part of gathering data from busy superintendents.

A written statement informing the participants the purpose of the study (Appendix D) was provided by the researcher (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The statement provided focus and structure for the interviews. The participants were more trusting and relaxed once the general intent of the interview was known. A signed written consent to participate in the study (Appendix D) was required of each participant (Borg and Gall, 1989). The superintendents were asked if tape recording the interview was agreeable. The consent was included in the permission to participate form. The uses of the data were explained to the participants.

The semistructured interviews began informally. The intentions of the researcher and the focus of the study were shared. Borg and Gall (1989) suggested the researcher have a specific purpose for the interview and this be made clear to the informant so the "person knows where the interview is going" (p. 398). Small talk began the interview in order to establish trust between the participant and the researcher. A conversational mode was used similar to everyday conversation. "This mode communicates empathy, encouragement, and understanding and elicits trust and a relaxed atmosphere" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 401). Commonalities were discussed and a basis for establishing a relationship was nurtured. Once the participant felt at ease and more trusting, the interview began to take focus. Throughout the session the respondent was allowed time to think. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggested a researcher may get more trustworthy data by allowing appropriate think time. The researcher was aware that good listening, pointed out by Glesne and Peshkin (1992), "is at the heart of effective interviewing" (p. 82).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggested that interviews may be used as the dominant strategy in research to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words. The researcher then attempts to "develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (p. 96). In the case of this study, the strategies utilized by the participants that

enhanced the voluntary consolidation process they had experienced are that piece of the world.

During the semistructured interviews the researcher listened carefully to the information presented and tried to understand the perceptions of the participants (Wolcott, 1990). The researcher's goal was to understand the subjects from their point of view (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). A tape recorder was used. Borg and Gall (1989) suggested this strategy had several advantages, one being the reduction of the danger of bias. In fact, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) recommended tape recording when "interviewing is the major technique of the study" (p. 128). The tapes were transcribed for later data analysis.

Researcher notes were also used as a data gathering technique. The notes greatly supported the tape recorded data and provided meaning and context to the interview. "The tape recorder misses the sights, the smells, the impressions, and the extra remarks said before and after the interview" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 107). In support of field notes, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) wrote:

Field notes can provide any study with a personal log that helps the researcher to keep track of the development of the project, to visualize how the research plan has been affected by the data collected, and to remain self-conscious of how he or she has been influenced by the data (p. 107).

Researcher notes helped guard against the researcher's biases by allowing for the detailed recording and the daily

reflection of his subjectivity (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Researcher notes also provided an additional source of data to support the interviews, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, feasibility studies, and other records and documents collected for data analysis.

As with any research project, the confidentiality of the participants, the schools, and the communities was protected. Borg and Gall (1989) generated that "whenever possible, names of subjects should be removed from data-collection instruments and replaced by a code" (p. 87). Fictitious names were given the people, places, and things so the readers of this research might not tell from where or from whom the data was collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

INSTRUMENTATION

In order to obtain information relevant to the problem statement and focused on the purpose of the study, the researcher developed nineteen interview questions to be used as a guide for data collection (Appendix B). The questions were designed to provide the participants an appropriate stimulus for recalling the strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process they experienced.

The interview questions were structured in such a way as to maximize data collection in an efficient manner. Borg and Gall (1989) discussed three types of interview questions utilized by qualitative researchers. These types all gather

pertinent data for most kinds of studies. The interview question types introduced by Borg and Gall (1989) included:

1. Descriptive questions, which are aimed at eliciting respondents' perceptions of some aspect of their culture;
2. Structural questions, which help the interviewer discover how respondents organize or structure their knowledge or perceptions; and
3. Contrast questions, which enable the researcher to discover the dimensions of meaning that respondents employ to distinguish the objects and events in their world (p. 398).

The interview questions prepared for this study were structured around these three types. Five of the interview questions were descriptive, nine were structural questions, and the remaining five were contrast questions (See Appendix B).

Measures were taken as not to overlook important variables and aspects of the instrumentation. Borg and Gall (1989) conceded that the best way to avoid gaps in the research instrumentation is to have other researchers study and critique the interview guide for content validity before actual data collection begins. Content validity, according to Borg and Gall (1989), is the degree to which the interview questions measure what the study is designed for. The validity of the questions was strengthened through the

involvement of others in the content analysis (Appendix C). First, the questions were sent to three University of Oklahoma professors for evaluation of content and design. The process then involved soliciting input from three university professors in educational administration in other states but who utilize qualitative research extensively. The third step included two Oklahoma superintendents experienced in school consolidation since H.B. 1017. They were given copies of the questions and asked to analyze them for clarity, appropriateness, and validity. All of the comments and suggestions from these experts in the field were used to improve the content of the interview questions, thus strengthening their validity (Holsti, 1969).

Boyan (1981) indicated that research in educational administration involves participating in an array of sites of inquiry all loosely connected. To say research in education involves a single field of study is moot. Borg and Gall (1989) felt semistructured interviews best support Boyan's assertion. Borg and Gall (1989) stated:

The semistructured interview is generally most appropriate for interview studies in education. It provides a desirable combination of objectivity and depth and often permits gathering valuable data that could not be successfully obtained by any other approach...The semistructured interview, therefore, has the advantages of being reasonably objective while permitting a more thorough understanding of the respondents' opinions and the reasons behind them...(p. 452).

Semistructured interviews provided confidence the data

gathered was comparable across subjects (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). This consistency provided for internal validity.

Other sources of data for this study included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Data from multiple sources strengthened the validity of the study (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Comparing data to other data is a requirement of content analysis (Holsti, 1969). Triangulation of the data also improved the validity and credibility of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The degree to which the participants' responses can be generalized for the population is referred to as "population validity" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 404). Population validity is one aspect of external validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that reliability is a precondition for validity. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) contended that recognizing the study's instrumentation limits, and the researcher's personal biases and subjectivity, also assist in "producing more trustworthy interpretations" (p. 147). Intrarater reliability was another means of enhancing the study's validity (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Intrarater reliability was established by analyzing the data as soon as it became available and then again after a significant period of time (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

ANALYSIS OF DATA

"Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992 p. 127). Data analysis is a process requiring organizational, analytical, and synthesizing skills; deciding what to tell others from the multitude of information collected is a task of patience, persistence, and fortitude (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) defined data analysis as those researcher activities which involve "working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned . . . " (p. 153).

Holsti (1969) identified four steps to content analysis. They are:

1. Selecting a sample of data,
2. Selecting content categories,
3. Comparing the categories, and
4. Drawing inferences (pp. 25-27).

Content analysis was utilized as a means of data analysis for this study following Holsti's (1969) four steps.

This study included data collected by the use of semistructured interviews from the superintendents involved in eight voluntary consolidations since H.B. 1017. Fifty-one consolidations have occurred in Oklahoma since H.B. 1017, but only nine were voluntary (Appendix A). One

consolidation was not used because a superintendent involved in the process could not be found. Other data was collected from researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Selecting a sample of data was the first step in the content analysis (Holsti, 1969).

After the sample population was selected, questions to guide the research were considered. Seven research questions were generated from the problem statement which served as the foundation for this study. The research questions provided the catalyst for the development of the interview guide. During the interviews the research questions remained the focus. Holsti (1969) referred to this as selecting content categories.

The data was collected and then compared across the sample population of the study, that is, the eight voluntary school consolidations used in this study. Holsti (1969) referred to this content analysis as comparing the categories. During content analysis commonalities and patterns emerged. These units Holsti (1969) referred to as themes.

In the next step of the content analysis, emerging themes congruent across the population were identified by the researcher. The themes were presented as the strategies utilized by the superintendents to enhance the voluntary

consolidation they had experienced since H.B. 1017. Holsti (1969) identified this step as drawing inferences from the content analysis.

As with any research project, the confidentiality of the participants, the schools, and the communities was protected. Borg and Gall (1989) stated that "whenever possible, names of subjects should be removed from data-collection instruments and replaced by a code" (p. 87). Fictitious names were given the people, places, and things so that the readers of this research might not recognize from where or from whom the data was collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

During the semistructured interviews the researcher listened carefully to the information presented and tried to understand the perceptions of the participants (Wolcott, 1990). The researcher's goal was to understand the subjects from their point of view (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). A tape recorder was used during the interview. Borg and Gall (1989) suggested that this strategy had several advantages, one being the reduction of the danger of bias. In fact, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) recommended tape recording when "interviewing is the major technique of the study" (p. 128). The tapes were transcribed for data analysis.

While it is difficult to discard information, data analysis is a process of data reduction (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The analysis process is one that creates a search

for themes that apply to all cases of the problem under analysis (Borg and Gall, 1989; Holsti, 1969). Whereas it may be dangerous to generalize across a population, it can be done "with caution" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 24).

"Descriptive studies can greatly increase our knowledge about what happens in schools, and suggest facilities and procedures to improve them" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 5).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) indicated:

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulated to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others (p. 153).

The researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education were beneficial in the final data analysis. "The use of multiple-data-collection methods contribute to the trustworthiness of the data" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 24). During the data analysis, intrarater reliability was established by analyzing the data as soon as it became available and then reanalyzing it after a significant period of time (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). For each case study the second data analysis occurred approximately ten days after the first analysis was conducted.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

"The worth of a study is the degree to which it generates theory, description, or understanding" (Bogdan and

Biklen, 1992, p. 46). This study identified strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents experienced in voluntary school consolidation that enhanced the consolidation process. This researcher found no other study of this type on the topic of consolidation. The reported data served both practical and theoretical purposes. The strategies reported in this study could benefit Oklahoma superintendents who must address the issues of consolidation. Applied research seeks findings that may be used "to make practical decisions about or improvements in programs and practices" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 199).

The data collected from this research could aid Oklahoma superintendents, school board members, community leaders, parents, teachers, and others faced with a school consolidation issue. Losing the school may be the most traumatic experience a community ever faces. These identified strategies, if implemented appropriately, could enhance that process.

Another significance of this research is the implications it could have on higher education and the programs offered aspiring school superintendents. With the data contained in this study, departments of educational administration could assess the courses offered through their superintendent certification programs and the measures taken to prepare the candidates for the superintendency in rural schools. "If we are to begin seriously reconsidering the way we prepare our educational leaders, then this is the

appropriate time to seriously reconsider the way we intend to prepare them to serve our rural districts as well" (Jacobson and Woodsworth, 1990, p. 41). Rural school superintendents have much to consider in leading their schools. This study is significant in that the findings could enhance educational administration programs and provide a resource to superintendents faced with a consolidation issue.

The availability of strategies that enhance the consolidation process and the assurance that these strategies have been researched and documented could provide some relief to an otherwise stressful experience. Although consolidation is at the forefront of many school reform efforts, how much it has actually improved schools is still being debated. Regardless whether it is or is not advantageous to young people's education, once the decision to consolidate has been made, these strategies could play a major role in providing an efficient, collegial, and productive process. "Win-Win" strategies are difficult to construct, but in the case of school consolidation, it can be done. It is the intent of this researcher to provide strategies to support a superintendent's efforts in developing a cooperative school consolidation process.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) acknowledged that a study's potential significance is something to consider. Also, the point must be made that research almost always draws political consequences. School consolidations are processes

of "give and take"; they require political strategies. This research indicated some of those strategies.

A superintendent's decisions should be based on sound educational theory. Applying theory and current research to practice is a challenge facing all leaders of education. It was the intent of this researcher to provide reliable research for practical application. Borg and Gall (1989) showed that the significance of research is contributing to the knowledge base of education. "There is the satisfaction in thinking that our work may one day influence the practice of teacher education" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 39).

LIMITATIONS

At the passage of H.B. 1017 in November 1989, Oklahoma ranked sixth nationally in the number of local school districts in the state. Because of this ranking, consolidation and annexation were often topics of reform debates across the state (Chance and Deering, 1993). One limitation of this study may be the researcher's personal biases toward the subject of small, rural schools and school consolidation. Since qualitative researchers view themselves as a primary instrument for collecting data (Borg and Gall, 1989), the values and experiences of the researcher could bias the study. This bias was controlled by enhancing the reliability of the data. Intrarater reliability was strengthened by analyzing the data more than once with a significant period of time between the two analyses (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Reliability was further

enhanced by utilizing multiple data collection techniques and by triangulating data collection and content analysis (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992).

Borg and Gall (1989) exposed another limitation of research that could be relevant to this study, and that is response effect. "Response effect is the tendency of the respondent to give inaccurate or incorrect responses, or more precisely, is the difference between the answer given by the respondent and the true answer" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 448). Whether or not people will tell you the truth is a risk that may be a factor in collecting responses from a participant. Risk is defined by Borg and Gall (1989) as the exposure to the possibility of physical, psychological, or social harm as a result of participating in a research project. While codifying the data will protect the participant somewhat, no study is fully without risk. These external risks lend themselves to weak internal validity. Internal validity of qualitative research has been criticized for distortions to data caused by extraneous variables (Borg and Gall, 1989).

External validity may also be a limitation to the study. Generalizing to a population from which the participants were drawn should be done with caution. The methods of descriptive research, especially interviewing, are subject to weak external validity. The degree to which the data can be generalized to the population, called "population validity" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 404), may be

a limitation to the study. Firestone (1993) contended that "one criticism about qualitative research is that it is difficult to generalize findings to settings not studied" (p. 16). Sher (1977) surmised that if policymakers assume success of a particular program in one rural area will guarantee its success elsewhere, they "are destined to failure" (p. 2). Also, the fact that only voluntary consolidations were utilized in this research could be a limitation. Forced consolidations and school annexations were not used as part of the sample population.

Other potential limitations to this study may include the interviewing skills of the researcher, the use of a tape recorder and its influence on the respondents, the smallness of the sample size, and the researcher's ability to accurately synthesize and report the data. But, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) concurred, "part of demonstrating the trustworthiness of your data is to realize the limitations of your study" (p. 147).

SUMMARY

This study was designed to identify the strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents that enhanced the consolidation process they had experienced. Semistructured interviews were conducted with superintendents experienced in voluntary consolidations occurring in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017 in November 1989. Other sources of data included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and

feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

The population for the study was comprised of superintendents experienced in eight of the nine voluntary school consolidations in Oklahoma since H.B. 1017. The Oklahoma State Department of Education identified the school districts that had voluntarily consolidated since H.B. 1017. Four of the voluntary consolidations occurred in the southwest quadrant of the state. The northwest section of the state experienced two of the voluntary consolidations. In the northeast quadrant of the state, one voluntary consolidation was used in the study. The southeast quadrant had one voluntary consolidation. Each of the nine new districts were telephoned and asked the status of the acting superintendent during the consolidation process. These superintendents were contacted and asked to participate in the study. One of the superintendents was not found, thus the consolidation he participated in was omitted from the study. The other superintendents agreed to participate.

Reduction of the data in this study was accomplished through content analysis. Holsti (1969) identified four steps to content analysis. They were: (1) selecting a sample of data, (2) selecting content categories, (3) comparing the categories, and (4) drawing inferences. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) concurred that "data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so

that you can make sense of what you have learned" (p. 127). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) defined data analysis as those researcher activities which involve "working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned..." (P. 153). From the data and the emerging themes found to be congruent across the population of the study, strategies for implementing an effective school consolidation were identified.

CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

School consolidation has been the most frequently implemented educational trend in the 20th century (Sher and Tompkins, 1976; Stern, 1994). "In the 28 years from 1932 to 1960, 117,000 operating school districts had been reduced to a little over 35,000--a drop averaging more than 3,000 school districts a year or about 2 1\2 percent a year" (Rhodes, 1962, pp. 11-12). By 1980, "the number of school districts had dropped to 16,000 and schools to 61,000" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 1).

The wave of small, rural school closings and consolidations continued until the 1980s when school consolidations began to decrease (DeYoung and Howley, 1992). School reformers began declaring "open season on the industrial model of schooling" (Sher, 1995, p. 143). Fowler (1992) stated that "there is a natural predilection in American education toward enormity, and it does not serve schools well" (p. 16). He also contended that "it took the better part of half a century to make schools larger. If the next half century devoted itself to making schools smaller, the existing evidence suggests, it will be an effort well spent" (Fowler, 1992, p. 16). Sher (1995) concluded that current research criticizes today's mega-

schools and applauds smallness. Opponents of school consolidation suggest that combining schools often produces more harm than good (Kamerzell, 1994).

However, Migyanko (1992) revealed that school consolidation continues to be encouraged and financially rewarded by local and state governments. Migyanko (1992) suggested that consolidation is supported on two primary grounds: (a) the "bigger is better" philosophy, and (b) economic efficiency (Migyanko, 1992, pp. 45-46). Through consolidation, increased opportunities for students can be realized at reduced costs (Migyanko, 1992). In addition to economic savings, Link (1971) suggested rural districts have "done little to keep up with the changes this sophisticated world is thrusting upon us" (p. 2). According to Link (1971), there are eight reasons school districts consider consolidation; they are:

1. Social mobility,
2. Socioeconomic factors,
3. New educational priorities,
4. Upgrading staff qualifications,
5. Curriculum development,
6. Meeting minimum state standards,
7. Physical plant changes, or
8. The economy (pp. 5-17).

Although America is no longer a predominately rural nation, "the majority of its school districts are located in very small towns and rural areas" (Glass, 1992, p. ix).

Overall, small districts, defined as those having fewer than 3,000 students (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992), constitute approximately 75 percent of districts in the nation and provide the schooling for about 30 percent of the elementary and secondary school-age population (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992). Fifty-one percent of all districts are both small and rural (ERIC, 1991; Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992).

"As rural and small schools are typically the targets of school consolidation, the threat of school closures persists as perhaps the most important concern in many American rural communities" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 1). Seal and Harmon (1995) suggested that "changing a school means changing the community and its culture" (p. 119). The schoolhouse is more than just a place for children to receive instruction; it is also a place for many adult activities, such as social gatherings, political rallies, and dances (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Tyack, 1974). Andersen (1993) stated that although the buildings and conditions within the schools are often very primitive, local communities are very fond of their schools and have great faith in the education their children receive there.

Benton (1962) observed that "consolidation is a subject most small, rural communities approach gingerly, if at all. Citizens have too much emotion invested in the local schoolhouse, the sports team, and the community's education heritage to do otherwise" (p. 1). Opponents of

consolidation argue it is difficult to place a monetary value on such strengths of rural schools as the involvement and support of parents and the community, individualized instruction, and widespread student participation in small activities made possible by small school and class size (Stern, 1994). Benton (1962) suggested that communities consolidate only under duress and "they'll fight bitterly all the way" (p. 1). Stern (1994) surmised that the school has become an important symbol in small, rural communities. This symbolism helps explain the fierce resistance to school consolidation and school district reorganization (Stern, 1994).

School consolidation will continue to be a tool for school reform in the name of efficiency and accountability. How can the process be enhanced and the fear and anxiety of communities toward consolidation alleviated?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study identified effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to identify strategies Oklahoma superintendents utilized in order to provide a more efficient, productive and less threatening consolidation process. Peshkin (1987) reported that qualitative research is productive in finding "peculiar factors" (p. 7).

The purpose of this study is to identify strategies which significantly enhance the consolidation process, particularly which strategies work and which strategies do not. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explained that one of the objectives of qualitative research is to reveal understanding, not pass judgement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study examined the strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents experienced in voluntary school consolidation that enhanced the consolidation process. The focus is on seven research questions. They are:

1. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?
2. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?
3. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the students?
4. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?

5. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?
6. What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?
7. What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

POPULATION

Since the passage of H.B. 1017 in November 1989, there have been 51 school consolidations reported in Oklahoma by the State Department of Education (1995) (Appendix A). Nine of the 51 school consolidations were voluntary, that is the districts merged free of local, state, or federal mandates to do so. The schools and the new districts formed are identified below:

1. Carter G. Woodson and Porter formed Porter Consolidated School on January 9, 1990,
2. Fairfax and Ralston Schools became Woodland School, July 1, 1990,
3. Mountain View and Gotebo consolidated into Mt. View-Gotebo on July 1, 1990,
4. Blue and Bokchito became known as Rock Creek School, July 1, 1991,

5. Binger and Oney joined to become Binger-Oney on July 1, 1991,
6. Ft. Cobb and Broxton formed Fort Cobb-Broxton, also July 1, 1991,
7. Ames and Lahoma merged to become Cimarron, date July 1, 1992,
8. Burns Flat and Dill City became known as Burns Flat-Dill City on July 1, 1993, and
9. Helena-Goltry and Jet-Nash formed Timberlake on the same date, July 1, 1993,

This study included data collected by the use of semistructured interviews from the superintendents involved in eight of the voluntary school consolidations since H.B. 1017. Nine voluntary consolidations have been reported (Appendix A) but one consolidation was not used because a superintendent involved in the process could not be found. This lack of data would cause inconsistencies in the content analysis. The methodology required contrasting and comparing the data from both superintendents involved in a consolidation. With data from only one participant, this step of the content analysis could not be performed. Consequently, the consolidation was omitted. The superintendents from the other voluntary consolidations since the passage of H.B. 1017 agreed to participate. Other sources of data included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans,

and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Borg and Gall (1989) cautioned that selecting a sample was "critical to the whole research process" (p. 215), and they surmised that in many cases small samples were more appropriate than studying a large population, especially when in-depth interviews were employed. In fact, the two researchers stated that "a study which probes deeply into the characteristics of a small sample often provides more knowledge than a study that attacks the same problem by collecting only shallow information on a large sample" (Borg and Gall, 1989, pp. 236-237). Lincoln and Guba (1989) suggested that the usual criteria for objectivity is intersubjective agreement. The smaller sample was selected in quest of improving the probability that findings would be credible by triangulating the data from different participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Borg and Gall, 1989).

The eight selected school districts were contacted by telephone to inquire about the superintendents serving the districts during the consolidation process. The superintendents were identified through the telephone calls and information acquired as to his or her present status. The superintendents were then contacted by telephone and asked if they would participate in the study.

Four of the voluntary consolidations since H.B. 1017 occurred in the southwest quadrant of the state. The northwest section of the state experienced two of the

the voluntary consolidations. In the northeast quadrant of the state, one voluntary consolidations was used. The southeast quadrant had one voluntary consolidation. This design of using several sites in different quadrants of the state for collection of the data supports evidence of external validity (Cronbach, 1960; Borg and Gall, 1989).

All of the superintendents participating in the study were guaranteed anonymity and that no individual, school, or school district would be identified in any report of the research. In order to provide anonymity, fictitious names were provided so that the readers of this research might not tell where and from whom the data was collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

ANALYSIS OF DATA

"Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992 p. 127). Data analysis is a process requiring organizational, analytical, and synthesizing skills; deciding what to tell others from the multitude of information collected is a task of patience, persistence, and fortitude (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) defined data analysis as those researcher activities which involve "working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned . . . " (p. 153).

Holsti (1969) identified four steps to content analysis. They are:

1. Selecting a sample of data,
2. Selecting content categories,
3. Comparing the categories, and
4. Drawing inferences (pp. 25-27).

Content analysis was utilized as a means of data analysis for this study following Holsti's (1969) four steps.

This study included data collected by the use of semistructured interviews from the superintendents involved in eight voluntary consolidations since H.B. 1017. Fifty-one consolidations have occurred in Oklahoma since H.B. 1017, but only nine were voluntary (Appendix A). One consolidation was not used because a superintendent involved in the process could not be found. Other data was collected from researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Selecting a sample of data was the first step in the content analysis (Holsti, 1969).

After the sample population was selected, questions to guide the research were considered. Seven research questions were generated with the problem statement which served as the foundation for this study. The research questions provided the catalyst for the development of the interview guide. During the interviews the research

questions remained the focus. Holsti (1969) referred to this as selecting content categories.

The data was collected and then compared across the sample population of the study, that is, the eight voluntary school consolidations used in this study. Holsti (1969) referred to this content analysis as comparing the categories. During content analysis commonalities and patterns emerged. These units Holsti (1969) referred to as themes.

In the next step of the content analysis, emerging themes congruent across the population were identified by the researcher. The themes were presented as the strategies utilized by the superintendents to enhance the voluntary consolidation they had experienced since H.B. 1017. Holsti (1969) identified this step as drawing inferences from the content analysis.

As with any research project, the confidentiality of the participants, the schools, and the communities was protected. Borg and Gall (1989) stated that "whenever possible, names of subjects should be removed from data-collection instruments and replaced by a code" (p. 87). Fictitious names were given the people, places, and things so that the readers of this research might not recognize from where or from whom the data was collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

During the semistructured interviews the researcher listened carefully to the information presented and tried to

understand the perceptions of the participants (Wolcott, 1990). The researcher's goal was to understand the subjects from their point of view (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). A tape recorder was used during the interview. Borg and Gall (1989) suggested that this strategy had several advantages; one being the reduction of the danger of bias. In fact, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) recommended tape recording when "interviewing is the major technique of the study" (p. 128). The tapes were transcribed for data analysis.

While it is difficult to discard information, data analysis is a process of data reduction (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The analysis process is one that creates a search for themes that apply to all cases of the problem under analysis (Borg and Gall, 1989; Holsti, 1969). Whereas, it may be dangerous to generalize across a population it can be done "with caution" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 24).

"Descriptive studies can greatly increase our knowledge about what happens in schools, and suggest facilities and procedures to improve them" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 5).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) indicated:

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulated to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others (p. 153).

The researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of

Education were beneficial in the final data analysis. "The use of multiple-data-collection methods contributes to the trustworthiness of the data" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 24). During the data analysis intrarater reliability was established by analyzing the data as soon as it became available and then reanalyzing it after a significant period of time (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). For each case study the second data analysis occurred approximately ten days after the first analysis was conducted.

THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The Oklahoma State Department of Education (1995) reported 51 school consolidations since the passage of H.B. 1017 in November 1989 (Appendix A). The eight consolidations selected for this study were schools that voluntarily consolidated and actually formed new districts (Appendix A) and which the superintendents could be found and agreed to participate in the study. The information to follow is the result of the content analysis conducted on the data collected. The data collected includes semistructured interviews, which were tape recorded and transcribed, researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

The consolidations are numbered and fictitious names given the people, places, and things involved in the

process. This strategy protects the confidentiality of the participants (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Demographic information on each school included in the consolidation is presented followed by the seven research questions and the superintendents' responses to the questions. Although semistructured interviews were the primary tool for data collection, other sources of information were used. "The use of multiple-data-collection methods contribute to the trustworthiness of the data" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 24).

CONSOLIDATION #1

Stony School District

Stony School was a small district in the northeast quadrant of the State. It was located approximately 51 miles from the nearest metropolitan center. The district consisted of one site and essentially three buildings in average condition. Square miles in the district were 141. The district had five school busses and had an average daily haul (ADH) of 58 students.

Before the consolidation Stony School had an enrollment of 151 students in a kindergarten through grade twelve setting. The minority student count consisted only of Native American at 13.5 percent. The last dropout report showed approximately 11 percent. Stony School served more than 60 percent of school lunches free or at the reduced price.

There were nine high school teachers, grades seven through twelve, and six elementary teachers, kindergarten through grade six. The basic curriculum was offered along with academic elective courses in computer applications and Spanish I. The school was not served by an area vocational technology school. Total net state aid the last year before consolidation was \$185,205. This represented 35 percent of the school's general funds revenue of \$526,656.88. Stony School had unused reserves of \$20,193.51 entering the last year of operation before the consolidation.

The net valuation for the Stony School District was \$3,764,240. Tax levies included:

General Fund	35.00 mills
Building Fund	5.00 mills
Sinking Fund	4.58 mills

The Stony superintendent, Mrs. Peterson, graduated with a B.S. in elementary education from an out-of-state university. Her master's degree was earned in remedial reading. She started teaching in 1973 in a very small district in Oklahoma. She explained during the semistructured interview that the small school experience was positive for her first year of teaching. Mrs. Peterson said of small schools, "There is a real strong sense of family and everyone pitches in and it is a really good experience, I think, for starting out."

Mrs. Peterson had taught kindergarten through junior high. She went into administration because she thought she

could make more of a difference. Mrs. Peterson stated she felt this way because of her experience working under, in her words, "a good elementary principal" in 1979. She also stated, "there were not a whole lot of women in administration in that part of the state, not even as principals." Mrs. Peterson became principal of a dependent school in 1983. In 1986 she took the superintendency at Stony Schools.

During the time leading up to the consolidation, Stony Schools were cooperatively sharing programs with its neighbor school, Agewater, five miles away. Foreign language, drivers' education, football, and higher-level math classes were being provided the students in a cooperative program between the two schools.

Agewater School District

Agewater School was located five miles from Stony in the northeast quadrant of the state. It was 56 miles from the nearest urban center. Agewater School had sixteen high school teachers in grades seven through twelve. There were 17 elementary teachers in grades kindergarten through six. Four hundred and one students were enrolled prior to the consolidation process with 34 percent being Native American. No other minority students were reported. Agewater School reported a dropout rate of two percent in 1988-89.

Core curricular classes were offered along with academic electives in basic computer applications, German I,

Spanish I, drama, and speech. Agewater had a counselor, a librarian, but no drivers' education teacher. Students were taught drivers' education through a cooperative effort with the Stony Schools. Agewater was served by an area vocational school 29 miles away.

More than 50 percent of Agewater students qualified for either free or reduced lunches. Total net state aid was \$516,494 which represented almost 45 percent of its \$1,148,221.41 total general fund revenue reported on the school's last income report before consolidation. Agewater, prior to the consolidation, showed unused reserves of \$114.95. The total valuation for the district was \$5,796,783. Tax levies included:

General Fund	35.00 mills
Building Fund	5.00 mills
Sinking Fund	7.30 mills

Agewater maintained two sites, an elementary school, grades kindergarten through eight, and a high school, nine through twelve. Both buildings were in good condition at the time of consolidation. The elementary was crowded with 15 classrooms, 10,516 net square feet, and 36 net square feet per student. Classes were meeting on the stage and parts of the media center.

Agewater School District was 206 square miles in size. The district owned three busses, leased four more, and had an average daily haul (ADH) of 103 students on four bus routes.

The Agewater superintendent, Mr. Alex, began his career teaching at Agewater in 1959. He had been in the service for five years prior to coming to the school. Agewater was the only place he had ever taught. He was a math teacher before becoming an administrator. Mr. Alex became the Agewater principal in 1967 and the superintendent in 1972. He retired in 1990 after the consolidation, but before the two schools actually opened their doors as one district.

Research Questions

Question 1: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?

The superintendents of Stony and Agewater Schools indicated that job security was the most important issue for teachers throughout the consolidation process. Mr. Alex explained that both boards agreed to take all of the teachers into the new consolidated school. He stated that this strategy was written into the consolidation plan and that it enhanced the process for teachers. Mr. Alex pointed out:

Now the boards made agreements as to certain things, and they wanted to take all the teachers from both schools. As a matter of fact, I am sure that it happened. No one lost their job over it. They were still going to have three buildings housing students, and they were going to make sure that we maintained the same number of teachers.

Mrs. Peterson concurred with Mr. Alex. She stated:

We put in writing that every teacher would teach as close as possible to the age or subject area they were currently teaching. We tried to write up these things as specifically as possible with the intent of what we would do if the consolidation went through.

Newspaper articles appearing in the Agewater paper reported the plan to secure teachers' jobs. The articles stated that both superintendents indicated that a reduction in staff would not be necessary taking into consideration the number of anticipated resignations. The newspaper reported that board members, too, were committed to keeping all of the teachers, although assignments could not be made prior to a final decision to consolidate.

The newspaper articles reported both boards' approval of a consolidation plan which contained seven items. Item four stated that due to pending retirements and resignations, all staff members should be able to be retained. The approved consolidation plan was recorded in both board's minutes.

The State Department feasibility study also addressed the teachers' jobs. In the general report it was recommended that the two school boards discuss issues such as, how shall teachers be selected from the present staff and how will the present employees who are not selected for staffing be assisted. Researcher notes taken during the interview showed that both superintendents responded in favor of teacher job security. When asked what strategies enhanced the consolidation process for teachers, Mrs. Peterson stated that it was "put in writing that every

teacher would teach as close as possible to the age or subject area that they were currently teaching" and Mr. Alex responded by stating "both boards did make an agreement as to certain things and that they wanted to take all teachers from both schools."

Another strategy utilized by the superintendents to enhance the consolidation process for teachers included the sharing of information concerning the consolidation. Mr. Alex presented that "the whole thing was an information thing." He stated:

Ours was something like, let's get out the information and try to show them the benefits. We answered everything as honestly as we could about what the situation was.

Both superintendents explained that faculty meetings were the primary tool used for informing the teachers of the consolidation process. Multiple faculty meetings were conducted according to the superintendents. Mr. Alex explained that he tried to answer "every question the teachers had."

Mrs. Peterson addressed the stress level of teachers during the consolidation process. She stated:

Another thing I did not realize was the stress level of the teachers because of going through everything we had to go through. We were under so much stress that we could barely keep our heads above water. I mean, we almost needed a full-time counselor just for the teachers. I ended up having people wanting to see me, but the line outside my door was three or four people deep at six and seven o'clock at night. They would get upset because they couldn't get in, plus the phone was ringing non-stop and you had all the other things that you had to settle and get done.

Question 2: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?

Strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation for parents and the community included town meetings which provided opportunity for parental and community input. Mr. Alex stated that "the meetings in the evenings" were most advantageous to the parents and the community. He pointed out that presenting everything at the meetings proved positive. Mr. Alex disclosed:

We tried to show everything that we could, anything pertaining to the finance part of it. We did that for the parents, as well as for those who came. We just tried to get out all the information we could. We encouraged people to come out.

Mrs. Peterson agreed. She explained that the consolidation plan was made available to parents and that she tried to inform parents of "everything the schools intended to do if the consolidation passed." Mrs. Peterson admitted:

The day before the election, I mean it really hit the fan. There was a rumor out that we were closing down everything. But parents knew that wasn't true. That had been discussed, that is, both of the buildings would stay open.

Other strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process included weekly newspaper articles throughout the consolidation process, an open transfer policy, and joint

board meetings held at both sites. The newspaper articles reported the approved consolidation plan which included seven items. Items of interest to parents and the community included the plan to keep both sites open and which grade levels would be located in each community. Also reported in the Agewater paper were the open-transfer policy and that a new school name, mascot, and school colors would be selected. The consolidation plan became part of each schools' board minutes.

The State Department feasibility study supported keeping both sites open. The facility evaluation stated that the Agewater building could easily accomodate all of the secondary students but that their elementary school was crowded with classes meeting on the stage and portions of the media center. The report stated that combined with Stony's facilities, there may be enough space to expand program offerings or develop additional specialized spaces.

Question 3: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the students?

The superintendents agreed that the cooperative efforts between the two schools prior to consolidation were positive strategies for students. The sharing of programs enhanced the consolidation process as students were able to get to know one another before the actual merger. Students

were also provided an opportunity to select the school colors, the school name, and the mascot. Mrs. Peterson stated:

The kids had gotten together, and through consensus they chose the name of the school. They chose the cougar as a mascot, and blue and silver as their colors. So we wanted everything blue and silver. We didn't want anything red or black and, of course, that bothered some people, too.

Mr. Alex agreed. He stated:

It was given the idea that they would have the opportunity to meet students from both schools and have input into the mascot, the school colors, and other things as we started off the new year.

A recommendation from the State Department's feasibility study was for the two school boards to discuss how the new school district would be named, mascot chosen, and school colors chosen. The Agewater newspaper reported that after many suggestions from Agewater and Stony, some 40 students from both schools met together for several hours to develop recommendations as to the name of the school, mascot, and school colors for the new consolidated school. The school board voted unanimously to accept the students' recommendations and they numbered the school district after the year the vote was made to consolidate. Researcher notes, too, reflected the commitments of the superintendents to allow the students input as to the selection of the school name, mascot, and colors.

Educational benefits were also discussed by the superintendents. Mr. Alex disclosed:

We stressed the fact that with the additional funding, there were going to be more courses and things of that nature that could be offered.

Mrs. Peterson, too, spoke of sharing the idea of expanded opportunities with the students. During the interview she stated:

Stony kids have never had band and we were able to keep the band program, which Agewater was going to lose if we didn't consolidate. We were able to bring some others in, also.

The feasibility study respectfully urged the school officials to expand the focus on the increased educational opportunities that could be provided by combining the school district.

Other strategies utilized by the superintendents to enhance the consolidation process for students included an open transfer policy and enhanced facilities. Mrs. Peterson explained that "we wanted the kids, when we went back to school, to see that place shine." She continued:

Our priorities were that the school was going to be ready for those kids when they got there. One of the things that happened was that football field had gone down hill fast. We were out there mowing on it, sprigging it with grass, watering it; I think I mowed it once. Everyone got out there and pitched in and worked. We got volunteers together to help paint everything out at the football field. Agewater had been state champions. That was still painted red and black, and it still is because that is the color they won with. But, we got a lot of people to volunteer, and pitch in, and help with those things.

Question 4: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?

Both superintendents contended that job security was foremost in the minds of the support staff. Mr. Alex admitted:

I don't think there was anyone on the support staff against the consolidation. That was probably because we tried to insure them that they would have a job. What we couldn't do was necessarily tell them where the job would be.

Mrs. Peterson contended that the support staffs were assured their jobs because "both of the buildings would stay open." The superintendents pointed out that the support staffs were kept informed of the consolidation plan through faculty meetings, town meetings, and board meetings, all of which the support staffs were encouraged to attend.

The State Department's feasibility study recommended that the two school boards discuss how support personnel for the new school would be selected, also, how employees that were not required would be assisted. The facility evaluation stated that keeping both sites open would provide a positive environment for students. This suggestion enhanced job security for the support staff.

Researcher notes indicated that the superintendents supported keeping both sites open and retaining the support staffs at both schools. The Agewater newspaper, too, reported that the intent of the school boards was to keep both sites open and that the continued employment of all support personnel was addressed in the consolidation plan.

Question 5: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?

It was revealed during the interviews that the three Agewater administrators were planning on retiring before the consolidation. Mrs. Peterson, the superintendent of Stony, was not retiring. She admitted that she recommended to both boards they place in the consolidation plan who would fill the administrative positions of the new school. Mr. Alex questioned that strategy by presenting:

I can't say it was decided that Mrs. Peterson would have the superintendent's position, but I had little doubt that they were going to offer her the job. In my own mind I was just sure that they would. But you see, they couldn't do it officially until they dissolved both boards and had a new board appointed.

Mrs. Peterson admitted to administrative chaos by disclosing:

Mr. Tolbert, my high school principal, and I decided to go interview at Agewater because those people had already resigned because they were retiring. Agewater hired me as superintendent and Mr. Tolbert as high school principal, which all of the sudden changed the tables. Now Stony was the one which didn't have any administrators.

In applying for the position of Agewater superintendency, Mrs. Peterson explained:

If push came to shove and we went down to July 1, there was a possibility that Agewater could control everything. The law states that if the schools can't come to an agreement, then the school board with the largest enumeration will take over as the new board.

So all of a sudden about June, it starts going through my mind that here I am with actually two jobs and possibly no job.

After the consolidation, Mrs. Peterson was hired by the new board as superintendent and Mr. Tolbert as the new principal.

The State Department's feasibility study recommended that the two boards discuss how the chief administrator for the new district would be selected. Also, the study stated it was worth noting that the entire Agewater administration was retiring and since the Stony administration was highly respected in both communities, there was every reason to believe that the administrative transition could be accomplished smoothly.

The Agewater paper, too, reported the pending retirements of the Agewater administrators. The paper agreed with the suggestion to employ Mrs. Peterson as superintendent of the new district.

The consolidation plan contained as item number three that the Stony superintendent and high school principal would assume the same positions in the new district. The consolidation plan was unanimously approved by both boards and made part of their school board minutes.

Question 6: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?

Mr. Alex indicated during the interview that the agreement to form a seven-member board, once the consolidation passed, enhanced the consolidation process for board members. He stated:

When you and another district consolidated, you could have like a seven-member board. So that is something else we agreed upon. One of ours voluntarily went off and someone else might have been retiring. I don't think there was a big problem on choosing who was going to be the board members; just the circumstances that came about made it somewhat easier.

Mrs. Peterson agreed that the seven-member board was productive. She indicated:

We worked with our senator on going to the seven-member board. The decision was that there would be three from each school system and one chosen among the remaining board members. Actually, before everything was finished, one of the Agewater board members resigned and one wanted to carry the insurance, so he resigned. It narrowed down pretty easily.

The Agewater paper stated that after a most lengthy process, the two boards agreed to set up a seven-member board rather than a five-member with three Stony members getting a four-year term, a three-year term, and a two-year term. The Agewater members would have one four-year term, one three-year term, one two-year term, and a one-year term. The paper also reported that one Agewater board member decided to step down from the board and a Stony member was not eligible for a seat as he was the agent of record for the Agewater School insurance and according to state law could not serve as a member of a board with which his company does business.

Another strategy utilized by the two superintendents included joint board meetings. Mrs. Peterson pointed out that joint board meetings were held more than once a month for six months prior to the election. She indicated that the meetings were open to the public and were well covered by the local newspaper. Disadvantages to the open forum meetings were revealed by Mrs. Peterson. She submitted:

Our big problem was that everyone had questions, or demands, or complaints, or wanted to yell and scream, or things like that. We had these joint board meetings and I can remember one of the board members finally saying that at this time we were not really sure if we wanted to consolidate. We just wanted to have the boards meet together to decide advantages and disadvantages and how we would handle things if we did choose to consolidate. I can remember one time one of the board members finally said something to the patrons like, we can't answer your questions until we can discuss the questions ourselves and we can't do that in a closed session. So, we are going to refuse to talk to you all for a while so we can discuss this among ourselves and come up with an idea of what we want to do.

Mrs. Peterson continued:

So we did that, and in our situation we put things in writing on what the intent of the board would be if we did consolidate.

The superintendents also stated that bringing State Department personnel and other superintendents experienced in consolidation to the joint board meetings were effective strategies. The Agewater paper advertised the meeting dates, locations, times, and agendas. The paper explained that State Department personnel attended two of the joint board meetings, and two Oklahoma superintendents were

available to answer questions from board members, staff, and patrons at one of the meetings.

Question 7: What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

Strategies that proved nonproductive were reviewed by Mr. Alex. During the interview he spoke of the defeat of the first consolidation election in Mrs. Peterson's district. Mr. Alex revealed:

We had some people living down in the old Seaver District who were actually closer to Puma. When they voted on the consolidation the first time, it didn't go through. Stony didn't approve it. Agewater approved it, but Stony didn't. They had to call another election. And this time it was agreed upon that no one would be forced to consolidate. We were going to turn loose a portion of the district, down toward Puma, and let those people go the other way.

Mr. Alex continued:

The second time it went through. There was a problem over that because a lot of the people down there actually lived so much closer to Puma. They wanted to go to Puma.

Mrs. Peterson spoke of the first election defeat at Stony. She stated:

There was a section of the Stony School District that was closer to Puma than it was to Stony. It was called Seaver. Seaver had had a dependent school a long time ago and when they decided to annex to Stony and to Puma, the lines in it were just unbelievable. I mean it was definitely by people's property. And a lot of the people who annexed to Stony did so because the property taxes were much lower. So anyway, they defeated the consolidation election. It was basically from that area. So we had more town meetings and set another election. We also set an election for part of our district, the Seaver area, to annex to Puma.

After the defeat of the first election, newspaper articles in the Agewater paper reported two meetings

between the Agewater board, the Stony board, and the school board from Puma. The paper stated that the general consensus of the Agewater and Stony boards was that they would look into the possibility of a land swap with the Puma board in order to allow an equitable solution to the question raised by Seaver residents wanting to go to Puma in the event of a consolidation of Agewater and Puma Schools. The paper reported that several parties suggested residents of the Seaver community would vote against the consolidation issue if their tax money could not follow their students to Puma.

School board minutes showed that the Stony school board agreed to give the Seaver area the opportunity to vote to annex its district to Puma, which was closer in proximity, should the consolidation pass. Mrs. Peterson pointed out the problems with the double election. She submitted:

The main problem at this point was that if the area annexed to Puma, then Stony could not survive if the consolidation did not go through. So the consolidation election was scheduled first. We also had to schedule the annexation election, but it was far enough apart that we would have been able to cancel the election if the consolidation had failed.

Mr. Alex summed up the feelings of many of the people in the districts. He submitted:

When you get into your schools, it is kind of like closing your church somewhere. You know in these churches, you say we were married in that church, my husband was buried there, and all of my kids were baptized there. Well, you have some people who have three, possibly four, generations who graduated at the

school. Those are always things to consider. You know that you have a few people who voted for the consolidation, even though it hurt them.

Before the second consolidation election, the Agewater paper reported that many of the issues that were of concern in the first election seemed to have been resolved. The paper stated that there was very little organized opposition to the issue the second time.

CONSOLIDATION #2

Tin Mill School District

Tin Mill School District was a small, rural district 32 miles from an urban center in the southwest quadrant of the state. Tin Mill School had 15 high school teachers in grades seven through twelve with 138 students. The 11 elementary teachers in grades kindergarten through six were responsible for 197 students. The minority population included five black students, 69 American Indian, and 14 Hispanics. The total percentage of minority students equaled 26.26 percent. Dropouts were minimal with only two reported in 1988-89.

The basic curriculum was offered at Tin Mill along with computer programming, accounting, vocal music, band, Spanish, general technology, creative writing, speech, yearbook, and drivers' training. Tin Mill students were served by a vocational school 26 miles away.

Fifty-five percent of Tin Mill's students qualified for either free or reduced lunches and two-thirds of the

students participated in the daily lunch program. The school received impact aid from the federal government in the amount of \$35,140.86 in 1989-90. Chapter 1 monies were also a significant source of income totaling \$31,344 in the same year.

The Tin Mill School District maintained two sites. The elementary site was originally built in the 1930s with a substantial addition in the late 50s. A recent remodeling of the building added several energy conserving elements and brought the entire building rating up to average. A separate kindergarten building was located adjacent to the elementary school and was in need of repair to accommodate anticipated enrollments. The junior/senior high facility was originally constructed in the 1930s with a gymnasium added in 1950 and a vocational agriculture facility attached later. The entire high school facility was rated average in 1981 by the School Plant Services of the State Department of Education.

Tin Mill School transported an average of 133 students, 39.7 percent, per day over the 242 square miles in the district. The school owned seven busses in excellent to good shape. The total net state aid in 1989-90 for the Tin Mill School District was \$468,391, 44 percent of the general fund revenue reported on the 1989-90 income report. The district had a valuation of \$7,460,644 and tax levies were the following:

General Fund	35.00 mills
Building Fund	5.00 mills
Sinking Fund	0.00 mills

There were unused reserves of \$8,283.39 in 1989-90. Tin Mill School, in 1988-89, spent 6.43 percent of total expenditures on administrative services, 7.35 percent on operation and maintenance of plant, and 58.36 percent of total expenditures on instructional services.

The Tin Mill superintendent, Mr. Rich, explained during the semistructured interview his positive feelings toward rural Oklahoma. He had been a superintendent for ten years. When he came to Tin Mill, "the school had 365 students, was in fairly good financial shape and was certified with no deficiencies." The superintendent continued, "everything was really nice."

Valley School District

Valley School was located seven miles from Tin Mill. It had 99 students in grades kindergarten through twelve prior to the consolidation. The school had eight teachers in grades seven through twelve serving 46 students. Seven elementary teachers in grades kindergarten through six served 53 pupils. Total minority students were nine with seven being American Indian and two Hispanics. There were no dropouts reported in 1988-89.

Course selection was limited at Valley High School. The basic curriculum was offered along with German,

accounting, agriculture, and home economics. Valley School was served by a different vocational school than Tin Mill. Valley's vocational school was located 37 miles away. More than 61 percent of Valley students qualified for free or reduced lunch and almost 94 percent of the students participated daily in the school lunch program.

Valley School received federal financial assistance through Chapter 1, \$11,221; Chapter 2, \$1,218; Title II, \$329; Indian Education, \$4,569; and Drug Education, \$482. The school maintained a single campus in good shape. There were 20 instructional spaces totaling 12,361 net square feet. Based on 1988-89 enrollments, this provided approximately 116 net square feet per student. This compared with Tin Mill's square footage per elementary child of 46 square feet and its secondary student ratio of 157.4 net square feet per pupil.

Valley School spanned 172 square miles. The district owned three busses and hauled 42 students, on the average, per day. This figure represented 42.4 percent of all children enrolled. State aid allocation in 1989-90 equaled \$122,648. This accounted for 29.4 percent of the total general fund revenues reported in the income report made available with the consolidation feasibility study. The total valuation of the district before consolidation was \$3,969,999. Tax levies included:

General Fund	35.00 mills
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Building Fund	5.00 mills
Sinking Fund	6.77 mills

Unused reserves prior to consolidation totaled \$425.95. Valley School spent 9.06 percent of their total expenditures in administrative services, 7.21 percent in maintenance and operation of plant, and 56.23 percent in instructional services.

The Valley superintendent, Mr. Steen, was a resident of Southwestern Oklahoma having grown up 23 miles from Valley. During the interview he replied that he was student-centered and financially cognizant. He explained:

Then on the students, I have an opinion of the students that we do as much as we possibly can financially for the students. I lean toward what the student wishes more than what I set as goals for employment at the school.

Research Questions

Question 1: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?

Mr. Rich explained during the interview that the best strategy for enhancing the consolidation process for teachers was to "develop a plan, put it in place, and stick to it." He admitted:

Many, many proposals were written up. We thought we should tell the people what we were going to do. Basically, our proposal that was accepted told which teachers would remain in the school system, what support personnel, who would be superintendent, principals, and right down the line.

Mr. Steen shared during the interview that job security was an important strategy for enhancing the consolidation process for teachers. He disclosed:

The teachers were all brought together for the consolidation and told that they all had their jobs. That was the neat thing about our consolidation. Nobody lost their jobs, short of the ones that were leaving to accept another job or those that were retiring anyway.

Mr. Steen explained who met with the teachers. He submitted:

The Valley teachers met with their administration and the Tin Mill teachers met with their administration. The principals met with those teachers that we moved. A few did move from one building to another building and we let the principals talk to them about moving to another site.

Mr. Rich's recollection concerning loss of jobs was different than Mr. Steen's. During the interview Mr. Rich presented that some loss of jobs did occur. But, he stated, "no one got hurt on the deal." Mr. Rich continued:

We didn't lie to anyone and say that we would try to find them a job. We knew that there would be reduction in force. We looked it over and everybody knew who had a job. Everybody knew who was leaving before they voted. So those teachers that didn't have a job had a chance to go out and campaign against it. I don't remember any of them doing that. They understood.

Mr. Rich explained how many teachers each district lost.

He stated:

What we did is, we were very forthright. We had a reduction in force at Valley and at Tin Mill. We said we needed this many teachers. We let retirees go, anybody that we could without exactly having to let someone go, we did that. We reduced staff by eight certified teachers. And like I said, I riffed three, Valley riffed five. There were no technical problems

on that at all. It was something that had to be done. The new system had no liability toward those teachers.

The Oklahoma State Department of Education feasibility study conducted for Tin Mill and Valley suggested that the two school boards should discuss in open meetings how teachers would be selected for the new district. Also recommended was to discuss how the board would assist present employees who would not be required for staffing the consolidated school. The finance study showed as one advantage to the consolidation some teaching positions, as they became vacant, would not have to be filled. Researcher notes showed that Mr. Steen indicated that he told the Valley teachers they would retain their jobs, but Mr. Rich stated that although job security for teachers was a top priority, some teachers from both schools were displaced because of the consolidation.

The consolidation was approved by both boards and made part of the boards' minutes. The Tin Mill News reported the plan to patrons and stated as item number six on the consolidation plan that Tin Mill would retain its teachers hired for the next school year and that the Valley elementary teachers would be hired to fill other open positions within the new school. Two weeks later the newspaper again reported the plan to consolidate and listed the names of the Valley teachers who would be employed by the new school district after the consolidation.

Question 2: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?

Mr. Rich, when asked about the parents and community, recalled distributing the consolidation plan to "all sectors of the community." Mr. Rich denoted:

We explained it to the parents. Like I said, many, many nights were spent, and days, talking to people, and it paid off. At town meetings I was asked a lot of questions, some of them were trying to show the people how bad it would be.

Mr. Steen supported town meetings as a productive strategy for parents and the community. He presented:

Both Tin Mill and Valley held town meetings to discuss the consolidation. That means each held town meetings in front of the boards of education of each community.

School board minutes showed joint meetings of Tin Mill and Valley school boards on two different occasions before the consolidation election. The second meeting was held in the Tin Mill auditorium with agenda items including an opportunity for the public to address the school board concerning the proposed consolidation. The agenda item called for a two minute limit per person. The third item on the agenda, and the last before the call to adjourn, was the call for a vote to approve or disapprove a resolution for a consolidation election.

The State Department's feasibility study also recommended joint board of education meetings. The purpose, as stated by the study, was to resolve as many issues as possible. The Tin Mill News advertised the meetings and reported on their proceedings which helped keep parents and the community informed.

Mr. Rich cautioned superintendents involved in consolidation. He proposed:

I think what a lot of people miss is they forget about the old folks; the senior citizens' vote. See, they vote, and they will turn out for anything. They believe in their right to vote. And if you miss them and an issue fails, you didn't go out there and get the right people, and that is the old people.

Mr. Rich continued discussing the senior citizens' vote and included the local newspaper as a strategy utilized for parents and the community. Mr. Rich stated:

The senior citizens ask intelligent questions. When I went over everything with them, they were already up on it. They had read the newspaper, which is another thing. Don't forget your local newspaper. We had a newspaper in Tin Mill and they were very supportive. We went to them before we started working with the business community in both areas. Then we took it to the churches, to the senior citizens, and we never forgot about the students.

One article in the Tin Mill News stated that at one of the joint board meetings some school patrons thought more news coverage was needed in order for a better understanding of the matter before the election.

Question 3: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school

consolidation utilize to enhance the
consolidation process for the students?

Strategies utilized to enhance the process for
students were discussed by both superintendents. Mr. Steen
stated:

That was the one that I thought we probably did the
best job on. We got the two student councils meeting
together after we publicized that we were going to
vote on this. We got them to meeting and talking and
getting to know each other. During the summer they met
two to four times and put together a first day event
where the students coming in to a new building were
met in a school assembly and made to feel welcome.

Mr. Rich supported meetings with students to discuss
the consolidation process. He commented on what was
discussed with students by stating:

We went to them and said that we are out here in rural
Oklahoma. If we don't go together then neither school
might exist. We asked do you want to go to
Hessville, do you want to go to Carl? And just
being honest here, their reputation wasn't as good as
ours, and they didn't want to go. The students saw
the advantages of having a united school system as
opposed to no school system. Consolidation was all
you could hear at the time.

Mr. Rich continued:

And that is what sold it, the students' success, and
especially those over at Valley. They were going to
get a lot more course offerings, more competition,
better stuff in every way.

Athletics and competition were discussed by Mr. Rich. He
disclosed:

Everybody gained. Students had more classes. We were
more competitive in athletics and you can't forget
that. I am not a coach, but that is important, too.
We went through area four years in a row after
consolidation, we were very competitive in athletics.
Also, very competitive as far as academic meets.

Mr. Steen proposed that students had input into the selection of the name of the school, the school colors, and the mascot. Mr. Rich agreed by stating:

We never forgot about the students. We answered their questions. We had an auditorium full of them wanting to know what the name of the school was, that was a big issue, school colors, another big issue, and they wanted to know the name of the mascot, big issue. And I can tell you those things are very important and you better get the right ones or it won't pass.

The State Department's feasibility study addressed the selection of the school name, mascot, and school colors. The study recommended that the two school boards discuss in open meetings how these items would be selected. The study also encouraged the boards to focus on the increased educational opportunities for students.

Researcher notes indicated that both superintendents prioritized student involvement. Mr. Steen discussed the two student councils meeting together and Mr. Rich elaborated on "going to the students" and discussing the consolidation.

As the Tin Mill News reported on the consolidation, the board approved plan was printed. Item number one of the consolidation plan stated that grades four through seven would be at Valley with all other grades at Tin Mill. Item two addressed athletics. It stated that the sports for grades four through seven would be at Valley with the exception of football. All other grades would have their sports at Tin Mill. The third item of particular interest

to students was number eight which stated that transfers would be given to students if no other possible solution could be worked out.

Question 4: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?

Mr. Steen described strategies which enhanced the consolidation process for support staffs by stating:

Probably the ones we didn't work so hard on, not to say you shouldn't, but, primarily each administrator went to their support people and told them that their job was secure, that they weren't releasing anybody. They would still work at the same site and do the same job. So we didn't have to let any of them go, either.

Mr. Rich admitted that utilizing the consolidation plan to tell exactly what would be done. He shared that the consolidation plan indicated "who would remain in the school system." Mr. Rich asserted:

We lived with the plan. We did exactly what we said we would do. That piece of paper was our guiding light. If a problem would come up, we went back to the agreement. Even though that agreement wasn't binding, the boards had signed it and we had given out copies to everybody saying this is what we are going to do, vote for the consolidation.

The consolidation plan was approved by both boards and printed in the Tin Mill News. The Tin Mill support staff retained their positions and item number six of the consolidation plan listed the names of the support personnel who would be hired for the new consolidated school. The list included the library aide, school

secretary, maintenance worker, and two cooks. The names also appeared in the board minutes when the employees were recommended to the board.

Mr. Steen emphasized, according to the researcher notes, that none of the support people lost their jobs. He stated that both sites would remain open and that all of the support employees would retain their positions.

Question 5: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?

Mr. Rich shared the importance of a preconsolidation agreement between the two schools and then "sticking to it." He explained that a plan should "outline everything that is going to happen and everyone should know." Mr. Rich revealed:

Any school system that is going to consider going together should consider a premarital agreement. A preconsolidation agreement where everybody knows what is going to happen. Put it on paper and both boards sign it.

Mr. Rich indicated that administrators knew before the election "who would be superintendent, principals, and right down the line" through the preconsolidation plan.

Mr. Steen agreed that job security for administrators was important. He commented:

As a matter of fact, the administrative staff stayed intact plus we hired one more and we hired them from

within the system. So each one of them were told by the boards that their administrative positions would stay intact.

The State Department's feasibility study recommended to the Valley and Tin Mill school boards that they discuss in open meetings who the administrators of the new school would be.

The consolidation plan was approved by both boards and became part of board minutes. It was also printed in the Tin Mill News on two different occasions. The Tin Mill administrators retained their positions with the consolidated school and from Valley, Mr. Steen was named assistant superintendent and Mr. Benjamin was named principal of grades four through seven. These appointments were included in item number six of the consolidation plan. According to the researcher notes, Mr. Benjamin's appointment was a new position and a promotion for him.

Question 6: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?

Mr. Steen stated that the three or four joint school board meetings were the most effective strategy for school board members. He further indicated that "the consolidation plan helped guide the board's decisions." Another strategy shared by the Valley superintendent was the preconsolidation agreement between the boards of a

five-member board for the new district. He explained:

By state law you could have a seven-member board or a five-member board and we chose to just leave it as a five-member board. But anyway, one individual off the old Tin Mill board agreed to resign his position and allow one of the Valley board to come on to the new board. His term would be the five year term. The four Tin Mill board members would be lesser terms.

The superintendent further indicated:

But the important thing is that every one of those board members buys into it. If you have one that balks in any shape, fashion, or form, you are in trouble. Those five board members have got to buy in to the consolidation plan.

Mr. Rich spoke of other strategies utilized to enhance the process for board members. He stated:

Both boards were very popular with their communities. And when they signed it we talked to them and explained how it would work and the financial advantages it would have for the two communities as far as the schools. We had a few parents who wanted to crucify us, but we even won them over before we voted.

Mr. Rich continued:

Mr. Steen and I never argued. We stuck to our plan. We knew what we were going to do and how we were going to do it. We worked closely with the State Department of Education. We did everything just right as far as what the government, legislature, State Department, and everybody was looking at.

Mr. Rich concluded, "the main thing is to believe in your program. Don't go forward until you have your plan in sight and both boards agree on it."

The Tin Mill News printed the initial letter sent to the Valley school board from Mr. Rich, the superintendent of Tin Mill Schools. In the letter a proposed consolidation plan was outlined for the Valley school board

to consider. According to the article, Mr. Steen declined to comment until after a Valley town meeting could be held. The meeting was scheduled for the same night the article appeared in the paper. Item number five of the proposed consolidation plan stated that Tin Mill would retain four board members and Valley would retain one with at least a three year term. When the consolidation plan appeared in the second Tin Mill News article two weeks later, item five had been amended to state:

Tin Mill would retain four board members and Valley would retain one board member with a five year term and first preference to a second position if a Tin Mill board member resigned before the next board election.

According to researcher notes and board minutes taken during the swearing-in of the consolidated school board members, which was held at the State Department and conducted by the State Superintendent of Instruction, four of the new members were from Tin Mill and one from Valley.

Question 7: What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

During the interview, Mr. Steen disclosed strategies that proved nonproductive. He explained:

We had one strategy that we promised the people that we would move some of the pictures, the senior panels, over to the other school and display them and that didn't ever materialize. That was something that we thought of and really the public didn't care, so we have just left those senior panels in the original building they were in.

The feasibility study prepared for the schools addressed the trophies, awards, and other school

memorabilia. The study recommended that the school boards discuss in open meetings what to do with such artifacts. According to researcher notes, leaving the senior panels and trophies at the school which they originated from proved to be the most acceptable plan. In fact, the board approved consolidation plan listed as item number three that trophies from both schools would be displayed at both locations.

Mr. Steen referred to moving administrative furniture by submitting:

Needless to say we had moved student chairs and desks, and so forth, to accommodate the buildings that would house the K-three, and we moved larger desks to the building that would house four-seven, and then the largest desks to the ones that housed eight-twelve. We were going to move administrative furniture and so forth, but we decided that was kind of silly because most of our administrators don't necessarily have a this is my desk. They work with what they are given.

Another strategy that Mr. Steen felt unnecessary was sanding off the mascot on the gym floor. He submitted:

One of the things that we talked about doing, and probably it didn't need to be done either, was that the gym floor over at Valley had a yellow jacket in the center of the floor, about two feet in diameter. Tin Mill's gym had a lion in the center of the floor which stayed appropriate because they were already the lions. But, we thought once about going in there and sanding the floor down and taking the yellow jacket out of the center of it. As it turned out, nobody really cared about that either.

In conclusion, Mr. Steen stated that, "we thought of all those things and probably we got, you know, you get too carried away with all of your thoughts."

When discussing nonproductive strategies, Mr. Rich stated that "we were the luckiest people in the world. If we did something nonproductive, people were nice enough not to point it out to us." The superintendent concluded by stating, "probably, when I retire, one of the best things that I did was put the two school systems together."

CONSOLIDATION #3

Reid School District

Reid School was located in the southeast quadrant of the state only six miles from Big Rock. Reid School had an enrollment of 226 students in grades kindergarten through twelve. Certified staff included eight high school teachers in grades seven through twelve and nine elementary, kindergarten through eighth grade, teachers. Minority students that were reported included one black and 57 American Indian. The dropout rate was five percent the year before consolidation.

Elective courses offered by the Reid School included accounting, computer application, art, Spanish, drafting, technology education, creative writing, and home economics. More than 60 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced lunches and 196 students participated in the lunch program on an average daily basis.

Total state aid in the last year before consolidation totaled \$544,963. The valuation of the district was \$2,986,612. Tax levies included:

General Fund	35.00 mills
Building Fund	5.00 mills
Sinking Fund	11.56 mills

Local revenue represented 4.42 percent of the total receipts, county 1.32 percent, state revenue equaled 65.99 percent of the total collected, ad valorem taxes were 12.71 percent, and the federal revenues made up 7.88 percent of the total budget. Other monies collected included miscellaneous revenues from surplus funds, back taxes, and prior expenditures recovered. The Reid School expenditure report indicated that 7.27 percent of the school's budget was spent on administrative services, 12.04 percent on operation and maintenance of the plant, and instructional services cost 58.66 percent of the total budget.

Federal revenues to the Reid School included \$7,196 for Indian Education, \$5,429.54 for Chapter 1, \$2,513 for Chapter 2, and Drug Education received \$695.

The State Department of Education in their feasibility study of the Reid School District described the school having 7,200 square feet with nine classrooms in grades kindergarten through eight. The high school, which was adjacent to the elementary school, was a metal building built in 1972. It had five classroom spaces with two more located in the adjacent gymnasium. The square miles in the district were 98. Reid had five busses and hauled 163 students on an average daily basis.

The Reid superintendent, Mr. Martin, was in his third superintendency with ten total years experience as a superintendent. Prior to that he was a high school principal for ten years and classroom teacher for two. He started his career in Texas. Small schools had always attracted him and all of his experience had been in that realm.

Big Rock School District

Big Rock, before the consolidation, had an enrollment of 264 students. There were ten high school teachers, grades nine through twelve, and eight kindergarten through eighth grade teachers.

Big Rock had 29 American Indian students which was almost eleven percent of the total student population and seven Hispanics which represented 2.6 percent. No other minority students were reported. The dropout rate in 1988-89 was one percent. Elective courses were limited. General business, typing, introduction to computers, art, Spanish, home economics, and vocational agriculture were offered along with the state mandated core curriculum. Big Rock was served by the same vocational school as the Reid School District.

Big Rock School served on the average 191 students in the federal school lunch and breakfast program. More than 60 percent of lunches were free or reduced. The school's total net state aid in 1990-91 was \$614,816. The district

valuation was \$2,662.520. Local revenues accounted for 12.77 percent of the school's receipts. State revenue was 61.11 percent and federal, 3.92 percent. The total general fund revenue was \$805,975.89. Tax levies for the district included:

General Fund	35.00 mills
Building Fund	5.00 mills
Sinking Fund	23.78 mills

Administrative services represented 5.98 percent of the district's total expenses. Operation and maintenance of plant cost 8.13 percent of the total, and instructional services realized 48.13 percent of the total expenditures.

Other receipts for the Big Rock School District included \$22,256.85 in Chapter 1 monies, \$2,709 for Chapter 2, and \$711 in Title II funds. The elementary facility was 35 years old and evaluated by the State Department as in average condition. The building was not handicap accessible. The high school was built in 1967 with 17,000 square feet and housed the district's cafeteria. The new gymnasium provided classrooms for home economics, math, and special education. The projected enrollment in 1993-94 listed an increase of nine students. Big Rock School District spanned 143 miles. The district utilized five busses and had an average daily haul of 158 students.

The Big Rock superintendent, Mr. Bates, was born and raised in Southeastern Oklahoma. He attended a state

university in the area where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees. The superintendent first taught in Colorado. His administrative experience began in New Mexico where he lived for ten years before returning to Oklahoma. He had been the superintendent at Big Rock sixteen years before the consolidation.

Research Questions

Question 1: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?

Both superintendents agreed that job security was an important strategy in enhancing the consolidation process for teachers. Mr. Bates listed it as "top priority." The superintendent disclosed that for teachers "provisions were made for everybody that wanted to stay on board." He further commented:

If a teacher was displaced with a consolidation, they got eighty percent of their salary for a year. But we didn't really displace any teachers. We made a place for everybody that wanted to stay. A few of them elected to take jobs elsewhere.

Mr. Martin discussed teachers displacement by stating:

I think the thing that we assured them was that there was nobody that was going to lose their job. And as it worked out there was only one person, and that was an elementary principal, that was not offered a comparable position.

Teacher meetings were also discussed as a strategy utilized to enhance the consolidation process. Mr. Martin

admitted that meetings were held with the teachers and then joint meetings with the boards, the community, and the staffs. He continued by stating:

We discussed it openly with anyone that wanted to. I never refused to answer a phone call or somebody coming in to talk about it. We talked about it to the teachers, and then, as I said, we had joint meetings.

Mr. Martin concluded that "there didn't seem to be, in reflecting on it, that there were that many critical issues with the teachers."

The State Department's feasibility study recommended that the school boards discuss in open meetings how teachers would be selected from the present staff and how the boards would assist those teachers who were not required for staffing the consolidated school. The study further suggested that any agreements made by the two boards should be in written form and made a part of each board of education's minutes. The feasibility study stated that a sharing of personnel could take place at very little cost, such as librarian, counselor, art teachers, and special education. The finance section of the feasibility study stated that by maintaining one high school, the per capita cost for course offerings should be less.

Researcher notes indicated that Mr. Bates stated that all teachers who wanted to stay were given a position with the new consolidated school.

School board minutes indicated that all certified personnel from the Big Rock and Reid School districts were

granted tenure at the new consolidated school. The vote was unanimous. Also, an additional English teacher was hired, as was another elementary teacher. The names of all teachers hired were listed in board minutes. Also in board minutes was a resolution to offer an eighty percent severance pay to certified personnel who had to take a reduction in pay through reassignment due to the consolidation.

Question 2: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?

Mr. Bates suggested that parents and the community should be a major group targeted in soliciting support for a school consolidation. He stated that "after the school board and the teachers, the parents and community must be well informed of the plan to consolidate." The superintendent shared that discussions which include "enhanced opportunities for students should be conducted and that it was very important not to turn a patron away." The superintendent asserted that "listening was a crucial strategy." Another strategy utilized by the Big Rock superintendent was soliciting funds from close friends in order to put a full page ad in the paper encouraging the support of the consolidation. Mr. Bates explained:

Well, I couldn't go up to the paper and put that ad in myself. So I went down and talked to a gal who worked at the bank and, being the chairman of the Better Schools Committee, she put it in the paper. I really think that helped with the vote. It had a bunch of points, good points, that would result because of consolidation. You know you had to play a little politics in this thing, too.

Mr. Bates further explained the politics of consolidation by submitting:

Well, you know, realistically there was probably a time that it looked like I was running for office. It was political. Just pure and simple it was political. You had to look at it as a political process. And you had to operate like you were running for office almost. You know you had to convince the people that it was a good plan.

Mr. Martin discussed the importance of parents and the community during the consolidation. He presented:

Reid was a real small, rural community. The school was one of the older schools in the state. The community was very supportive of the school and the school was very important to the community which made it a little touchy in working with the consolidation. The long-time residents had been there all of their lives and their children and grandchildren had gone there and they felt like they were losing something.

The Reid superintendent indicated that public meetings were utilized to enhance the consolidation. He revealed:

We were very careful to include the community. Very openly, we discussed anything that they wanted to discuss. We made a real effort not to hide or even give the perception of hiding anything that was going on. We had public meetings. We brought people in from the State Department and we discussed openly with anyone that wanted to. I think that was the thing that made it operate more smoothly.

Mr. Martin recalled one public meeting in particular.

He submitted:

I remember one that I knew that there were some people that were adamantly against it, and I could understand

that. I was an outsider in their community and here I was proposing them to give up part ownership in their school. I knew there were going to be some people that were going to cause some problems. We had the meeting in the gymnasium at Reid and I had invited some speakers to come in and talk to them. I thought, I have got to get control of this, I can't let them take control of it.

Mr. Martin pointed out his strategies at the meeting. He stated:

So, first of all I brought in a group of kids to sing some songs and I had them lead the pledge of allegiance. Then I invited a local minister to say a prayer. I thought, you know, how is somebody going to get up and start ranting and raving about what was going on. We also said that anybody who had a question had a right to ask it, but that we were going to all treat each other with dignity and try to answer the questions to the best of our ability. And it disarmed the volatile potential there.

Mr. Bates discussed the importance of the school to his community. He disclosed that the "main thing that they wanted was to keep the school in Big Rock." The superintendent also presented:

You always wanted to use the correct terminology. You always wanted to say Rock Valley. You never wanted to slip and say Big Rock or slip and say Reid School and that type of thing.

Mr. Bates discussed the community's acceptance of the consolidation. He admitted:

The kids accepted it and probably the kids going to school there now hardly remember what it was like before. But the old people still do and it is one of those things that will always be a little bit under the surface there for quite a while. It will take a long time for them to get over losing an individual school.

Mr. Martin concluded his discussion of parents and the community by reviewing:

It was to help the kids, not hurt the community or to hurt people. We all agreed that if it started going that direction that we would just drop the issue. It would have never gone that far. If I had felt like there was not any support, it would not have been worth it.

School board minutes from Reid and Big Rock reflected open meetings as strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation for parents and the community. Contained in the Big Rock board minutes are recommendations from Mr. Bates to call for public meetings to solicit input from the community. The minutes also indicated that State Department personnel were available to assist in explaining the ramifications of the consolidation to the public.

Big Rock board minutes indicated that the State Department's feasibility study was openly discussed at board meetings. Other board meeting items showed that the Big Rock and Reid school boards met together several times and at different locations in order to discuss the consolidation with parents and other patrons. State Department personnel were brought in on at least two different occasions as shown by researcher notes and school board minutes.

Other strategies utilized to enhance the process for parents and the community were reported. Allowing committee input as to the school name, mascot, and school colors was recorded in board minutes and researcher notes, as were the boards' intentions of visiting with officials

from another Oklahoma school which had recently consolidated.

Strategies were also recommended by the State Department's feasibility study. Contained within the study for the Big Rock and Reid Schools were the suggestions to discuss in open meetings what would happen to the trophies, awards, and other memorabilia of the schools, which campuses would remain open and for which grades, how would the school records be preserved, and how would the school name, mascot, and school colors be chosen.

Board minutes indicated that the new high school would be located at Big Rock and the new elementary school at Reid. Keeping both sites opened enhanced the consolidation for parents and the communities. Another strategy evident in board minutes and researcher notes was the survey of patrons conducted at a Reid basketball game. This strategy provided an avenue for the community to voice their opinions on the consolidation issue.

Question 3: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the students?

Mr. Bates suggested that the superintendents during the consolidation process "spent a lot of time selling it to the kids." He presented:

We had some times that we had some get togethers with the kids from the two high schools. Like if Big Rock

was playing a tournament, or something, in baseball and Reid wasn't playing, they would bring their kids over to watch our kids play and that kind of stuff. We tried to involve the kids as much as we could.

Mr. Martin stated that "the kids felt pretty good about it." He proposed:

I think they kind of thought about it and were a little excited about the possibility. Here they had been rivals all these years and now they were going to get to play ball together and all of that. We thought there would be some problems but I never thought any big problems. Most of the time the kids really worked out things pretty well.

Mr. Martin recalled course selection at Reid before the consolidation. He admitted, "we did not have some of the programs that I felt were important for children as far as giving them the courses they needed." Lack of course selection, Mr. Martin suggested, "is kind of what prompted it." He continued:

We felt like we were going to be able to offer more to the kids, more courses, more programs, that they didn't have as a single school. And both schools' numbers had been dropping, and that is not the case anymore. They are pretty well staying stable now. But at the time, both of them were dropping.

Mr. Martin reviewed that "the students were told that they would have more programs."

Mr. Bates indicated that enhanced athletics was an effective strategy. He added:

One of the things that really helped it, I think, was we had a successful athletic program. The very first year we consolidated the girls qualified for the state tournament and won a couple of games. Kids from both communities were playing and that united the people. The first year, also, the boys qualified for the state tournament in baseball. As a matter of fact, every year up until this year there has been a

team playing at the state tournament level. And you can say what you want to about athletics, but it has been a real unifying factor there.

Another strategy utilized by the superintendents was pointed out by Mr. Martin as "allowing the kids to name the school, to name their colors, and the mascot."

Mr. Bates presented:

One thing the kids probably had the biggest say in was the school colors, school mascot, and school name. We let the kids submit names for all these things. After we had all the names submitted, we let the kids vote on their choices. We wanted them to feel they had a part in it, or that they were the ones who picked them, so they would feel like it was their school, their mascot, and that kind of stuff. So they were very involved in it.

The Big Rock and Reid consolidation feasibility study recommended that the two school boards discuss in open meetings how the name of the school, the mascot, and the school colors would be chosen. Researcher notes indicated that the students nominated their choices for the three items and then were allowed to vote from the top five nominations as selected by a committee of parents. Board minutes indicated that the name of the new school would be Rock Valley.

Question 4: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?

Mr. Bates indicated that the support staff got less input than anyone on the consolidation process. But, he

explained the support people all retained their jobs. The Big Rock superintendent revealed that "probably of all the people, probably support staff got, honestly, got less input than anyone." Mr. Bates discussed further the support staff. He submitted:

We were able to preserve all of their jobs because we still had to have custodians. We kept both plants open. And the schools were separated, so we had to have two cafeterias. So all of their jobs were preserved. It really wasn't an issue of them losing their jobs.

Mr. Bates explained the reasons support staff may have opposed the consolidation. He presented that, "probably the only thing they would look at is if they were a Big Rock or Reid graduate, they might have looked on it as a community pride type thing."

Mr. Martin agreed that job security was important to the support staff. He stated:

Guarantee their jobs. Tell them that no one would be losing a job. Even if they had another job with the school, they wouldn't lose any seniority or income. They were guaranteed they were going to have something.

The Reid superintendent explained that maintaining the support staff's jobs was "the critical thing that we kept in mind when trying to do the consolidation."

During the interview Mr. Martin explained that personnel displacement money was available for support staff, as well as, teachers. He denoted:

At that time, and you may or may not be aware of this, there was a provision in that when we got the money from the State Department for the consolidation, that

you either guarantee people a job or use some of those funds to pay them a year's salary if you could not provide them a job.

Mr. Bates closed the discussion on support staff by stating:

We just made the point that things were going to be tough and we better voluntarily consolidate and get what we can out of it while we can or we may be put into the position where we go bankrupt.

School board minutes indicated that severance pay was guaranteed to all employees who took a reduction in base pay through reassignment due to the consolidation issue. The pay would be eighty percent of the employees original salary. As stated in the interviews with the superintendents, the support staff all retained their original positions and consequently, none were in need of the displacement money. Researcher notes also indicated that all of the support staff were retained. Mr. Bates stated that both sites, including the cafeterias, were kept opened which assured the support people their positions. Mr. Martin stated that job security for the support staff was critical when developing the consolidation plan.

Board minutes recorded that all support staff were initially retained in their present positions. However, at a later meeting of the new Rock Valley board, one bus driver was not reemployed. The board minutes stated that a motion was made not to reemploy the bus driver according to the Rock Valley School District Board of Education Policy Statement, Support Personnel: Suspension, Demotion

or Termination, cause #40, if it is in the best interest of the school district, any support person may be suspended, demoted, or terminated. The motion was seconded and all of the Rock Valley board members voted yes, according to board minutes.

Question 5: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?

Mr. Bates stated that all of the administrators were offered positions in the new school. One of the superintendents was offered the consolidated school superintendent's job, the other an assistant superintendent's position. One high school principal retained the position of high school principal, while the other was offered a counselor's position. Only one principal was moved out of administration and that was an elementary principal who was offered a position teaching fifth grade. Mr. Bates commented:

But he turned it down and took a job at Denville. After taking a job at Denville he wanted eighty percent. But he wasn't displaced, so the board refused to give him eighty percent because they had offered him a job.

Mr. Bates continued:

So he sued and we got an attorney and everything. I don't know exactly what happened but he got a settlement from the State Department of Education. I don't know how they did it or what happened, but they gave him some money some way.

Mr. Martin, while discussing administrators, contended that the elementary principal "was the only person in the entire school that lost a job over it." Mr. Martin disclosed that during the consolidation process, the administrators "were an integral part of the process as it was going on." He agreed with Mr. Bates in that the administrators "knew that they were part of it and supported it."

The State Department's feasibility study recommended that the school boards discuss in open meetings who the chief administrator of the new school would be. Minutes from board meetings indicated that Mr. Bates was named as the superintendent and Mr. Martin assistant superintendent. The minutes also reflected the reassignment of the Reid elementary principal to elementary science teacher. One board member voted no to the reassignment. Researcher notes indicated that the administrator eventually resigned and moved from the area.

Researcher notes also revealed that most administrators remained in the same positions but some were relocated. The movement of administrative office sites allowed the principals to stay close to students they would be working with and, according to Mr. Bates, ones they already knew. Researcher notes also showed that, although Mr. Martin was employed as the new assistant superintendent, he resigned before the consolidated school opened and left for another superintendent's position.

Question 6: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?

Mr. Bates, the Big Rock superintendent, explained that "as far as the board members, probably the first thing he did was to sell the board members, to get them to buy into it." Mr. Martin disclosed:

Mr. Bates and I began to talk and then we got our board members together. We had several retreats. We would get off in the country with the board members; some of them were hard things to talk about. There were real issues and a lot of ownership to the people in the community.

Both superintendents agreed that the schools' finances and state mandates fueled the consolidation process. Mr. Bates admitted:

The leadership on my board saw the handwriting on the wall. With the governor we had, it was pretty obvious that small schools were going to be squeezed. We were, Big Rock was, always kind of in a precarious situation as far as finances. I mean, every year I sweated it and struggled. It just looked like the best thing to preserve the school.

Mr. Martin identified the financial challenges at Reid. He indicated:

Being the superintendent I was aware of the budget problems at Reid. As a matter of fact, I might mention that when I took over at Reid we were \$30,000 in the red. We talked to our legislature and at that time we had the pull and the school was just flat given \$30,000. So we started off at least on zero and we were paying nonpayable warrants for the first year that I was there. We were struggling just to keep the doors open.

Mr. Martin discussed the reasons for consolidation. He suggested:

That was another thing that prompted my thinking that we were going to have to do something. The state kept making more mandates and expenses were going up and rather than losing the school or going with our hat in our hand to another school and saying we want to annex and they end up taking control of everything, we felt that why don't we go in with each of us having the same amount of power and whatever, so that it would be a consolidation rather than an annexation.

Other strategies to enhance the consolidation process for board members were discussed by the superintendents.

Mr. Bates talked of the decision to create a seven-member board. He indicated:

This was really something they hashed and hashed a long time. They finally decided to go with a seven-member board, probably because it wouldn't displace as many board members. So that was their decision, a seven-member board. We ended up with four from Big Rock and three from Reid.

Mr. Martin spoke of joint board meetings at both sites. He indicated that there "were a lot of really late night meetings," and that they proved "interesting." He stated:

The boards would meet in separate rooms and then we would come together and we would meet as a group. Then we would separate again and talk about all these issues. Some of them were long nights and people said exactly how they felt. But it was a good group of board members that were open and said what they wanted to. But they never got angry.

Mr. Martin explained that the joint board meetings "started out that way and it worked out well."

In closing, Mr. Martin asserted an additional strategy for board members. He indicated that Mr. Bates and he

visited newly consolidated schools and talked to the superintendents there. Mr. Martin reviewed that "we tried to contact as many people as we could and get as much information as to what would be the best way to go."

The State Department's feasibility study recommended that the two school boards discuss how the new board would be formed and who would be its members. School board minutes revealed the origination of the new seven-member board. According to board minutes recorded during one of the joint board meetings, a ballot was handed to the members of both boards with all ten board members' names listed on it. The board members then went to separate voting places and recorded their choices for the consolidated school's seven-member board. Board minutes stated that the board members were to vote for seven people with not more than four coming from any one district.

Board minutes further indicated that the minutes clerks would total the ballots. After the ballots were checked twice for accuracy, each board president was handed the results. After a review of the totals, a motion was made and then seconded to approve three board members from Big Rock and four from Reid for the new consolidated school. The motion carried unanimously. Researcher notes indicated that the decision to organize a seven-member board was formed so not as many original board members would be displaced.

Question 7: What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

Mr. Bates and Mr. Martin discussed nonproductive strategies during the consolidation process. Mr. Bates stated that "one thing I would really try to keep them from doing is going with a seven-member board." He proposed that "a seven-member board is kind of, is an unwielding number." He continued by presenting, "you know it is hard enough to get five on the same track and it is much more difficult to get seven."

Mr. Martin disclosed that he couldn't recall any nonproductive strategies. He contended that "if it didn't look like it was going to work, we abandoned them." Mr. Martin suggested that there were "little bops along the way," but nothing "that was just real bad."

In reflecting, Mr. Martin proposed:

I have asked myself many times what would have happened if we hadn't consolidated. I think the school would have still been there. I think that the threat I felt at the time, although I think that there were a lot of people pushing for consolidation, I don't think it ever happened the way that the legislature had anticipated it happening. I think that they thought that they were going to have mass consolidations statewide and I think that was the intent in a lot of ways.

Mr. Martin continued:

I thought maybe the school would have been better off if they hadn't consolidated. But when I reflect on that, I think of all the improvements. I think it was successful and I think I would have done it again the same way we did it. And, as I say, it ran real well and I think it was the thing to do at the time, given all the information.

CONSOLIDATION #4Gerry School District

Gerry Public School was a small rural school in Southwest Oklahoma. It was approximately 40 miles from an urban center. The school had an enrollment of 292 students with 16 high school teachers and 13 elementary. Minority students included six black, 52 American Indian, and 19 Hispanics. The dropout rate in 1989-90 was one percent.

Elective courses were limited at Gerry. Three business education classes were offered along with computer literacy and computer programming. A half section of vocal music was offered as was one section of both Spanish and German. Technology education was provided, also home economics, agriculture, and drivers' education. The district was served by a vocational school.

More than 60 percent of Gerry's students qualified for either free or reduced meals. Average daily participation in the federal meal program was 218 students. The school received Indian Education monies equaling \$6,911.67.

Chapter 1 funds provided \$47,925 to the budget. Other federal funds included Chapter 2, \$3071; Drug Education, \$2,904; and Migrant Education, \$35,228. The buildings on the eight-acre campus were assessed in good condition with 84 square feet per student. The elementary and high school site was constructed in the mid 70s.

The Gerry School District comprised 89 3/8 square miles. The average daily haul was 144 students and the

district owned seven busses in good to excellent condition. The total net state aid in 1990-91 was \$424,421. The valuation of the district was \$7,384,943. The tax levies were:

General Fund	35.00 mills
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Building Fund	5.00 mills
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Sinking Fund	12.53 mills
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Local and county revenues accounted for 8.23 percent of the total district collections, while the state revenue represented 36.76 percent, and federal monies 11.29 percent. The total general fund revenue, according to the Oklahoma State Department of Education Income Report 1990-91, was \$938,379.48.

The 1989-90 expenditure report showed the Gerry Schools spending 6.56 percent of their total budget on administrative services. The operation and maintenance of the plant required 11.56 percent of the budget and instructional services 59.20 percent.

The Gerry superintendent, Mr. Burman, was originally from Gerry. He attended a state university also in the southwest part of the state. He taught school and was a principal and superintendent all in Southwestern Oklahoma. He attended the National Science Foundation Institute at Kansas State University early in his teaching career. In 1965 he was selected a Shell Fellow at Stanford University. In 1969 he became the high school principal at Gerry and

stayed with that school district until his retirement on June 30, 1996.

Nona School District

Nona School was eight miles from Gerry. It was a very small school with only 128 students enrolled. The largest class was grade eleven with 15 students and the smallest was ninth grade with five. There were seven high school teachers and nine elementary teachers. The minority student population consisted of four American Indians and ten Hispanics. There were no dropouts reported in 1989-90.

With such a small enrollment, course selection was limited. Business education was offered in six separate areas but there were no fine arts, foreign language, or technology courses available to the students. Outside the basic curriculum and business, home economics was the only other elective offered. The district was not served by a vocational school.

Nona Schools served meals to 113 of its students daily. Fifty-nine students qualified for free meals and 16 were served at the reduced price. Combined, these students represented 58.59 percent of the total enrollment. Other federal programs in which the school participated and their amounts of funding were:

Chapter 1	\$20,098.00
Chapter 2	1,495.00
Drug Education	1,288.00
Title II	363.00

Facilities at Nona were assessed by State Department officials as average to good. The 23,413 square foot elementary and the 7,500 square foot high schools were located on the same 7.8 acre site. The elementary facility was constructed more than 60 years ago with the only deficiency being an inadequate fire alarm system. There were ten classrooms in the elementary school which provided almost 57.5 square feet per pupil. The high school was a one-story structure built in the late 70s. It had four general classrooms and was in good condition. The high school was accessible to the disabled. Based on enrollment, there were almost 47 square feet per student.

The Nona School District totaled 63 square miles. The four busses transported 116 students per day or 90.6 percent of the students. The longest bus route was 14 miles. The total net state aid in 1990-91 was \$225,313. Valuation of the district was \$3,536,540. Tax levies were:

General Fund	35.00 mills
Building Fund	5.00 mills
Sinking Fund	7.72 mills

General funds revenue from 1989-90 equaled \$466,424.71. Local and county revenue represented 1.31 percent of the total, state revenues were 44.83 percent, and federal monies collected were 6.51 percent. Ad valorem taxes generated the remainder of the total revenue collected. Expenses for the district included \$52,514.23 (10.47

percent) in administrative costs, \$28,676.45 (5.71 percent) for operation and maintenance of plant, and \$319,595.21 (63.69 percent) for instructional services.

The Nona superintendent, Mr. Taylor, emphasized how supportive the people of Nona were. He explained:

Nona was a very unique experience. I retired from Hondale and Nona contacted me and told me that they wanted to keep the school open as long as they could. They asked me if I would come down there. They were just wonderful people. They were very supportive of the school and the kids were great. They not only produced real fine kids, they were very athletic and we enjoyed a very good sports program. All the teachers were very supportive. There were times when we didn't have enough money to hire custodians, and we just cleaned the buildings ourselves. After school the teachers and I and the principals would all just clean the schools up and get ready for the next day.

The superintendent explained that consolidation was inevitable and the community knew it. "We just ran out of money," he said.

Research Questions

Question 1: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?

Mr. Taylor disclosed that soon after he and the school treasurer had told the board that the school could probably not stay open another year, the teachers were called together for the same reason. Mr. Taylor indicated that he told the teachers what to expect with a call to

consolidate. The superintendent stated:

The faculty and I discussed what all the options would be and we discussed the surrounding school districts. We had a lot of input with each other trying to, kind of, decide where we thought it would be best to consolidate our school.

Mr. Burman explained that the two schools were very compatible, "just eight miles apart, they seemed like next door neighbors. Many things were done together even before the talk of consolidation." He indicated that "once the consolidation issue was raised, it just seemed that things fell into place."

Mr. Burman stated that all of the teachers at Gerry "kept their jobs." But he disclosed that Mr. Taylor and the Nona School Board had to make some decisions as to which Nona teachers would be displaced. Mr. Burman elaborated:

The only school that was being closed in Nona at the time was the high school. So that was the only teachers that, you know, were up on the firing line so to speak. We let the Nona superintendent, Mr. Taylor, and his Board of Education choose what teachers to let go. Mr. Taylor and I kind of got together and said, hey, you know this is how many teachers we need. The Nona Board said we are actually the one that is closing down, so we are the one that should cut teachers back.

Mr. Taylor discussed the displacement of three Nona teachers. He recalled:

There were some sad spots. We had to let a couple of teachers go because there wasn't any room for them. For instance, we didn't need two ag teachers; so we had to let one of the ag teachers go. Same thing with the home ec. teachers; we didn't need two home ec. teachers. And we had too many coaches and we had to let a coach go. I think that was all. We were able to absorb all the teachers except three.

Mr. Taylor continued:

That was the sad part. We notified them quite a while before school was out and I know for sure one of them found a job. I don't know about the other two whether they did or not. But at that time the state had a program in place that would pay them a little more than two-thirds of their salary.

Mr. Burman suggested teachers who retained their jobs were familiar with the Gerry Schools. He stated:

You know most of them had lived around there all of their lives. They were pretty close to there. Of course they had been over there for ball games and all of the things like that. They were pretty familiar with it already.

The State Department's feasibility study discussed teacher displacement. The study's general report recommended that the school boards discuss in open meetings how teachers would be selected for the new school. The feasibility study also suggested that the boards discuss how those teachers not hired by the consolidated school would be assisted. The study further stated that personnel recommendations should be in written form and made a part of each board of education's minutes. The consolidation plan agreed on by the two boards stated as item number two that all of the faculty would be hired by the consolidated school or they would be paid eighty percent of their salary. The consolidation plan became part of board minutes.

Personnel recommendations were presented to the boards by the superintendents. Board minutes indicated that all certified teachers were retained from Gerry and all but

three teachers from Nona were provided positions with the consolidated school. The three teachers not hired were given official notice before the consolidation according to board minutes.

Question 2: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?

Mr. Taylor discussed the issues at Nona after deciding to consolidate but before deciding to consolidate with Gerry. He presented:

We called a community meeting and invited all the school districts in the area to send representatives or anyone who wanted to attend. We published it in the local newspaper that we were going to have this meeting. We printed up kind of a ballot and we passed it out to all the people who attended the meeting. It was just a very informal kind of a ballot, nothing legal, just more or less an opinion poll.

Mr. Taylor described the procedure for the meeting. He indicated:

We let anyone at the meeting talk or say whatever they wanted to, including the local-area superintendents. The local-area superintendents were very nice and they all invited us to come be a part of their school. We passed out our ballots, and on the ballots the people who attended more or less voted as to what their preference would be as far as the surrounding districts and where they would like their children to attend. The vote indicated that they would prefer to go to Gerry.

Mr. Taylor pointed out that he "tried to get as many people as we could to come to the meetings." He further disclosed

that he "felt like that we got anyone who was really interested there." Mr. Taylor revealed that the meeting announcements were "put in all the local newspapers, posted in the local stores, and sent home with kids."

Mr. Burman, too, identified public meetings as a strategy to enhance the consolidation process. He presented that joint public meetings were held in the auditorium with State Department personnel in attendance.

Mr. Burman contended:

We have made an effort to keep everything as fair as possible for both sides. The Gerry community has made an effort to make Nona feel welcome. We still do that even though we are not Gerry, we are not Nona. I still every once in a while hear someone say Gerry this, Gerry that, and I say, wait a minute, we are Gerry-Nona, now.

Mr. Burman further disclosed that enhanced athletic programs positively influenced the consolidation issue for parents and the community. He stated:

And I'll tell you something else that did not hurt us a bit, we went out the very first year that we consolidated and won two state championships in baseball, one in the fall and one in the spring. That probably pulled the communities closer together than they ever thought they could be. Neither one of us could have won any state tournaments without the other.

In closing, Mr. Taylor suggested the community meeting was the most productive strategy utilized. He disclosed:

I think that the most productive thing was our community meeting. And I think the fact that we invited every school in to talk about it, we really communicated well with the community all during the process to let them know what was going on. Not only when we got into the consolidation year, but we were communicating with them for two or three years and

letting them know that eventually we are going to have to do something with the school because we just can't keep it open. And everybody knew it and they were prepared and very supportive. They really didn't like to lose their school, but they knew it was just something that couldn't be helped.

Mr. Taylor suggested that keeping both sites open for at least three years "really helped, too." And although the consolidation election "passed overwhelmingly, down in their hearts, everybody opposed it."

School board minutes recorded the proceedings of the open meetings. From Nona it was stated that several patrons asked questions and expressed their thoughts. The consolidation plan became part of school board minutes. Initially, item number one of the plan read to keep the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades of both districts at the Nona School site. However, before the consolidation election, the item was amended to state, and retain the Nona site for three years or longer if feasible. This amendment further enhanced the consolidation for parents and patrons of Nona.

The State Department's feasibility study recommended discussions between the two boards that should consist of what would happen to the trophies, awards, and other memorabilia of the schools, which campuses would remain open and for which grades, and how would the school name, mascot, and school colors be chosen. School board minutes indicated that the consolidation plan stated the Nona alumni banquet would continue to be held at the Nona School

site. Also, the trophies and school bell would remain on site. Another strategy to enhance the consolidation for parents and the community was an open transfer policy. This policy was included in the consolidation plan and became part of school board minutes.

The consolidation issue was reported in a local newspaper, as well as, by one of the state's major papers. The articles discussed the consolidation plan between the two schools including additional state funding that may be available and enhanced educational and athletic opportunities. Researcher notes showed that Mr. Burman and Mr. Taylor stated that open, honest information provided to parents and patrons enhanced the consolidation process.

Question 3: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the students?

One strategy that Mr. Taylor discussed as effective was to allow the students to visit the other campus. Mr. Taylor disclosed:

One thing that really helped was we loaded all of our students up by grades, we didn't take them all at once, and we bussed them over to Gerry before our school was out for the final year.

Mr. Taylor stated that the students "spent some time over at Gerry in the school." He further disclosed that they were "introduced to the teachers and the kids." Mr. Taylor stated:

We took everyone around and let them see the facilities and all of this kind of thing before school was out so that they wouldn't be so nervous at the beginning of the next year.

Mr. Taylor discussed the Nona students' reaction to the new school site. He stated:

They loved it. The kids all came back and the facilities at Nona weren't great. It had been a while since we had been able to do a lot and they were very impressed and really, they were eager to get over there. It was just remarkable at how well the two schools combined and the students, it was just like they had been going there for a long time.

Mr. Burman agreed that allowing the Nona students to visit Gerry was productive. Mr. Burman added:

And I felt, since this was my home town, I felt real good about it because when we sat all the Nona students down in our cafeteria, which seated 180 people, I could almost go down the line and call fifty percent of them by their first name. I felt good about that because I knew them, I knew their parents, and I knew their grandparents.

Mr. Taylor pointed out also that "the first year that we were there, we won back to back baseball state tournaments which didn't hurt a thing." He explained that "everything just really meshed. It was a very, very good union. Everybody was just tickled to death with it." Mr. Taylor identified one additional strategy in closing. He stated:

We talked to the students a lot and we helped them understand that this is why we have to do this. And those kids were really sharp, they just went and fit right in. It was just unreal. The kids just adjusted overnight.

Newspaper articles covering the Gerry-Nona consolidation reported that additional opportunities could

be provided students through the merger of the two schools. Articles also stated which communities would contain the different grade levels. Both sites were reported to remain open. According to researcher notes, Mr. Burman stated that talking personally to the students and allowing other staff members to talk to them enhanced the process. Mr. Taylor cautioned to not let the students "get lost in the picture."

Several items pertaining to the students were included in the consolidation plan which became part of board minutes. Item four addressed an open transfer policy. Item seven stated that students from both schools would be given consideration for valedictorian and salutatorian honors for three years; a student who would have been valedictorian or salutatorian at their previous school would receive the honor as if they were still in that school. This policy would apply to junior high and senior high students. Item number eight of the consolidation plan stated that some method would be formulated for the next year's seniors from the Nona District whereby they could be eligible for the senior trip without creating an undo financial burden on the individual student.

The feasibility study also addressed student concerns. Included in the study's recommendations were open discussions between the two school boards on which campuses would remain open and for which grades and how the trophies

and awards would be preserved. The feasibility study also urged the school boards to focus on the increased educational opportunities that could be provided students by consolidating the two schools.

Question 4: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?

Mr. Burman contended that the support staffs were positive about the consolidation. He stated that the support staff at Gerry was "okay" with the issue and that the consolidated school retained all of the Nona support staff. "They were down to the bare bone anyway," suggested Mr. Burman, "they had cut back their support staff and some of their teachers were doing janitor work."

Mr. Taylor explained how the three year facilities plan affected support staffs. He submitted:

Well, we kept the school at Nona. The fourth, fifth, and sixth were housed over there for, I think, three years. They have closed it now. So the cooks stayed there and the custodian, too. I don't know what happened to them after the three year period when they closed the school. But that was kind of part of the deal, that they would leave that grade school over there for three years.

The State Department's feasibility study suggested that the two school boards discuss in open meetings which support personnel would be selected to fill positions within the new consolidated school. The study also

recommended that the boards decide how they would assist those employees not hired and that it all be put in writing and made a part of the board of education's minutes. Within the facilities section of the feasibility study, it was stated that neither district had sufficient space to handle the combined enrollments. Furthermore, the facilities evaluation recommended that both sites be utilized until a larger building could be built. Action was taken by the two school boards to maintain both sites for at least three years. This strategy helped to ensure the support staff their positions which enhanced the consolidation issue for them.

The board approved consolidation plan stated that all personnel would be retained or would be paid eighty percent of their salary. Researcher notes, too, indicated that the support staffs were guaranteed job security and, according to Mr. Burman, they were "kept informed" of the consolidation process.

Question 5: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?

When discussing strategies that enhanced the consolidation process for administrators, Mr. Burman presented:

Their high school principal was one of them that took the eighty percent and got another job. We kept our high school principal here at Gerry. The two boards of education decided to keep Mr. Taylor and myself. I was the superintendent and he was the assistant superintendent.

Mr. Taylor supported Mr. Burman's comments. Mr. Taylor discussed as strategies for administrators that he and the Nona principal "were both offered positions." Mr. Taylor continued:

The principal, a fine man, took another job at Earlsboro. I stayed there as assistant superintendent for one year and then at the end of that year, I retired.

Mr. Taylor concluded by giving Mr. Burman much of the credit for the smoothness of the consolidation. Mr. Taylor submitted:

I don't know how but we were just lucky. Everything really worked well. Old Mr. Burman helped a lot. Old Burman was born and raised in Gerry and he knew everyone. He is still the superintendent there. He is a fine man. He is to be given a lot of credit. But he is just really a gentleman and he was very accommodating to everyone and everyone trusted him. They knew him and they knew that he was going to treat them right.

School board minutes revealed that Mr. Burman was hired as the superintendent of the new school and Mr. Taylor the assistant superintendent. The feasibility study prepared by the State Department had suggested the school boards decide who would be the chief administrator and to put it in writing. Newspaper articles, too, reported the assignments of the two administrators. Neither superintendent suffered a loss in pay according to school board minutes.

Other administrators were guaranteed comparable positions with the new school or eighty percent of their salary according to the board approved consolidation plan which was placed in school board minutes. Researcher notes further indicated that Mr. Taylor stated the administrators "participated actively in the decision-making" which also enhanced the process for the school leaders.

Question 6: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?

Mr. Taylor discussed the strategies utilized with board members. He stated that "our tax base was not very good being a farm community and not any industry, and we just ran out of money." Mr. Taylor described how he came to Nona as superintendent. He revealed:

They came out with an early retirement plan. But before I actually went through with it, the superintendent at Nona also took an early retirement plan and I knew some people down there. They contacted me and asked me if instead of retiring if I would come down there and help them keep the school open as long as possible. They knew that eventually they were going to have to do something.

Mr. Taylor disclosed that he helped keep the school open for "another three and a half years." Mr. Taylor then indicated:

At that time I told them that I felt like it would not be possible to keep the school open any longer. And, of course, it can be a felony if you operate a school and don't have the money to pay you indebtedness. They were a very good board. They understood and

said, just do whatever we have to do. So we proceeded into the consolidation process.

Mr. Burman explained the strategies once the consolidation was called. He reviewed that the "two boards had several joint meetings." Mr. Burman presented that "everything seemed to fall right in place."

The two superintendents also discussed the strategies utilized to form the new board. Mr. Burman submitted:

They decided among themselves, the two boards did, that Gerry would have three board members on the new board and Nona would have two. They did not choose to keep that in place forever. They chose to go ahead and every board position that would come up would be voted on at-large.

Mr. Taylor presented that "the two boards got together" to decide on the new members. He stated:

They had to make some kind of a decision about who was going to be on the board and who wasn't. We finally arrived at the decision that Gerry would keep three board members and we would keep two. They kind of did a lottery thing to see who was going to stay and who wasn't. You know, just put the names in the hat and draw them out or something like that.

Mr. Taylor proposed that the "two boards were very compatible." He contended:

They got along real well and there wasn't any problem when the two from Gerry had to leave and the three from Nona had to leave. They just, as I said, had kind of a lottery deal and whoever won stayed.

The feasibility study prepared by the State Department of Education recommended that the boards discuss in open meetings how the new board of education would be formed and who its members would be. The board approved consolidation plan stated that Nona would have two members on the new

board and Gerry three members. Newspaper articles, also, reported how many board members each district would have. Researcher notes indicated that Mr. Taylor stated the decision of who would remain on the new board was done in a cooperative, friendly manner.

Other board minutes showed the two school boards meeting in joint sessions. Open meetings that allowed for community input were also indicated by board meeting agendas and minutes. A special board meeting was held on one occasion so the two boards of education could tour the school facilities. After the tour, according to board minutes, there was considerable discussion on consolidation of the two schools.

Question 7: What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

Mr. Burman discussed the consolidation process in retrospect. He stated:

We had such a successful marriage that I don't know if I would have changed anything or not. And like I said, we did not go out pursuing Nona. We didn't give them the big song and dance and everything. We didn't pursue them as heavily as some of the other neighboring schools.

Mr. Taylor indicated that the community "really didn't like to lose their school, but they knew it was just something that couldn't be helped." He further stated:

There was no organized opposition at all. Everybody was just real sad and saying, I really hate to see this happen, and I really don't want it to happen, and I'm against it, but I know it has got to be this way, so we are going to go ahead and vote for it.

Researcher notes, board meeting agendas and minutes, the consolidation plan, the State Department feasibility study, and newspaper articles were all reviewed for strategies that proved nonproductive during the consolidation process. None were found by this researcher.

CONSOLIDATION #5

Barley Heights School District

Barley Heights was located in the southwest quadrant of the state and was eight miles from Mabel. Barley Heights had an enrollment of 337 students in grades kindergarten through twelve. The largest class was kindergarten with 38 students and the smallest was tenth grade which had an enrollment of 15. There were ten high school teachers, six middle school, and 15 elementary teachers. The minority student population consisted of 13 black, 113 American Indian, and six Hispanic students. The dropout rate reported in 1989-90 was one student.

Barley Heights offered the basic curriculum with elective courses in business education, computer programming, art, vocal music, speech, vocational home economics, and vocational agriculture. The district was supported by a vocational school. Almost 58 percent of the student body qualified for free or reduced lunches. The cafeteria served 262 students daily. Chapter 1 programs produced \$59,363 to the district in 1990-91. Indian Education allocations in 1989-90 were \$11,537.

Facilities' evaluations conducted by the State Department of Education in 1991 reported all spaces in good condition with average maintenance. Except for a gymnasium, a vocational agriculture shop, and a 7,200 square foot junior high building, all grades were located in a single 70,272 square foot facility on a two-acre site. The elementary wing consisted of 15 classrooms providing 18,352 square feet. Based on enrollment, this provided about 77 square feet per elementary child. The 7,200 square foot junior high had five classrooms and offered 91 net square feet per pupil. At 9,144 square feet, the high school provided 150 square feet per student with eight classrooms.

The Barley Heights School District encompassed 91 square miles. The district operated seven busses and transported 248 students (73.5 percent) daily. State aid for the district in 1990-91 saw a net of \$718,330. The county property valuation was \$4,839,499. Tax levies were:

General Fund	35.00 mills
Building Fund	5.00 mills
Sinking Fund	9.72 mills

Local and county revenues accounted for 6.09 percent of the total revenue while the state revenues were 42.08 percent and federal 22.37 percent. Ad valorem taxes were 14.90 percent of the total collections for Barley Heights. In the 1989-90 income report, the total general fund revenue

was \$1,299,362.88. The 1988-89 State Department expenditure report for Barley Heights showed 6.62 percent of the total expenses spent on administrative services. Operation and maintenance of plant services required 13.2 percent of the total expenditures, and instructional services represented 63.29 percent of the total.

The Barley Heights superintendent, Dr. Williams, shared that he had 32 years experience in education. He began in 1965 teaching in Oklahoma City. He had taught in both elementary and secondary settings. His career in administration began as a high school principal where he gained five years experience and then was an assistant superintendent for two. In 1979 he became the superintendent of a rapidly growing suburban school where he stayed until 1983. At the time, the superintendent accepted what he referred to during the interview as the biggest challenge of his life. He left Oklahoma education, finished his doctoral work, and left the country for six years working for the church in the area of education and training in Africa. His work included developing, opening, and renovating schools in Uganda.

The superintendent came back to the states in the spring of 1990 and applied for the superintendency at Barley Heights. He was offered the position and began later that summer.

Mabel School District

Mabel was a small, rural school in Southwest Oklahoma.

It was located approximately 60 miles from an urban metropolitan area. The 1990-91 school year saw an enrollment at Mabel of 136 students in grades pre-kindergarten through twelve. The pre-kindergarten class had three students which represented the smallest grade participation while the kindergarten had 14 pupils, the largest class. Other grade enrollments included 16 seniors, five juniors, 12 sophomores, 13 freshman, and 73 students in grades one through eight. There were 13 teachers at Mabel with six in the elementary school and seven at the high school. The only minority population reported included 60 American Indians. The school's dropout rate revealed two students in 1989-90. Elective courses were offered in computer programming, art, German, Spanish, drama, drivers' education, and vocational agriculture. The district was served by the same vocational facility as Barley Heights.

The State Department Child Nutrition report for Mabel disclosed more than 60 percent of its students qualified for free or reduced meals. The average daily participation exhibited 127 student meals served or 93.3 percent of the student body. Other federally reimbursed programs included Chapter 1, \$25,662; Chapter 2, \$1,335; Drug Education, \$1,262; Title II, \$364; and Indian Education, \$6,282.

The facilities at Mabel included an agriculture barn, special education building, and a 20,407 square foot

structure for kindergarten through grade twelve. All were housed on a three-acre site. The original facility was constructed in 1929 and included 2,600 square feet. A 1958 addition included four classrooms. In 1964 a gymnasium, cafeteria, kindergarten, music, science, and math addition was built which added 7,048 square feet. According to a State Department evaluation team, the facilities were in good condition considering age, maintenance, and other factors. Based on 1990-91 enrollments, there were approximately 32 net square feet per elementary child which was less than the recommended guidelines. There were almost 60 net square feet of classroom space for each high school student.

The Mabel School District was 63 square miles in size. The district operated four busses and hauled 102 students (75 percent) daily. Net state aid in 1990-91 included \$280,326. Valuation totaled \$1,612,855 according to the school's income report of 1989-90. The Mabel School District tax levies were:

General Fund	35.00 mills
Building Fund	5.00 mills
Sinking Fund	0.00 mills

The total general fund revenue was \$467,249.40. Ad valorem taxes represented 13.06 percent of the total monies collected. Local and county revenue included 2.57 percent, state 43.28 percent, and federal collections 27.42 percent.

The district expenditures, shown by 1988-89 State Department records, included 8.61 percent of total expenses going to administrative services, 5.52 percent expended on maintenance and operation of the plant, and instructional services costing 69.25 percent of total expenditures.

The Mabel superintendent, Mr. Walters, shared his career background during the semistructured interview. He stated that his twenty years in education had been spent teaching, coaching, and working as an elementary principal before moving into the superintendency. Mr. Walters acknowledged that he held both an elementary and secondary administrator's certificate along with a standard superintendent's certificate. He stated that he would like to go back to complete requirements for a doctorate, but his present location didn't allow that to happen.

Research Questions

Question 1: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?

Mr. Walters revealed that job security was the major concern of teachers in his district. He stated:

One of the biggest concerns for teachers was if they were going to have a job. And that was one of the things the Barley Heights superintendent and I had to sit down and agree, that when this happens, we are going to have to take care of some people.

Mr. Walters continued:

We went through the process. We visited with each other then visited with our teachers and reassured the teachers that they were going to be taken care of.

The superintendent presented that teachers were guaranteed a job for at least three years with the exception of "a couple of teachers that had some problems, but they would have had some problems regardless of whether the consolidation went on or not."

Dr. Williams agreed with Mr. Walters. He indicated that "there were some problems in absorbing all the personnel." The superintendent admitted:

I can't remember how many personnel voluntarily told us that they wanted to leave but it seems like there were only a couple. They drew the eighty percent and all the rest of the money went into whatever things were legal to spend it on.

"In general," Dr. Williams reported, "the teachers supported the consolidation." He then stated:

One of the things, especially at Barley Heights, was you have a lot of home grown teachers. So I'm sure that we had a couple of teachers and maybe even a principal that voted against the consolidation. But they were very definitely in the minority. The vast majority supported it and thought it was the only thing that would save our school.

Mr. Walters suggested that "it was a process of just sitting down with the teachers and saying this is the reason why we are doing this." He pointed out that the teachers were told "your job with the consolidated district is secure for at least three years, and from there on it is up to the new board." Mr. Walters concluded:

Most of the teachers supported it. I had a couple of teachers on my staff that had some problems with it

and again, it was out of the fear of not having a job. That is reality.

School board minutes stated that all certified teachers were offered a position with the new consolidated district. This action was part of the consolidation plan which was approved by both boards of education. Initially, according to the board minutes, one position in the secondary program was eliminated through attrition and the assignment was filled by an existing teacher. Also, board minutes indicated that several people might need to be reassigned to serve the expanded enrollment and additional programs to be offered, but that anyone displaced by the consolidation would be offered eighty percent of their salary for one year. The State Department's feasibility study stated that the school boards should discuss in open meeting how the staff of the new school would be selected and how those not hired would be compensated. Newspaper articles that appeared in the Barley Heights News and a state-wide publication reported that it was likely that some teachers would take on new assignments but that a wholesale reduction-in-force was not anticipated, especially if programs were added.

Other strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation for teachers was the organization of a community committee to recommend a school name, mascot, and school colors to the board of education. Two teachers joined one patron,

two students, and one support person on the committee. Numerous joint board meetings were held of which teachers were invited to attend, as well as, at least one community meeting which allowed teachers and patrons opportunity to address the two boards of education. Local newspaper articles both advertized these meetings and reported their proceedings. Researcher notes indicated that Dr. Williams stated the reduction-in-force policy would not be in affect until after the first year of consolidation. Mr. Walters stated, also according to researcher notes, that the teachers were guaranteed a job for at least three years. These strategies helped to enhance job security for teachers.

Question 2: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?

Mr. Walters revealed that the board took more of a leadership role in selling the consolidation issue to the parents and the community than he did. Weekly newspaper articles, he contended, were a productive strategy, as was the plan to delay the closing of any sites for at least three years. Mr. Walters pointed out some of the concerns of parents and the community. He stated:

Well, there were some concerns about, and again this goes typically with any consolidation, where the

pictures were going to go. There were all those type of issues. The board had promised that they were going to keep the campus at Mabel open for at least three years and that did happen.

Mr. Walters further disclosed:

Although they have closed it now, they have turned it in to, as I understand it, a community center. So all of those type of issues were supposedly taken care of. I think if they ever do close that community building down that all of the things will probably go to Barley Heights and be taken care of. I was assured that would happen.

Dr. Williams discussed keeping both sites open. He explained that arrangements were made to "put the junior high from the two schools at Mabel" and "the kindergarten through fifth and nine through twelve at Barley Heights." The superintendent stated that when the two schools were combined "about four hundred and eighty five kids by the first of October" were enrolled. Dr. Williams suggested that open-forum meetings were meant to enhance the consolidation issue, but he asserted:

We did have one open forum meeting and I swore I would never have another one, because every nut in the world came out. That meeting was not what I would really call a good meeting. But it was a necessity.

Dr. Williams further stated:

It opened the door for a lot of real negative people to express a lot of real negative attitudes. I was frustrated by the meeting and so were my board members.

The feasibility study submitted by the State Department addressed several issues important to parents. It was recommended by the study that the boards discuss in open meetings which campuses would remain open and for

which grades. Also, the feasibility study suggested that the two boards agree on how the school memorabilia would be preserved, as well as, school records. Any agreements between the two boards, the study recommended, should be in written form and become a part of board minutes.

The consolidation plan approved by both school boards showed that pre-kindergarten and kindergarten would be held at their respective sites in order to keep the transportation problems of these young students at a minimum. The plan further stated that grades one through four would be held at Barley Heights, five through eight at Mabel, and nine through twelve at Barley Heights. This decision to maintain both sites was approved by both boards and became part of the board minutes. Newspaper articles reported this plan to patrons and the State Department's feasibility study supported it by stating that retaining a lower grade center at Mabel would alleviate the net area per student problem occurring at Mabel and would utilize the upper grade facilities at Barley Heights better. Newspaper articles also advertised the joint board meetings, as well as, the community meeting. The proceedings of the meetings were also published by the paper in order to keep patrons informed.

Question 3: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for students?

During the semistructured interview, Mr. Walters stated of students:

You know, the students saw the positive side of it. I don't remember a single student really having a problem with it. What they saw were some advantages of being offered some things that they would not have been offered before. Without hesitation the students saw this as a very positive move, so it wasn't difficult to see that either.

The superintendent revealed that selling the consolidation to students involved little more than just sitting down with them and explaining the positives.

According to Dr. Williams, students were provided the opportunity to nominate choices for a school name, although the two boards reserved the right to make the final decision. He disclosed that the students selected the mascot and school colors, also. Dr. Williams explained the mascot selection process. He submitted:

We talked about it and we decided among the two boards that we would allow the students in grades four through twelve to vote on that, and it was like a five to one majority. The kids evidently had talked and the name they wanted was Broncos.

He also discussed selecting the school colors. Dr. Williams stated:

School colors were part of the agreement. But as I recall both schools had blue in their colors and it was different shades of blue. The agreement was blue and white, and I think it was two different shades of blue.

Dr. Williams also indicated that joint meetings of the two schools' student councils and bringing the elementary students together for a program and a meal were utilized as

strategies to enhance the consolidation process for students.

School board minutes indicated that two students were placed on a community committee to gather suggestions for a school name, mascot, and school colors. The committee organization was part of the board approved consolidation plan. The committee presented their suggestions to the boards of education for their review. Although the boards reserved the right to choose the school name, they allowed both student bodies to vote on the committee's suggestions. The boards approved the mascot and school colors that were voted on by the students. The selection became part of the official board of education minutes.

The feasibility study recommended that the two school boards focus on the increased educational opportunities for students. The study stated it would be questionable without consolidating whether Barley Heights would be able to meet the mandates of H.B. 1017 and it would be almost impossible for Mabel to meet them. Newspaper articles reported the enhanced programs for pupils. Researcher notes indicated that Mr. Walters stated he tried to "explain the positives" to students.

Question 4: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?

Dr. Williams contended the support staff was treated as part of the faculty throughout the consolidation process. He suggested that keeping both sites open assured the support staff their jobs at least "until the next year." Dr. Williams admitted that "we could keep them because we had extra money."

Mr. Walters spoke of meeting with the support staff. He presented:

It was just sitting down with the staff and trying to reassure them that they were going to have a job with the new district. Each superintendent handled his own staff and just reassured them that they were going to have a job.

Job security, Mr. Walters explained, "was the number one issue" with the support staff. He submitted that all of the support personnel stayed in the same building, with the same type of job, except for "a couple of people that had position changes, but it was nothing major and they handled it well."

The Oklahoma State Department of Education's feasibility study prepared for the Barley Heights and Mabel school boards suggested that the boards discuss in open meetings how the support personnel for the new district would be selected and how those not selected would be assisted. The study further recommended that both sites be utilized to accommodate projected growth in student enrollment and programs.

Newspaper articles in the Barley Heights News reported that both sites would remain open and that Dr. Williams

stated one support staff position may need to be eliminated by a reduction-in-force. The initial Mabel consolidation plan proposal was reported in the newspaper as stating all personnel would try to be maintained if normal retirement and attrition take care of over staffing and that special attempts would be made to assure employees who are close to retirement that their job, salary, and benefits were secure. Researcher notes indicated that support personnel who were displaced by the consolidation would be eligible for eighty percent of their salary for one year.

The board approved consolidation plan stated that all personnel rehired for the next school year by their respective boards would be retained by the consolidated district. The consolidation plan further stated that all personnel would be subject to reassignment. The consolidation plan was made part of official school board minutes after both board's approval more than two months before the consolidation.

Question 5: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?

Mr. Walters explained during the interview that he was the only administrator for the Mabel Schools. He was offered the position of assistant superintendent of the new

school district. He initially accepted the position, but later took a superintendent's job at another school before the consolidated school opened.

Dr. Williams discussed the superintendent's position for the new school by reviewing a conversation he had with Mr. Walters. Dr. Williams submitted:

When we first talked I told the superintendent, his name was Mr. Walters, I told him I needed to be real honest with him about this thing and tell him right off that I wasn't going to pursue this at all if we were going to have some kind of jockeying for position of who was going to be superintendent. I told him counting the six years in Africa, I had ten years as superintendent, three years as assistant superintendent and I had a doctorate and I was not going to be assistant superintendent to him.

Dr. Williams stated that the two superintendents discussed the issue over lunch where they "spent two or three hours together" in a town located several miles from both of their schools. Dr. Williams admitted that he "thought Mr. Walters was totally satisfied until the night that the two boards met together to resolve the conflict over the name of the school." When the Barley Heights board president told the members from Mabel that his patrons were just not going to buy in to the name, Mabel-Barley Heights, the Mabel board responded "that is fine, let Mr. Walters be superintendent." Dr. Williams clarified the sequence of events. He stated:

And that is the first we had even heard of that. So here came another problem that we hadn't been looking for, and I thought Mr. Walters was totally satisfied. As it turned out the Mabel board gave on both of those issues and came out ready to agree to however many

points there were. I don't remember what they all were. Of course, the name was one of them. I think they knew that was what they wanted to do in the first place, as they had approached us. And I think that they didn't want to go to Atwell at all.

The State Department's feasibility study recommended that the two school boards discuss in open meetings how the chief administrator for the new district would be named. Initially, both school's proposed consolidation plans named Dr. Williams as superintendent and Mr. Walters as assistant superintendent of the new district. The Barley Heights News reported the proposed consolidation plans that stated who the superintendent and assistant superintendent would be. No board minutes were reviewed by this researcher that indicated Mr. Walters was ever recommended by the Mabel board to serve as the consolidated district's superintendent.

Board minutes from more than two months before the consolidation revealed that the board approved consolidation plan named Dr. Williams as superintendent of the consolidated school and that Mr. Walters was not appointed an administrative position. Researcher notes acknowledged that Mr. Walters resigned and took a superintendent's position at another school in Oklahoma.

Question 6: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?

Mr. Walters contended that a consolidation process should start with the board. He submitted that once he disclosed the district's finances, and the condition of the school, the idea of consolidation was accepted. The superintendent presented:

We had a school plant that was very old and was just deteriorating to a point where I did not feel comfortable in allowing it to go much further. I started out with my board and once I laid out the finances and where we were headed in the near future, the board sold the thing. I didn't have to do much. The board took care of it. We really didn't have any public meetings or anything. It was just word of mouth.

Mr. Walters indicated how the consolidation plan was developed. He submitted:

Dr. Williams and I spent several hours just sitting down trying to figure out how we wanted to present this to our boards. We then had either two or three joint board meetings where we basically had our ideas and presented those. The boards followed through with those and then discussions and so forth.

Dr. Williams discussed the strategies utilized to enhance the process for the Barley Heights board members. He stated:

One of the things when I got to Barley Heights the board had said was, we are concerned that this school is not going to be in existence in 15 years if we don't do something. I asked what they had in mind and they said there are two or three small schools around here that are going to end up being consolidated with somebody, or annexed, or they are going to have a tough time making it. They thought that with the new money the legislature had put out that the possibility really existed for them and they wanted me to help on that.

Dr. Williams presented that soon afterwards the Mabel superintendent came to his office and said "there might be

a possibility that they were not going to make it." Dr.

Williams continued:

Mr. Walters said we are losing students, finances are not good, and he wanted to talk to me about consolidation. So we visited and I told the board and the board was ecstatic. We had a public board meeting, of course, and we brought the Mabel and Barley Heights board members together and just, as I recall, considered a resolution. A resolution stating that the two boards agreed to meet and discuss the possible consolidation of the two school districts. It was very generic but it was a beginning.

Other strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation for board members were discussed by Dr. Williams. They included working with State Department personnel in calling for a feasibility study, and helping the board "draw up certain agreements." Dr. Williams said of the consolidation plan:

I don't even remember what all it said, but there were points that we had agreed on and I drew those up and both boards approved that. But the name was one of the real points of contention.

Dr. Williams also discussed the configuration of the new board after consolidation. He indicated that the new district was drawn "so that at least for a while, two seats would be held from Mabel and three seats would be held by Barley Heights."

One of the suggestions stated in the State Department's feasibility study was for the two school boards to discuss in open meetings how the new board of education would be formed and who would be its members. The study further recommended that any agreements made by

the school boards be in written form and made part of the board of education minutes.

The consolidation plan approved by both boards supported the data collected during the semistructured interviews. The board approved plan stated that three of the new school board members would come from the Barley Heights board and two from Mabel. Barley Heights would fill office two with a one-year term. The person filling the seat would serve as the board's president and then the office would be voted on at-large in the proceeding years. Barley Heights would also fill office number four serving a three-year term and office five serving a four-year term. The Mabel board would fill office number one for five years and office three with a two-year term. The office three position was named as the board president's seat after office two's term expired in one year. The Barley Heights News reported the consolidation plan, including the organization of the new board, to patrons. The plan became part of board approved minutes.

Other strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process for board members were several joint board meetings and an open-forum community meeting. The boards also reserved the right to name the district and after several discussions, as indicated by board minutes, the name Barley Heights-Mabel was approved. Another name had been voted on by the students from both schools but, according to board

minutes, the school boards felt the two existing names should be used in hyphenated form so as to preserve the identity of the communities. Other facilities were named by the boards of education and made part of board minutes. They included the name of the high school, Creek Valley High, which was the name voted on by the students for the name of the district, the Mabel facility was named Mabel Elementary School, and the Barley Heights Elementary School retained its original name.

Researcher notes indicated additional strategies that enhanced the consolidation process for board members. One was identified as the joint board meetings held at both sites, and according to Dr. Williams, were held more than twice a month for six months prior to the consolidation election. Other strategies identified were the boards working with the State Department personnel, and the development of projected enrollments, school finances, and facilities needs as identified by the State Department's feasibility study.

Question 7: What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

The Mabel superintendent, toward the close of the semistructured interview, evaluated the consolidation process. He submitted:

As it turned out, I probably would not have gone through it again, and that is from a personal point of view. This consolidation ended up causing me to move to where I am right now. And even though this is a

positive situation, it was not positive at the time. But that is personal. Like I said, I would not have gone through this.

Mr. Walters indicated that the issue of what to name the consolidated school became a nonproductive process. He disclosed:

We had difficulties that were sometimes very stupid. One of the things was the name itself, the consolidated name itself. Barley Heights put brakes on it at one point saying that if Mabel was going to be the first name listed then they would not go through with the consolidation.

In closing, Mr. Walters revealed that there was another area school he felt would have made a better consolidation for Mabel, but that they had just completed a consolidation with another school. Mr. Walters made these comments:

The only thing that I would have liked to have seen, and it just didn't develop, was when Baymont and Adville Schools went together I was trying to, or the board and I, work with Baymont Schools. Baymont and Mabel would have been a much better combination for us, those two schools, than what we both ended up going to. We would have both benefited if we had consolidated together instead of going the directions that we did.

Dr. Williams revealed several issues he thought to be nonproductive to the consolidation process. Naming the consolidated school was one of those strategies. Dr. Williams presented "of all things, we got hung up on the name and I guess a lot of people do that." Naming the superintendent was "another problem that we hadn't been looking for" indicated Dr. Williams. The superintendent described selecting a mascot as a nonproductive issue, also. He presented:

The mascot thing reared its ugly head before the election. That thing became a point of contention and it was a point of contention against Dr. Williams and I never have figured out why.

Another nonproductive strategy indicated by Dr. Williams was an open forum meeting held for parents. The superintendent stated that "every nut in the world came out" and "I swore I would never have another one." Dr. Williams, in closing, spoke of the pressure on board members during the consolidation process. He submitted:

I had three board members that by the end of this thing were just literally exhausted. They were frustrated and they had all had tons of phone calls both good and bad and it had just taken all of their time. They were just so frustrated by this thing it was unbelievable. After the election those three board members resigned.

School board minutes revealed that the name of the district was initially agreed upon by both boards to be Mabel-Barley Heights. Late in the consolidation process, approximately one month before the consolidation, the previous board resolution was amended to change the name of the district to Barley Heights-Mabel. The naming of the district appeared on at least seven board meeting agendas before the consolidation election and was shown to be discussed numerous times. The name suggested by the community committee and then voted on by students from both schools was not selected by the school boards. The Barley Heights News reported the school name proposals, changes, and the results of the student ballots.

Another strategy found in board minutes more than once was naming a Mabel teaching principal to an administrative position within the new district. Board minutes showed that initially the staff member was approved by the two boards as the middle school principal of the consolidated school. But at another meeting, one month later, his proposed responsibilities had been changed to read, Director of Transportation and Athletic Director. Attached to that meeting's board minutes were the staff member's resume and a copy of a state law recorded as coming from The School Laws of Oklahoma, 1990. An underlined section of the law stated that until July 1, 1993, teaching principals shall not be required to hold administrative certificates. Beginning July 1, 1993, teaching principals shall be required to hold administrative certificates. One month later, the board minutes recorded another amendment to the staff member's assignment. This amendment read that the employee was to have the responsibilities of Transportation Director, Gifted and Talented, Energy Grant, also a secondary teaching assignment and Athletic Director. Both boards approved this motion. The issue was covered in articles appearing in the Barley Heights News.

Notes from the open-forum meeting conducted by the boards revealed concerns of parents and the community. The notes indicated that patrons who attended the meeting asked about the financial problems of the schools, staff

reduction, and the new district's boundaries. Those attending the meeting also asked questions pertaining to the projected enrollment of the new school and the board organization. The notes from the community meeting showed that patrons were also interested in curriculum improvements and the name of the new district. The meeting was held approximately three months before the consolidation election and board minutes indicated that board members agreed to discuss and finalize the major items before the election.

CONSOLIDATION #6

Bowman School District

Bowman School was located seven miles from Fayeveille in Southwestern Oklahoma. Data from school accreditation applications for the 1992-93 school year showed 340 students enrolled in grades kindergarten through eight and high school, nine through twelve, with 132. Minority students totaled 40 with 15 blacks, two American Indians, and 23 Hispanics. Bowman had 38 teachers and three administrators, according to the state accreditation report. The courses offered met the state-mandated curriculums with additional curricular opportunities for students in foreign language, computer literacy and membership in the local vocational school.

The school's child nutrition report revealed that 38.9 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced

lunches. Average daily participation in the lunch program was 316 students. Federal reimbursement to the school's nutrition program was \$66,304.93. Other federal programs and the monies received included Chapter 1, \$31,192; Chapter 2, \$3,350; Drug Education, \$2,699; and Migrant Education, \$21,476.

A State Department facilities' evaluation indicated that Bowman's campus consisted of 18 acres with an elementary school housing grades kindergarten through eight, and a high school for students in grades nine through twelve. The elementary school was built in 1959, had 19,679 square feet and was in average condition. The high school, reported in good condition, was built in 1929 and had 65,811 square feet. Other facilities included a 3,400 square foot field house in good condition, built in 1961, and the industrial arts building with 3,000 square feet, constructed in 1982 and also in good condition. The later buildings were metal construction, while the older classroom facilities were made of brick and concrete block. All of the facilities were handicap accessible with no significant building deficiencies according to the State Department report.

The transportation report provided by the State Department of Education within the consolidation feasibility study showed that Bowman School had five bus routes and ten busses. The total square miles in the

district were reported to be 78 and the district transported, on the average, 221 students per day. An Oklahoma State Department of Education report disclosed 1992-93 state aid allocations for Bowman at \$925,340.

The Bowman superintendent, Mr. Hoover, discussed his experiences in education. He pointed out that he had begun his teaching career in Fayeville and later moved to Bowman. Mr. Hoover believed that since the schools had now consolidated, he guessed he had "been at the same school system for 31 years." Mr. Hoover also explained the fluctuation in enrollment over the years at Bowman with the oil boom and military affiliation within the district. Mr. Hoover presented that when he first began, Bowman had 2,400 students but dropped to 220 when the base closed. During the oil boom of the 80s, Bowman grew to 1,200 students and then the year before consolidation, enrollment dropped to around 300 students. The superintendent explained, "as the economy goes, Bowman goes."

Fayeville School District

Fayeville School was a small, independent district seven miles from Bowman and approximately 75 miles from the nearest urban center. The school had 152 students the year prior to consolidation. The elementary school, grades kindergarten through eight, had an enrollment of 116, while the high school had a membership of 36. The professional staff consisted of 17 full time teachers, one three-fourths

time teacher, and one half-time teacher. There were two administrators serving the district. Along with the basic, state-mandated curriculum, opportunities were made available for students in foreign language, computer literacy, and services provided by the area vocational-technical school only seven miles away.

Fayeveille School had more than 68 percent of its students qualifying for free or reduced lunches. Minority students were minimal with only two Hispanics reported in the 1992-93 accreditation report. Federal reimbursement for the lunch program totaled \$40,105.55 in 1991-92. Other federal allocations accounted for \$18,213 in Chapter 1 funds; \$1,525 Chapter 2 monies; and \$1,415 for Drug Education.

A 1992 facility evaluation conducted by the State Department of Education showed that the district encompassed 57 square miles. The school was providing two country bus routes and one town route, and hauled approximately 40 percent of its students. The school buildings were located on a single 14-acre campus with kindergarten through eighth grade in one building and nine through twelve in another. The elementary building was built in 1978 and had 7,144 square feet. It was evaluated to be in good condition. The building was constructed of brick and block, was handicap accessible, and cited for no deficiencies in the 1992 State Department report. The high

school building was built in 1929 with an addition added in 1934. Although the high school was described to be in good condition by the facilities' evaluation, the report suggested the age of the site might lead to high maintenance cost. Other facilities available for instruction and date of construction included, an auditorium, 1980; music building, 1980; gymnasium, 1957; cafeteria, 1957; and an agriculture building, 1983. These structures were shown to be in average to good condition with no deficiencies and all accessible to the disabled.

A State Department state aid allocation report in 1992-93 indicated tentative state aid for Fayeveille at \$365,833. The county four-mill levy collected in 1990-91 amounted to \$14,318. School land earnings of 1990-91 represented \$10,657. Gross production taxes accounted for \$35,905 that same year, while the motor vehicle tax receipts collected \$39,819. The Rural Electric Association (R.E.A.) tax collections in 1990-91 were minimal at \$3,498 returned to the district. Fayeveille School District had an actual valuation set at \$2,902,208.

During the semistructured interview the Fayeveille superintendent, Mr. Stephens, shared his experiences in education. The superintendent stated:

Professionally, I have been in the school business getting close to probably 30 years. I have been in about every part of it, classroom and administrative. Personally, I enjoy the school systems or I wouldn't have stayed as long as I have. I am probably looking toward retirement one of these days before very long.

Mr. Stephens disclosed that Fayeveille was struggling financially when he became superintendent three years before the consolidation. The board had previously had some meetings and discussions concerning the future of the school. Mr. Stephens indicated the board had even involved the State Department in an earlier study of the school. The Fayeveille administrator held that there were several factors involved in the decision to consolidate, and it took the community three years before a final decision could be made to determine what could best be done for the students.

Research Questions

Question 1: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?

Mr. Hoover indicated the primary strategy utilized to enhance the consolidation for teachers was job security.

He stated:

I think stability was probably the main thing. It seemed like the magic figure that the legislature and everybody was talking about back then was a school of 500 students. Anything smaller was going to be looked at to be done away with. So I just told them if we didn't go together then we would just have to ride it out.

Mr. Stephens agreed that job security was important to teachers. He commented:

Basically on the teachers, the staff was told that probably the way the student numbers and stuff was

working that most of them that wanted a job probably would be able to come forward on the consolidation.

Mr. Stephens held that "basically, with the exception of one or two, that was more or less the way we left it."

Mr. Hoover pointed out that at Bowman "we didn't let any of them go." Mr. Hoover continued:

And then at Fayeville, basically I left that up to Mr. Stephens. We went through and picked out what we would need and then offered jobs to them. If they turned it down they got the incentive money.

Mr. Hoover explained the incentive pay for displaced teachers. He indicated:

We offered them jobs, but they took the money and then went and got them another job and drew their eighty percent of their salary.

He was presented a challenge in offering all of the teaching staff comparable positions. Mr. Hoover stated:

The main thing, probably the hardest thing, was the coaches. I really didn't have an opening for either one of the coaches as head coach. We had openings as assistants, but both of them were used to being head coach and wanted to be head coach. So they both took their eighty percent and went and got other jobs.

Mr. Stephens submitted that an enhanced curriculum provided another incentive to teachers. He indicated:

At that point in time we did get a little bit of extra money for new programs and that was part of the strategy enhancement of the consolidation. We put in an art program, we kept our ag programs, both ag programs we had. So through that and a projection of possibly a few more students, which we did gain several more students than both of us had together, it was just the idea that we would do the best we could to use everyone and they would, if not used, receive the incentive money for one year as far as pay.

Mr. Stephens added that "we didn't have too much dissension or anything with any staff members."

Mr. Hoover revealed that "basically the people were ready to do something."

The State Department feasibility study recommended that the school boards discuss in open meetings how teachers would be selected for the new school district and how those not hired would be assisted. The study further suggested that any agreements made by the two boards should be in written form and included in board minutes. The feasibility study stated that it was apparent that the combining of all resources would provide a broader educational environment.

Researcher notes indicated that the consolidated school received approximately \$300,000 for the consolidation. This money was in addition to the state aid processed through the state formula. Mr. Hoover also indicated that the consolidated school would have priority to state grant money. The additional money made it possible to enhance programs and offer incentive money for displaced teachers.

Newspaper articles in the Corndale Beacon, a community newspaper located approximately eight miles from Fayeveille, advertised a public meeting to discuss the consolidation. Teachers were encouraged to attend according to researcher notes.

Question 2: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school

consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?

Mr. Stephens indicated that before the final decision was made consolidation discussions had been "going on for quite some time." As for enhancing the process for parents and the community, he indicated:

I don't know that there was any particular method. We just did a lot of discussing. We involved the people of the community. I had several meetings and I went to meetings of older people where they have the senior citizens center. I talked with several others. We had several open meetings where the State Department came out. We just went through a process of discussing and letting people know where we were at financially, where we were at on other things such as student wise, building wise, and it was just a cooperative effort between everyone.

Mr. Hoover explained that meetings at both communities were held. The two superintendents attended the meetings at each site along with patrons from the communities and the two school boards.

Mr. Hoover expanded on the notion of cooperation between the two communities. He presented:

It was common knowledge that something was going to be done. The main thing I tried to do was just not pressure Fayeville and make them feel like they had to come over here. And, of course, the two communities are pretty much alike and they have always gotten along over the years. Like I said, it was a good deal for us and it was a good deal for them.

Both superintendents contended that being open and honest with parents and the community enhanced the consolidation process. Mr. Stephens stated:

We tried to be honest with the people and probably that was the main strategy that we had. It went real well and if I had to do it over again, I think that is what I would do again, tell them where we were at financially, with students, and everything else.

Mr. Hoover stated:

We just kind of took things as they came up and we tried to be honest and out front with everybody and not make a bunch of promises. Basically, we said what we would do.

The Corndale Beacon advertised the community meetings held to discuss the consolidation of Bowman and Fayeville. An article also reminded patrons of the election date. After the election the newspaper reported the results which revealed overwhelming support for the consolidation in both communities. One newspaper article cautioned citizens of Fayeville after the election to not let its community identity be lost. The paper stated that for a small town, the school is more than just the center of education; it is the center of the community. The article further read, Fayeville now faces the task of retaining its coherence as a town, while improving its capacity to educate its youth.

Researcher notes indicated that both superintendents stated the parents and the communities knew that something had to be done about the schools. Mr. Stephens stated that discussions had been going on for years in Fayeville concerning school consolidation. Mr. Stephens also stated that a survey was utilized for community input as to which district Fayeville should consolidate with. Mr. Hoover

discussed patrons from both communities attending the open-forum meetings. According to researcher notes, Mr. Hoover stated that when he met with the Fayeville patrons, they said they wanted everything in one place and they didn't want one child at Fayeville and another at Bowman. Mr. Hoover further disclosed that when he visited with the Fayeville parents, "they were ready to close it down."

The State Department's feasibility study suggested that school boards discuss in open meetings which campuses would remain open, how would the school records be preserved, and what would happen to the trophies, awards, and other school memorabilia. The study further stated that overcoming the factor of change would be the greatest obstacle for the people of each district to adjust to, but putting aside their feelings and adjusting to the fact that better and more opportunities could be provided for all students would make it easier for all to accept the consolidation.

Question 3: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the students?

Mr. Stephens suggested that there "wasn't a whole lot of extra things" utilized to enhance the consolidation process for the Fayeville students. He exhibited two examples by stating:

There was a few things discussed like the possibility of maybe chemistry, or something extra that way. We did other things like, for example, cheerleaders. Again, there wasn't a whole lot of extra things.

Mr. Stephens indicated that the "togetherness of your people, becoming a part of us, and having the same opportunities was stressed pretty strongly" to the Bowman students. He revealed:

It wasn't going to be, well you are coming in, so you will have to fit in. That was never, nothing like that was ever put out. It was all, we are together now.

Mr. Stephens concluded by stating that "a lot of people think the students are the problem, but they are the least problem, they are the least."

Mr. Hoover disclosed additional strategies utilized for students. He submitted:

Our school counselor and the student councils met. We invited Fayeville High School students over and they went around with some of the kids to different classes and some of that.

Mr. Hoover discussed the students visiting the schools. He stated:

They saw what programs and extra curriculum activities we had and what was available to them at Fayeville. So it really wasn't any problem. Everything worked real well.

The State Department feasibility study discussed the students. The study stated that the combining of the schools' resources would provide all students a broader educational opportunity and enhance their learning environment. Transportation was the only concern cited by

the feasibility study. The report indicated that Fayeville was transporting approximately 40 percent of its students, while Bowman transported between 40 and 50 percent. However, with the number of buses available and the distance and condition of the roads between the two communities, the feasibility study stated that transportation of the students could be managed.

Researcher notes indicated that Mr. Hoover stated that with the students "everything worked real well." Mr. Stephens indicated that enhanced educational opportunities, programs, and activities were effective strategies for students. Researcher notes further indicated that the consolidated school lost six or seven students because of interest in other communities, but Mr. Stephens stated "that was minimal and you could have had that no matter what anybody did."

Question 4: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?

Mr. Stephens indicated that there was not "too much dissension" even with the "support personnel." He admitted that "we used basically all of our support personnel" in the new school. The superintendent stated:

The support fell into a situation where we did tell them it didn't make any difference what the pay scale was when they came up here, if they were making x number of dollars then it would not be decreased. Their positions were not decreased either.

Mr. Hoover recalled that the support staff at Bowman "knew that their jobs were secure." Mr. Hoover submitted:

Mr. Stephens was a big help. He was superintendent at Fayeveville and he did most of the visiting with the staff over there and recommending what we did. I really didn't get that involved with it.

The feasibility study suggested that the two school boards decide on the support personnel needed to staff the new district and how those not hired by the consolidated school would be assisted. The study further recommended that the school boards discuss the support positions in open meetings and put in written form any agreements made by the boards. The feasibility study stated any agreements should be recorded in the board of education minutes.

The facilities evaluation conducted by the State Department of Education recommended to the Fayeveville and Bowman school boards that grade centers be considered. This recommendation would have enhanced job security for the support staffs by maintaining both sites. However, according to researcher notes, Mr. Hoover stated that patrons did not want their children separated by two sites and that maintaining both facilities would have cost the new district unnecessary expense.

Researcher notes indicated that all of the support personnel were retained from Bowman and that Mr. Hoover stated the new district hired one of the Fayeveville cooks and one of its janitors. Mr. Stephens indicated that

anyone not used would "receive the incentive money for one year as far as pay."

Question 5: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?

Mr. Stephens proposed that there were not any strategies utilized for administrators during the consolidation process. He explained:

Because basically there was not any changes there. I was the only administrator that came forward into the new system, and the administrators up here kept their positions. We just went forward from there.

Mr. Hoover also stated "there really wasn't any" strategies put in place to enhance the consolidation for administrators. He suggested:

We felt like we had only one position. I had an elementary principal, they had a high school principal. He taught and was high school principal. The area he taught in we didn't need, so Mr. Stephens was the only one that we offered a job to.

Mr. Hoover clarified that all of the administrators at Bowman retained their positions. He discussed Mr. Stephens' new position. Mr. Hoover presented:

He basically is the administrative assistant and he also takes care of the seventh and eighth grade. He also takes care of the school lunch, school transportation, and the federal programs.

Researcher notes supported the data collected from the semistructured interviews. Analysis of the notes indicated

that the Fayeville administrator not hired by the consolidated school district was offered the incentive pay for displaced employees. The feasibility study suggested that the boards of education decide early in the consolidation process how the chief administrators would be selected and how those not retained would be assisted. Mr. Hoover was kept as the superintendent of the new school and Mr. Stephens his administrative assistant. All other administrators from Bowman were retained in their present positions.

Question 6: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?

Mr. Stephens reviewed that the Fayeville board had discussed consolidation for "quite some time" before actually making any decisions. He contended that "this wasn't an overnight thing." Mr. Stephens stated:

They had even involved the State Department. They had done some surveys, checks, and different things. The buildings were not in good repair. So it was several factors. I was there three years before we made a final decision to try and see what we could do as far as possibly consolidating with someone or whatever the best avenue was to go.

Mr. Stephens presented that once the decision to consolidate was made "we worked with the State Department." The superintendent pointed out that "they told us what we would get extra as far as finances and what we could do with that."

Mr. Stephens also discussed the new school board and how each district would be represented. He indicated:

It was agreed upon when we decided to do this that we would have two members and they would have three. Our members would take the longer running seats. After that, I can't remember if it was the first election or not, we had a board member from Fayeveville elected. So at the present time we have three members from Fayeveville and two from Bowman and it doesn't create any problem at all.

Mr. Hoover reflected on the Bowman board's decision to consolidate. He presented:

We had talked about the need to do something and about consolidation. About the only place that we had to expand would have been with Fayeveville because Carltown is to the west of us and south of us is Sedgefield. So Fayeveville was about the only way we had to go. But we really just let them know we were interested if they ever decided to do anything.

Mr. Hoover added, "we really didn't try to pressure them or anything." He spoke of his discussion with the board. Mr. Hoover submitted:

I told the board that we were a small district area wise. We only have 65 square miles and Fayeveville had about the same. There just wasn't anything we could do and if something didn't come in out on base, then our days would have been numbered. So I felt like in order for us to exist, we needed to try to do everything we could to get them over here.

Mr. Hoover revealed strategies utilized to enhance the process for board members. He indicated:

When we started talking about consolidation, we invited the Fayeveville board over and they came and met with us. They went to Sedgefield. They met with Corndale. Then they had a community meeting and I went over and visited with them and answered any questions they had.

Mr. Hoover continued:

We went over and met with Fayeville and they came over and met with us and toured our facilities. Then they came back after they had visited all schools. I don't know what all offers Sedgfield and Corndale made but they came back and said they were interested in visiting with us. So we proceeded from there.

School board records indicated that the Bowman and Fayeville school boards requested a feasibility study for a possible consolidation be conducted by the State Department of education. The feasibility study suggested several strategies to enhance the consolidation for board members. One item was that the boards of education decide how the new board would be formed and who its members would be. The report also recommended that the boards decide how the school name, mascot, and school colors would be chosen, how the records would be preserved, and what would become of school trophies, awards, and other memorabilia. The feasibility study stated that the two school boards should discuss these topics in open meetings and record in board minutes any agreements reached.

The State Department's feasibility study contained eight separate reports to help guide the school boards through the consolidation process. The study contained a general report, accreditation and curriculum report, child nutrition report, federal programs report, capital improvements, budget, and planning report, special education report, transportation report, and a financial services report.

The general report reminded the school boards that the State Department would like to work closely with the schools during the consolidation. The accreditation and curriculum report stated that the combining of the schools' resources would provide a broader educational opportunity for students and that it appeared the eagerness of the patrons to enjoy the best education possible was top priority. This section concluded by stating that overcoming the factor of change would be the greatest obstacle for the people of the two districts.

The capital improvement, budget, and planning report stated that both districts maintain sites that are less than the minimum required for each grade level. The report recommended grade centers be utilized at both Fayeveille and Bowman. The transportation report concluded that there were no foreseeable transportation problems within the proposed district.

Other strategies to enhance the consolidation for board members were found in the Corndale Beacon newspaper. Special board meetings were advertised in the paper, as well as, the consolidation election date, and the results of the vote. The paper also reported to patrons the term the consolidated school would be opened.

Question 7: What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

Mr. Hoover contended that his "big concern" was in closing the site at Fayeveille. He commented:

If I had to leave the other site open and leave a grade school there, then I would have been bussing students down there and the people in both communities didn't want that.

Mr. Hoover explained:

If we had left kindergarten through third grade down there, then they could have had a student there and then a fifth or sixth grader up here.

Mr. Hoover contended that the parents agreed that "they would just as soon have them all in one place." The superintendent stated:

Basically, we said what we would do. But if we were going to have to leave everything open over there and operate two sites, it wasn't going to benefit either one of us.

Mr. Hoover recommended in the consolidation plan that the Fayeville School be closed and everything be moved to Hoover. He added that "we had plenty of room and that gave us about 700 students."

Mr. Stephens discussed other strategies that hindered the consolidation. He said of patrons:

We had a few that were vocal somewhat, about that they would not come up here. It was some that had already made up their mind. If we would have stayed in existence as a school there, they would have probably transferred out anyway, which I think ended up being six or seven students. And that was minimal, you could have had that no matter what anybody did.

Another strategy that proved nonproductive, according to Mr. Stephens, was "comparing our figures" to the feasibility study. Mr. Stephens stated that one of "the hardest things" to do was predict next year's revenue from the feasibility studies. He contended that "the figures

were not as current" as they needed to be to "do the planning that you wanted to." Mr. Stephens explained that the year before consolidation, Fayeville "had about twenty kindergartners," but the feasibility study projected only two. He added that "we had gone through the community and did some checking, so some of the things in the feasibility study didn't enter into some of the things that actually occurred."

Mr. Stephens concluded by admitting that the consolidation is "serving the students better" and consequently "the people have accepted it and felt like it was the best possibility they had to provide a good education for the students in the community."

Strategies that proved nonproductive during the consolidation process were also reviewed through researcher notes, newspaper articles, and the State Department feasibility study. Researcher notes indicated that Mr. Hoover recommended to the school boards that the Fayeville site be closed to save the district money. Newspaper articles in the Corndale Beacon presented that for a small town, the school is more than the center of education and with the closing of the Fayeville facility, the patrons faced the task of retaining their community's identity while improving the quality of education for its youth.

The feasibility study reported that there had been several meetings between the two boards with the

possibility of a partial site remaining at Fayeville. The study suggested, from a facilities standpoint and the close proximity of the two communities, that grade centers would be effective. Researcher notes indicated that Mr. Hoover stated the patrons did not want two schools. The possibility of one child in a school at Bowman and another at Fayeville was unappealing to parents according to Mr. Hoover.

CONSOLIDATION #7

Sentry School District

Sentry was a small, rural school in Northwestern Oklahoma. The State Department feasibility study showed eight high school teachers and 12 elementary teachers. There were 153 students enrolled at Sentry the year prior to consolidation. The largest class of students was the first graders with 19 enrolled and the smallest class, with six students, was fourth grade. There were no minority students reported in the feasibility study and only a one percent dropout rate in 1988-89. No dropouts were reported for two years prior to consolidating with the Andrew Schools.

Course offerings at Sentry met the state minimum criteria. Elective courses were available in vocal music, German, home economics, vocational agriculture, and business education. The school participated in a vocational district with the center located 30 miles from

Sentry. Pupils at Sentry which qualified for free or reduced lunches represented 35 percent of the student body. Federal reimbursement for school lunches amounted to \$14,168.13 in 1989-90. Other significant federal program allocations reported were \$16,770 in Chapter 1, \$1,565 for Chapter 2, and \$326 for Title II.

The Sentry School net state aid figure for the 1990-91 school year represented \$175,879, according to the state financial report contained within the school's consolidation feasibility study. The 1989-90 income report documented \$5,227,938 total valuation for the district. The district collected 7.87 percent of its revenue from local and county sources. State revenues represented 32.60 percent of Sentry's general fund and federal monies 1.65 percent. The total general fund revenue for 1988-89 showed \$598,391.10 for the district. Ad valorem taxes generated 31.2 percent of the total collections. The Sentry expenditure report of 1988-89 indicated the school spent 10.74 percent of its total expenses on administrative services. Operation and maintenance of plant services cost 10.81 percent, and instructional services, 57.8 percent.

A facility's evaluation was conducted by the State Department of Education in 1990 as part of the consolidation feasibility study. There were seven buildings on Sentry's 11.6 acre site. The high school was a pre-engineered metal building with 6,867 square feet. It

was built in 1973 and was rated in good condition by State Department personnel. There were separate structures for gym, welding, vocational agriculture and home economics. The 8,460 square feet of classroom space was rated as average. A significant discrepancy was noted in an adequate fresh water supply. The high school comprised grades nine through twelve.

The elementary school, grades kindergarten through eight, had 92 students in the fall of 1990. The school was housed in a 11,781 square foot concrete building just west of the main high school facility. The elementary building was erected in 1977 and was rated in good condition. Classroom utilization was 68 square feet per student, well above the recommended minimum 47 square feet per elementary child.

The transportation section of the State Department feasibility study presented 100 square miles in the Sentry District. The school had four busses and hauled approximately 102 students per day.

During the semistructured interview with the Sentry superintendent, Mr. Myers, he shared that when he accepted the position at Sentry, the board presented him with a goal of passing an annexation or consolidation vote within three years. Mr. Myers explained the goal was created from a petition of the people within the district. The superintendent further disclosed that after he and his

wife, who served the district as business manager, arrived they soon found it would be difficult for the school to make it three years. Mr. Myers stated:

We decided we could make it three years with good luck. But if we had any bad luck, it would be hard to survive and get through three years. We just told them they needed to do this. Instead of scrimping and saving everything, we need to go ahead and have school. And go out and do it like you are supposed to, and do it in two years. The board told me to go after it then. It was about a two-year deal. It took that long to get it going.

Andrew School District

The school year prior to consolidating with Sentry, Andrew had ten high school teachers and 11 elementary teachers. There were 304 students in grades kindergarten through twelve with the largest class being 36 in second grade and the smallest with 14 in seventh grade. The minority report of the school indicated five black students and seven Hispanics. There were no dropouts reported for the 1990-91 school year.

The basic curriculum was offered which met state mandated criteria. Electives were available in computer education, instrumental music, French, German, drivers' education, and vocational agriculture. The district was served by a vocational technical institution seven miles from Andrew.

According to a State Department child nutrition report, 39.8 percent of Andrew students qualified for free or reduced meals. Two hundred and seven pupils

participated daily in the lunch program which qualified Andrew for \$29,672.98 in federal lunch fund reimbursement during the 1989-90 school year. Other federal program allocations that year generated \$9,954.91 in Chapter 1 funds, \$2,536 for Chapter 2, \$544 in Title II, and \$922 for Drug Education.

In June 1991, State Department personnel compiled a facility's evaluation as part of the consolidation feasibility study. The report indicated Andrew had one ten-acre campus with a kindergarten through eighth grade delivery system and a nine through twelve system. The main building was reported built in 1966 with major deficiencies cited in the fire alarm system and toilet facilities. The building was reported handicap accessible and evaluated to be in good to average condition. The gymnasium, built the following year, was in similar condition. The newest building on Andrew's campus was a combination gymnasium/classroom facility built in 1990. It, too, was in good condition, as were the special education building built in 1978, the music facility opened in 1983, and the bus barn erected in 1985. A transportation section of the feasibility study indicated Andrew had five busses, hauled 124 students daily (40.7 percent), and served 50 square miles.

As part of the consolidation feasibility study, a financial report was formulated for the Andrew School

District. The report revealed 1990-91 state aid allocations at \$605,205. The district valuation was recorded to be \$5,193,921 of which tax levies were:

General Fund	35.00 mills
Building Fund	5.00 mills
Sinking Fund	0.00 mills

The district received 9.03 percent of its total revenue from local and county sources. State revenues accounted for 46.98 percent and federal 11.86 percent. Ad valorem taxes supported 20.62 percent of the total revenue received by the district. The total general fund revenue presented by the State Department's 1989-90 income report was \$916,044.98.

Andrew's expenditures for services rendered seemed to be characteristic of small, rural schools. Administrative services expended 6.75 percent of the budget. The operation and maintenance of plant services required 9.71 percent of the total expenditures and instructional services took 60.91 percent of the total expenditures.

Mr. Landry, the Andrew superintendent during the consolidation, stated that he "had a career in the Air Force and then a career in education." He said that he spent six and one half years as the superintendent at Andrew and considered the consolidation in which he participated a success.

Research Questions

Question 1: What strategies did the superintendents who

have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?

Mr. Myers contended that job security enhanced the consolidation for the teachers. He stated:

In our particular situation, we felt like every teacher that was on board that wanted a job would be able to stay in the new system, which they did. But there was one or two of us that really weren't interested. All the teachers were needed and I think all of us, except me and one more, got a job and the other guy was wanting to leave that part of the state, also.

He indicated that "there were a couple of them" that were released through a reduction-in-force, "but before the summer was up, it was sure they were going to be needed, and they were offered jobs, also." Mr. Myers added that the staff knew "they were going to have a job or were going to draw eighty percent of their pay for a year."

Mr. Landry agreed that the teachers who "were eliminated from their positions" were paid a percentage for one year. He also discussed meetings with teachers. Mr. Landry stated:

We went to each individual school and met with the teachers. We had joint social gatherings to bring the teachers of the two schools together. In our meetings, and stuff, we explained very thoroughly the need for a positive attitude.

Job security was also indicated by the State Department's feasibility study as a major concern for teachers. The study recommended that the two school boards discuss in open meetings who would be hired to staff the

new school and how would present employees not required be assisted. The report further suggested that any issues agreed upon by the two boards become a part of board minutes.

The consolidation plan approved by the school board indicated that both sites would be maintained. This action enhanced job security for teachers according to researcher notes. Researcher notes also showed that displaced employees would receive eighty percent of their salary for one year.

Board minutes recorded three months prior to the consolidation revealed that letters were sent to teachers who would not be retained by the new consolidated school. The names of the teachers were listed in the minutes. A month later the board took action to rehire the teachers previously notified for possible termination under the R.I.F. policy and, again, the names of the teachers rehired were recorded in the board minutes.

Question 2: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?

Mr. Myers suggested that organizing a community committee was a positive strategy during the consolidation process. He indicated that at least two patrons served on

the committee with two board members and the superintendent. Mr. Myers presented:

We met several times and talked things out and hashed things out and talked about where we would have schools and where we would possibly build a new school. We had meetings at both communities. We had joint meetings and we had a lot of committee meetings just talking things out, hashing them out.

Mr. Landry concurred that "the school board each appointed a committee to work on the consolidation." He also presented the committees "consisted of two board members, two community members, and the superintendent, and each school put some kids on it."

Mr. Myers indicated that the superintendent at Frontline was a friend of his, but more importantly he was experienced in school consolidation. Mr. Myers further stated:

I went to him because he had gone through it a couple of times. I visited with him several times and I got him to come to one of our joint community meetings. A lot of people had questions that he had been through before. He helped us a whole lot just on planning and how to do different things.

Mr. Landry also revealed town meetings as a strategy utilized for parents and the community. He stated:

We had town meetings in each town, each community, open forum. We answered questions and had open houses at each facility. The parents of the other community could go through and see the building, things of that nature.

Mr. Landry suggested that "a lot of publicity was done, a lot of coverage in the newspapers." He concluded that "we tried to show the positive points."

The consolidation plan for Sentry and Andrew showed sites at both communities to remain open. The Andrew facility would house grades nine through twelve and kindergarten through third. The school at Sentry would have fourth through eighth grades. Other strategies recorded in the plan that enhanced the consolidation process for parents and the communities included activities scheduled at both facilities. Parental involvement was noted by allowing booster clubs and parent-teacher organizations to manage the gate and concession stands at the events.

The feasibility study prepared by the State Department of Education suggested that the school boards decide which campuses would remain open and for which grades. The study recommended the boards discuss issues in open meetings and record any agreements in board minutes. The board minutes revealed joint meetings of the Andrew and Sentry boards of education held at both locations.

Question 3: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the students?

When asked what strategies he utilized to enhance the consolidation for students, Mr. Myers revealed that students had input in selecting the school colors, the mascot, and even the school name. Mr. Myers stated:

The students picked school colors, mascots, and things like that. We involved the students in quite a lot of it. As a matter of fact, they picked the name of the school.

Mr. Myers explained that both schools held nominations and decided on their top three choices. He continued:

We would have a deal at Sentry and they would have a deal at Andrew and we would come up with the top three names in both places. Then we put all three of those on a ballot of six, or we might narrow it down to two or three. But the student bodies picked the school name, school colors, and things like that.

Mr. Myers also accounted for bringing the students together for programs such as a drug-free assembly and a cooperative baseball team during the spring before consolidation. Mr. Myers admitted:

There was a time or two that spring we would have like a drug-free assembly. We would have a program and bring all of them together just to get them together. Also that spring, our baseball team and their baseball team co-oped.

The superintendent asserted:

So we got a jump on it right there. The kids were together that spring and playing on the same teams even before the vote.

Of these strategies utilized for students, Mr. Myers fostered:

It probably had something to do with the way everything went. The votes at both communities were like eighty-something percent for it.

Mr. Landry agreed that students were involved in the consolidation process. Strategies discussed by Mr. Landry and utilized for students included "bringing them together." Mr. Landry disclosed:

We had some joint student activities before the actual consolidation. We had students that were going to be going to a new building at a new school. We had visitation days, things of that nature.

Mr. Landry also explained that students were part of the community committees appointed by each school board. He presented that the committees "met together several times."

The feasibility study submitted by the State Department supported information gathered from the semistructured interviews. The study recommended that the school boards decide how the name of the district, the mascot, and the school colors would be decided. Also pertinent to students, was the decision of which campuses to maintain and for which grades. The feasibility study urged the school boards to focus on the increased educational opportunities that could be provided students.

School board minutes revealed discussions by the boards on student programs such as vocational agriculture, technology education, band, and vocal music. The boards of education approved these programs and furthermore, agreed to hire both agriculture teachers. Board minutes also showed that the name of the new district would be Timberlake, and the mascot, Volunteers. Other board action which enhanced curriculum opportunities for students, according to researcher notes, was the approval of a vocational technical school for the district.

The consolidation plan revealed strategies that enhanced the consolidation for students. Activities at

both sites and new athletic uniforms were included in the plan.

Question 4: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?

When presented the question concerning the support staff, Mr. Landry indicated:

We kept them equally informed. They were part of it. The social gatherings were not just for teachers, they were for everybody.

However, Mr. Myers revealed that the support staffs "weren't involved in the process." He pointed out they "were treated as members of the community." Mr. Myers also stated that none of them "lost their jobs."

Mr. Landry supported the notion that job security was protected for the support staff. He contended that "all the support people that wanted to stay had a job."

The consolidation plan indicated that both sites would remain open, which grades they would maintain, and the activities and events scheduled for each facility. This action by the boards of education enhanced job security for the support staff. The State Department feasibility study suggested that the boards discuss which support employees would be retained and how those not required for staffing would be assisted. The study further recommended that the boards discuss these matters in open meetings and any

agreements should be included in the board minutes.

Researcher notes showed that all of the support staff kept their jobs according to Mr. Landry.

Question 5: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?

Mr. Myers indicated that he and the other administrator from Sentry did not accept positions with the consolidated school. Mr. Myers presented:

The only job I was interested in was superintendent, and that was only if Mr. Landry didn't want it. He only lacked a year or two retiring, so I didn't pursue the superintendent's job. He had been there longer than me, he wanted it, and he was from that part of the state. I would have been interested only if he didn't want it.

Mr. Myers further stated:

I had one principal, a K-12 principal. He and I were the two that didn't get a job in the new system. All the rest of the certified people did get a job in the new system.

Mr. Myers indicated that he and the principal knew they "were going to draw eighty percent of their pay for one year" from the consolidated district and that he and "the other guy were wanting to leave that part of the state."

Mr. Landry stated the "superintendent from Sentry was one of the positions eliminated." Mr. Landry further disclosed that the displaced administrators "received the payment." Other strategies Mr. Landry revealed included

joint planning of the consolidation process. He indicated:

We worked very closely together on this. We got together with the State Department and we worked prior to the election. We worked pretty closely together on coming up with the pros and cons of the consolidation and the meetings with the communities and teachers.

Deciding who the chief administrator of the new school district would be was one recommendation made to the two school boards by the feasibility study submitted by the State Department of Education. Also, determining how those employees not used in staffing the new school would be assisted was suggested by the study. These issues, along with others, were stated to be major topics that the Andrew and Sentry school boards should discuss in open meetings. The feasibility study also stated that the boards should put in writing any agreements they reached.

The finance section of the feasibility study reported five advantages to the consolidation. Number five stated that there could be some reduction in administrative costs. Researcher notes showed that the two administrators from Sentry received the eighty percent displacement money and left the district. No other administrators were reported to be hired.

The consolidation plan indicated that three sites would remain open after the consolidation. The high school would be located at Andrew, the middle school at Sentry, and the elementary at Andrew. Activities and special events were scheduled in both communities. School board

minutes revealed that Mr. Landry was approved as the consolidated school's superintendent and that the building principals from Andrew retained their previous positions. School board records also showed that administrators had input as to the duties and assignments of personnel employed by the new district.

Question 6: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?

Mr. Myers reviewed several strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process for the board members. One was to accept their goal of calling for a consolidation or annexation within three years of his being hired. Mr. Myers revealed:

I took the job in the spring and one of the goals the board gave me was to try to pass an annexation or consolidation within a three year period and that had come from a petition from the people of the community.

Mr. Myers further explained:

When I got there in the fall, and I got situated, I wrote a letter to every school district that was contiguous or was touching our school district. I told them that we were interested in a consolidation or an annexation and if any of them were interested in going in with us, they needed to let me know.

Mr. Myers indicated that five schools were interested in his proposal. He stated that all of the "school districts had a superintendent's meeting" and they all "had a committee in each community." The committees included one

or two board members so they "could get together and meet" without establishing a quorum of the board. Through the process, three of the schools eventually "dropped out" and left only Sentry and Andrew.

Another strategy utilized for board members, according to Mr. Myers, was to involve another superintendent experienced in school consolidation. Mr. Myers contended that the experienced superintendent helped "a whole lot just on planning and how to do different things." The State Department feasibility study was also cited as productive for the board members.

Mr. Landry concurred that the State Department was involved in the consolidation process. He stated that "we worked together with the State Department." Mr. Landry submitted that the community committees were also a productive strategy. He presented that "each board appointed a committee to work on the consolidation." He disclosed that "two board members" served on the committees along with "two community members and the superintendent." Mr. Landry fostered the notion that "each school put some kids" on the committee, also.

Mr. Landry reviewed the strategies involved in selecting the new board for the consolidated school. He indicated:

Each individual board, themselves, took on the process of how to appoint the members that would be on the new board, to select the members that would be on the new board. Andrew was given three positions at that time and Sentry two positions.

Mr. Landry continued:

They went through their own process to elect their own members. So it was set up that way. Andrew took the three shortest terms and Sentry had the two longest terms to help balance that all. After that point, whenever a vacancy became open, either one of the communities could apply.

School board minutes indicated that the State Department of Education was utilized to help in the consolidation process. A feasibility study was requested by the school boards approximately nine months prior to the consolidation. The State Department was also asked to call for an election to consolidate Sentry and Andrew. School board minutes revealed the selection process of board members for the new district. The minutes stated that the members used a written sheet with all of their names listed alphabetically as a primary nomination sheet. The board members then aligned their preferences in rank order, one through five, with one being their first choice. The three board members from Andrew with the lowest scores were recommended to serve on the new board of education with two members from Sentry.

The feasibility study submitted to the school boards suggested the members discuss how the new board would be formed and who would hold each seat. The study recommended that the boards discuss major issues in open meetings and record any agreements in board minutes. The feasibility study revealed advantages to the consolidation. One was

the possible reduction in per capita cost for course offerings. Another stated that H.B. 1017 mandates could more easily be met. Other advantages to consolidating and presented to the board members were that the district would be eligible to apply for voluntary consolidation assistance funds and the district would have preference to receive competitive grants.

School board minutes reflected joint board meetings between Andrew and Sentry. Researcher notes indicated that another superintendent experienced in school consolidation was used as a resource, as were State Department personnel.

Question 7: What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

When asked about strategies that proved nonproductive, Mr. Myers stated that the feasibility study "didn't seem to me that it told a whole lot." He fostered:

It just told what the new school might look like after the consolidation. I didn't think it told a whole lot to be honest with you.

Mr. Myers also proposed that the hiring of two agriculture teachers may not have been productive. He disclosed:

The only thing they did that I disagreed with the whole time was they hired two ag teachers, even with the vocational department telling them they didn't need it. But, Mr. Landry wouldn't tell them that and, as you know, Southwestern Oklahoma has been real big in ag.

Mr. Myers surmised that "both ag teachers were well liked and they didn't want to get rid of either one of them." He then stated:

But I think they ended up having to do it in a few years because of the money. But that is about the only thing they did in the whole thing that I didn't agree with, and it was already known that I wasn't going to be a part of the new school, so I just kind of stood back to the side. When I was asked, I told them what I thought. But that was one of the things they did that they made a mistake on which could have saved them forty or fifty thousand dollars a year.

Mr. Landry could not recall strategies he thought nonproductive. He submitted:

I can't think of any offhand. Of course you are always going to have some people that don't seem to be happy with it. It seemed like there were people who said, now my taxes are going to go up and so forth, or I don't want my kids traveling that far. Basically, the folks that were most vocal on it had some children in school.

Mr. Landry concluded:

We did a lot of publicity on it, though. We had a lot of coverage in the newspapers. We tried to stress the positive points.

School board minutes revealed the process in hiring the additional agriculture teacher. Board minutes indicated the decision to hire the Sentry instructor was tabled twice before he was finally approved and the decision to have two instructors was made. At one point, according to the minutes, the board decided to table all discussions concerning the agriculture program until a decision concerning the teachers could be made. Other strategies suggested to be nonproductive during the consolidation process were not found in researcher notes, the feasibility study, or the consolidation plan.

CONSOLIDATION #8Lyndale School District

Lyndale School was located in the northwest quadrant of Oklahoma. It was a small, rural school located approximately 120 miles from the nearest metropolitan area. The last school year before the consolidation with Fittsview, Lyndale had ten teachers in the high school and 14 elementary teachers. There were 164 students in grades pre-kindergarten through eight and 75 in high school, grades nine through twelve. Other than the pre-kindergarten class which had just one student, the smallest class was 11th grade with 14 students. The largest enrollments occurred in the first, second, and tenth grades, each having average daily memberships of 22. There was one black student reported on Lyndale's minority population report included in the school's consolidation feasibility study. No dropouts were disclosed between 1987 and 1991.

General curriculum offered the students at Lyndale was limited because of the school's size. The state's minimum standards were met along with electives in business education, German, Spanish, technology education, drivers' training, and vocational agriculture. The school was served by a vocational school located about 30 miles from Lyndale. Federal programs included Chapter 1 which

generated \$31,589 into the district, Chapter 2 with an allocation of \$2,162, and Drug Education that provided \$1,934. More than 40 percent of the Lyndale students qualified for free or reduced lunches, and with an average of 194 students participating in the lunch program, federal reimbursement in 1991-92 was \$24,830.74.

Reported by the State Department of Education's facility evaluation in 1992, the Lyndale campus covered six acres and maintained six separate buildings. The elementary building, built in 1968, had 11,696 square feet and was in good condition. Reported deficiencies with the brick and block building were an inadequate fire alarm system, the need to re-roof, and the lack of sufficient square footage per elementary child. Space guidelines for elementary facilities recommended by the State Department indicated 38 square feet per elementary child were minimal. Before the consolidation Lyndale's elementary school evaluation revealed 34 square feet per child.

The main building of the high school was built in 1981, had 25,440 square feet, and was reported to be in good condition. Other buildings located on the Lyndale campus included a 16,690 square foot gymnasium built in 1958, a vocational agriculture/industrial arts facility in average condition with 4,179 square feet, an administration office with 1,600 square feet in good condition, and a combination horticulture/dressing room structure built in

1956 with 3,000 square feet and evaluated to be in good condition. The campus was easily accessed via state highways. Total square miles in the district were 138 with eight busses in operation. The average daily haul was 124 students, which represented almost 52 percent of the total student population.

A State Department finance report conducted as part of Lyndale's feasibility study presented \$337,700 in tentative state aid for the 1992-93 school year. Valuation for the district was shown at \$8,954,562. County four-mill levies collected in 1990-91 were \$38,742. School land earnings the same year tallied \$14,578. Other revenues that year, and monies generated, were gross production taxes, \$52,047; motor vehicle tax, \$68,877; and the R.E.A. tax, \$15,993.

During the semistructured interview the Lyndale superintendent, Mr. Horton, revealed that he had been at Lyndale all of his life. He stated that he had grown up and gone to school there and had graduated in 1965. His first teaching job after attending a Northwestern Oklahoma university, was in Fittsview, where he served four years. After leaving there and working one year at the local state school for boys, the administrator pointed out that Lyndale hired him as a coach/math teacher in 1976. In 1981 he began his administrative career as elementary principal and moved into the superintendency three years prior to the consolidation. Mr. Horton explained that when the Lyndale

board hired him as superintendent they highly encouraged him to stay after consolidation. The superintendent revealed that he immediately began contacting area schools which might be interested in consolidating. While the Lyndale consolidation began with a possible five school merger, when it came time to "sign on the dotted line," Mr. Horton stated that only Lyndale and Fittsview remained. The "super school" concept fell apart, admitted the superintendent, but the desire to control their destiny continued to drive the Lyndale district. Mr. Horton asserted that they "were looking at consolidation for the simple fact that we wanted to make the decision and not the State Department or Legislature."

Fittsview School District

The Fittsview School District was a small, rural school located in Northwestern Oklahoma. Enrollment was 141 students the year prior to consolidation. There were 20 classroom teachers employed with eight at the high school and 12 working in the elementary. The last graduating class represented the smallest enrollment of all grades at Fittsview that final school year. There were six students scheduled to graduate. The largest groups of students were the second and third graders with 15 enrolled in each of those classes. No minority students and no dropouts were reported in the State Department feasibility study for consolidation.

With 141 students and eight high school teachers, curricular opportunities were limited at Fittsview. Elective courses were offered in German, home economics, and vocational agriculture. The school was not served by a vocational technical district.

Federal programs enhancing Fittsview's curriculum included Chapter 1, \$18,720; Chapter 2, \$1,564; Title II, \$506; and Drug Education, \$1,365. The federal lunch program served 89 percent of the students daily. Almost 40 percent of the pupils qualified for free or reduced lunches according to the State Department child nutrition report. Federal reimbursement to Fittsview's school lunch program tabulated to \$15,432.96 in 1991-92.

A facility evaluation filed prior to the consolidation showed the Fittsview Elementary School, kindergarten through eighth grade, located on 20 acres in a different county than the twelve acre high school campus. The campuses were separated by seven miles along a U.S. highway. The elementary building, built in the 1930s, was reported in good condition and had 17,534 square feet. Elementary students had access to a 10,482 square foot gymnasium built in the 1950s. It, too, was evaluated by the State Department in good condition.

Fittsview High School comprised a 1950s main building, an east wing built in 1956, and a vocational agriculture building constructed the same year as the main building.

All of the high school buildings were described in average condition except the 3,200 square foot agriculture facility which was characterized as in poor condition. The main building and east wing combined for 29,042 square feet. Some outside wiring associated with the Fittsview Schools was cited as not up to generally accepted standards. Student/teacher ratios and square footage per student both surpassed state minimal standards.

The transportation section of the State's feasibility study disclosed 259 square miles in the Fittsview District. The school operated six busses and transported 83.7 percent of its students. The east portion of the district was submitted as having road problems during inclement weather.

In the financial services section of the feasibility study, it was reviewed that Fittsview would receive \$253,216 in state aid for the 1992-93 school year. The actual valuation of the district was reported to be \$9,351,839. County four-mill levies collected in 1990-91 were \$29,766. School land earnings accounted for \$10,956 in 1990-91. Other taxes collected in 1990-91 were gross production, \$39,354; motor vehicle, \$50,694; and R.E.A., \$31,568.

The Fittsview superintendent, Mrs. Earls, shared her experiences at the school. Mrs. Earls formulated that she had originally moved to Fittsview as high school principal. Money was tight she said, and when the superintendent

consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?

"They were ready," revealed Mr. Horton when discussing strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation for teachers. He stated:

They knew something was going to have to happen. They were wanting to get it over with and get settled back into a routine that they wouldn't have to worry about whether or not they were going to have a job the next year. Stability is a real big thing for teachers. Both Lyndale and Fittsview teachers were 100 percent for it. I didn't have one teacher that was negative. That helped a lot. They did a lot of campaigning for me, too.

Mrs. Earls agreed that job security was important for teachers. She commented:

Obviously it impacted them a lot. They were concerned as to whether or not they would have jobs. But we all met together and we met from the beginning. You have to reassure them that this is alright, this is going to work, you will be fine. And assure them on a personal level that this is alright.

Mrs. Earls discussed the human relations side of the consolidation process. She proposed:

When you are in a building all by yourself, just you and them, I mean there were eight or nine of them at a time and me, it is not us versus them, teachers and administration. You are all there, you are family.

Mrs. Earls continued:

I have always had an open door. Sometimes that has been a problem not having any, you know, real separate time to work on anything. But when somebody needs to talk, you talk to them. The people come before the paperwork.

The feasibility study submitted by the State Department of Education recommended that the school boards

discuss in open meetings which teachers would be retained to staff the new school and how those not required would be assisted. The study suggested that any agreements made by the boards could not bind a new board, but should provide a good faith effort and direction to the new board of education.

The consolidation plan indicated that sites would remain open in three of the four communities served by the present schools. The superintendents stated that as many of the present teachers as possible would be retained. An area newspaper ran articles on the consolidation issue for approximately three months prior to the election. One article reported parts of the consolidation plan and quoted the superintendents concerning job security for teachers.

Question 2: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?

Mr. Horton contended that community meetings were held at both sites in order to share the consolidation plan with parents and community members. He disclosed:

We held community meetings. We just had both boards sitting there with both superintendents, and just answered questions and told them about our plans of what we were going to try to do, and that our number one goal was to make a better school for the kids, to be able to provide a better education.

Mr. Horton submitted that keeping the parents and community

informed was critical. He stated:

We tried to, through committee meetings, through invitations, through news articles, you know, tried to keep them informed of what we were trying to do and to encourage them to come to the meetings and ask questions. The ones that were real concerned did and the others felt like it was the best thing anyway. They accepted it real well.

Mr. Horton asserted that "being honest with people" is important. He further suggested that strategies should include "telling the people like it is and whatever you tell them, you want to try to do it." Mr. Horton continued:

Because, if you tell them one thing and do something else, you are flirting with a disaster out here, anyway. They like a person, and that is what the other superintendent and I tried to do in those meetings, if we were telling the people that we were going to try and do this, we did it. We made sure that first year that we did it.

Mr. Horton submitted that "98 percent" of what the superintendents "tried to do then, they are still doing now." He fostered that "as long as you try to do that, you will be okay."

Mrs. Earls discussed community meetings as part of the consolidation process. She indicated:

If you ever want to draw a crowd, just talk about consolidation where one of the buildings could get closed. We had board meeting after board meeting that we had to hold in the cafeteria, and occasionally in the auditorium, because we had that many people. So our board meetings became public. I mean big time public events. Newspapers, radio, TV station people, all showed up. I had TV cameras in the hall interviewing kids.

Mrs. Earls pointed out that the consolidation "managed to

not close the school in any of the sites." She admitted "that was a big deal, because if you close a school, a town dies."

Another strategy utilized by Mrs. Earls for parents and the community were surveys. Mrs. Earls disclosed:

We used a series of surveys after we were through talking about it. We sent out formal surveys that the board and I worked on together. We very carefully asked some questions and we sent them to homes. We mailed them out to everybody so that everybody got a copy. They were all going to have to vote, not just parents.

Mrs. Earls indicated that the parents and community were surveyed "at least twice" and "maybe a third time." She submitted that "it almost got to the point that they were surveyed to death." Mrs. Earls contended that "some of them finally said just either you know what, or get off the pot."

Mrs. Earls submitted community committees were utilized to enhance the consolidation process. She explained that she "chaired community committees on finance and curriculum." Mrs. Earls explained to the committees "how a school runs." She pointed out that she "in essence, taught classes on this is how schools work." Mrs. Earls concluded:

A lot of people in consolidations leave out those people who don't have kids in school and aren't employed by the school. And we didn't, on purpose. They were everybody else's grandma, neighbor, all those folks who have lived there all their lives who vote but don't actually have kids in school. We went to churches, the ladies' club and talked to them. I mean, I talked to more Lion's Clubs, sewing circles, Sunday School classes, all that stuff.

Mr. Horton indicated:

You just kind of have a gut feeling with the people that you think will carry it, and if it is going to be enough to make it work. I think to be honest with people is important and tell them like it is. And whatever you tell them, you want to try and do it.

Newspaper articles reported the consolidation plan to patrons. The articles indicated joint board meetings and open meetings held at each of the communities involved in the consolidation. At one joint board meeting a superintendent and two board members from a nearby consolidated school were available to answer questions and provide suggestions.

The consolidation plan revealed that sites would remain open in three of the four communities impacted by the process. The plan also called for future school board elections to be at-large from the total new district. The consolidation plan indicated prior trophies and awards would remain with their respective buildings and all school records would be maintained in the central office. The superintendents were stated by newspaper articles as submitting that the consolidation would allow more courses to be offered and for upgrading the computer labs and libraries.

The State Department feasibility study recommended to the school boards strategies that would enhance the consolidation process for parents and the communities. One suggestion was to discuss in open meetings issues such as what would happen to trophies, awards, and other

memorabilia, where would the school records be preserved, and which campuses would remain open and for which grades. The feasibility study stated that any agreements reached by the boards should be in written form and made part of each board of education's minutes.

Question 3: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the students?

Mr. Horton proposed that the consolidation "was a real good thing for kids." He explained:

We were able to offer the Lyndale kids courses that the Fittsview kids had and then we were able to offer the Fittsview kids courses that the Lyndale kids had. So it just made a better situation for everybody.

Mr. Horton indicated that the students of the two schools had long established relationships. He explained:

Like I said, we are a real rural community out here. The county fairs, they practically run together. So as for students, the consolidation was very good. We were pretty good rivals in basketball and football. You know whenever you have that, you get to know each other real well.

Mr. Horton explained that the students, much like the parents, had seen programs and courses cut until "they wanted to see something go the other way." Mr. Horton concluded:

They had seen the negative side and didn't like that and wanted to see something positive. So there is no doubt that Red Oak, the new district, really provided that for everybody.

Mrs. Earls contended students "had their voice" in the

consolidation. She stated that "they had the same surveys" as parents and community members. Mrs. Earls further indicated:

They were also family. When you are talking about graduating classes of five, six, and eight, they are like brothers and sisters. They got together and they had a spokesperson that made presentations at the board meetings and the like.

Mrs. Earls also indicated that stress among students was a factor. She stated:

It is mega-stressful and that is something that has to be taken into consideration while you are working on it because there is a level of anxiety there among the staff and among the students that has to be dealt with. It has to be dealt with daily. Especially when they get these negative things at home.

Mrs. Earls explained how the students managed the stress of the consolidation. She submitted:

It divided the kids some because some of their parents were the ones against it. We tried real hard and the kids sort of decided among themselves here at school that we are us, we are not us and them, we are just us. And they made a conscious choice to leave it at the door and get an education while they were there.

Mrs. Earls pointed out that when the two schools merged the students "got their classes back, they got their advanced classes." She also indicated "they have gotten some of their programs back and are not having to see cuts."

The feasibility study stated that board members should discuss in open meetings issues that would enhance the consolidation process for students. Topics included which campuses would remain open and for which grades, how would school memorabilia and records be preserved, and how would

the school name, colors, and mascot be chosen. The feasibility study further suggested that school boards put in writing any agreements they reached and record them in board minutes.

The consolidation plan reported by an area newspaper indicated that the students in grades kindergarten through eleven would have input into the school name, the mascot, and the school colors. The reported consolidation plan indicated that the names of none of the present communities would be considered for the district name. The consolidation plan also revealed the proposed school sites for each grade level.

Newspaper articles stated that the school boards promised open transfer to students not wanting to enter the consolidated district and that the superintendents indicated that the consolidation could mean enhanced programs for students.

Question 4: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?

Mr. Horton indicated that the support staff was treated the same as other staff members. He contended:

We are kind of like a big family out here and if the certified people are involved in something then the support staff are right there beside them. It was pretty much the same thing, let's get on with this and see what is going to be better for the kids.

Mr. Horton further disclosed that "we didn't have to let anyone go and I think that was another thing that people saw."

Mrs. Earls also stated that the support staff was treated the same as certified staff. She indicated that "custodians, cooks, bus drivers, I mean, we were all together there." Mrs. Earls presented:

Like I said we were all family and when you stand around and talk you are usually talking in the kitchen. We had custodians married to other custodians in the other building, a custodian in one building married to the cook in the other building, and that kind of stuff.

Mrs. Earls contended that support people were involved in the community committees at Fittsview. She asserted that "bus drivers were in there on how the bus routes could be different and cooks were in on how you could satellite meals." Mrs. Earls concluded that "we all talked together from the beginning and they made choices, too."

The feasibility study prepared by the State Department of Education suggested that the school boards discuss in open meetings which support positions would be needed with the new district and how those employees not needed would be assisted. The study further recommended that any agreements made between the school boards be put in writing and become part of school board minutes.

The consolidation plan revealed that three of the four sites being utilized would continue to be maintained. Keeping as many buildings open as possible enhanced job

security for the support staff according to Mr. Horton. The newspaper articles reported the consolidation plan to patrons. They also advertised the joint school board meetings and public meetings held at all of the communities being affected by the consolidation. Mr. Horton added that the support people, like the teachers, were ready to see something done positively for the kids.

Question 5: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?

Mr. Horton disclosed that the "administrators tried to stay real close with their staff." He also revealed:

We had reduced to myself as being superintendent and the elementary principal and one other person as being the high school principal. Then at the Fittsview site, the high school principal and the superintendent were the same person and they had an elementary principal.

Mr. Horton continued:

So, we kept the faculty and the students as informed as we could about what was going on. Then in the consolidation, we actually had the right amount of administrators that we needed but, of course, there could only be one superintendent and I was selected for that position. But the other one had the chance of doing a middle school principal job. She decided not to do that and moved on.

Mrs. Earls discussed administrators at Fittsview. The superintendent stated that a nine month elementary principal and she were the only administrators at

Fittsview. Mrs. Earls indicated that she went "through three principals in the process." She presented:

One went to private business and had come from private business. He had been there six to eight years and then went back to private business. I hired a new kid out first year as a principal and he didn't work out too well. I hired another lady who had been a principal in another district and she didn't fit in the community. I hired another lady out of Redland who had been a classroom teacher, but in the area a long time. She is still there.

Mrs. Earls also disclosed that she worked very closely with the board throughout the process. She asserted that she "had been in from the beginning on all kinds of things."

Mrs. Earls indicated that she left Fittsview after the consolidation to become a high school principal in a larger district. According to researcher notes, she had the opportunity of staying with the consolidated school as middle school principal but elected to move. Mr. Horton retained the superintendent's position with the new district.

The State Department's feasibility study recommended that the two school boards discuss in open meetings how the chief administrator for the new district would be selected and how the employees not needed would be assisted. The study stated that the boards should put in board minutes any agreements they reached. The consolidation plan reviewed for this research did not indicate who the administrators of the new district would be, nor was that information found in the newspaper articles utilized.

Question 6: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?

Mr. Horton surmised that before Lyndale's consolidation, "there was a lot of schools out there looking at consolidation for the simple fact that they wanted to make this decision and not the State Department or legislature." He said that at Lyndale, "we wanted to control our destiny." Mr. Horton stated that the board "highly encouraged him to stay after consolidation," and that "it was just a matter of finding the right one that you could work with." Mr. Horton stated:

My first year as superintendent, I actually had Fittsview and all of their board, Waterford School and their board, Redden and their board, Florentine and their board, and then Lyndale all sitting in the auditorium at Lyndale discussing a huge consolidation. So they mentioned us in the paper as the super school. But we met a couple of times and it fell apart.

Mr. Horton then revealed:

Then the board and myself, we went to a meeting with Sentry, Andrew, and Bellvue and considered something that way. And that fell apart, so we went back to the school that was north of us which was Fittsview and the school which was south of us which was Waterford.

Mr. Horton explained that the three schools "had several meetings" and finally Lyndale decided it "would try a consolidation with Waterford." He further submitted that Fittsview "was wanting to visit with Walker, Hitchville, and Maline to their east, so they kind of backed off and

went that way." Mr. Horton stated that the Waterford superintendent and he "were at the point where we were getting ready, and it was December." The Mr. Horton disclosed:

We had all the studies done that you need to have done. We were at the point to call for a resolution and some how, some way, somebody notified the Waterford superintendent that the information he had on finances wasn't quite right. So he went to the State Department and found out that the person was right. And instead of gaining money we were going to lose money. So, after we found out we were going to lose big time money, we said there was no way we were going to put our districts through this. So that fell through.

Mr. Horton continued:

When we went back to the board and got hold of Fittsview, they had gone through what they wanted to with those schools north of them and they didn't like their scenario. That is when we sat down and started getting serious.

Mrs. Earls discussed strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation for the Fittsview board members. She revealed that her board "was very active," and that her leadership style is "by no means autocratic." Mrs. Earls admitted:

The board were small town people used to talking things out. They wanted to be in on all the decisions, and they had been from the beginning. So we talked things over a lot and they did a lot of directing.

Mrs. Earls also referred to utilizing a board committee as a strategy to enhance the consolidation. She stated that the board committee worked on the "series of surveys after we were through with the talking around part." The

committee also helped compile the surveys after they were completed by the community. Mrs. Earls contended:

We tallied, I tallied, and combined, and we looked, and we turned it this way, and that way to see what their lines of thought were.

Mrs. Earls concluded:

For board members, information, information, information; training, training, training; talk, talk, talk. And by golly, if they weren't comfortable with it, it wasn't going to happen.

Newspaper articles revealed joint board meetings held between the Fittsview and Lyndale school boards. Articles also reported the consolidation plan to patrons and advertised the public meetings scheduled by the boards at all of the communities involved in the consolidation. The newspaper pointed out election dates and items on the ballots.

According to the State Department's feasibility study, the school boards should discuss how the new board would be formed and how its members would be selected. The study recommended that the boards discuss these topics in open meetings, put the agreements in writing, and make them part of their board minutes.

The reported consolidation plan revealed that the new school board would consist of three members from Lyndale and two from Fittsview. The plan called for the members of the current boards to select the new members. The consolidation agreements also stated that future elections would be held at-large from the total new district.

Question 7: What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

Mr. Horton warned that "if you promise the patrons things, and when you put the consolidation together you only do part of them, then you may be in trouble." He asserted, "I mean they will be on you." Mr. Horton also disclosed that one of the communities would be losing their school and "when a consolidation closes a school in a small town, that is about the end of the town." Mr. Horton proposed that although the community members "are probably not holding it against us, it is a sad day when you lose your school." In closing, Mr. Horton stated:

It was interesting. Personally, I don't want to have to do another one. But consolidation is something that nobody ever wants to do. Yet there is a time that school districts realize that it is better for the kids. If you are not doing it for the kids, then you are doing it for the wrong reason.

Mrs. Earls acknowledged:

Openness is great and everybody gets a chance to have their two bits in. But the problem is that whenever everybody gets a chance to get their two bits in, you get more information than you can channel into manageable chunks and directions. You get way too many options and way too many choices. Everybody thinks that their suggestion should be looked at as seriously as everybody else's and some of them haven't got a snowball's chance and aren't even in the world of reality.

Mrs. Earls explained that by creating a sense of openness, a superintendent "often spends more time putting out little fires that had you been more closed-mouth, may not have ever cropped up."

Mrs. Earls emphasized giving the facts up front so the opposition "could not throw half-truths at the community." She stated that if you are "personable, honest, and look them straight in the eye," then people will trust you and your decisions. Mrs. Earls surmised that the consolidation was "trial by fire." She concluded:

It is like having your arm chopped off an inch at a time. And if you expect anybody to appreciate you after your gone, forget it. But you do what you have to do, because it is the right thing.

One strategy agreed upon by the school boards and made part of the consolidation plan was to close the facility in one of the communities served by the consolidated district. Newspaper articles reported that opponents of the consolidation disagreed with this strategy and objected to the long distance from their area to Lyndale, where the new high school would be housed. According to the article, the parents living in the community wondered if the open transfer promised by the boards would lead to an exodus of students and would cause the closing of the proposed Fittsview elementary facility in the future.

SUMMARY

This chapter contains data collected from sixteen participants experienced in voluntary school consolidation. The participants each served as superintendent of an Oklahoma school district that voluntarily consolidated since H.B. 1017. The Oklahoma State Department of Education (1995) has reported 51 school consolidations

since H.B. 1017 with nine of those being voluntary (Appendix A). One of the superintendents involved in the voluntary consolidations could not be found, hence the consolidation he participated in was eliminated from the research. The remaining eight voluntary consolidations were used.

The superintendents involved in the eight consolidations were interviewed and the interviews were taped and transcribed. Other means of data collection included researcher notes, policy manuals, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted to the Oklahoma State Department of Education. The data was analyzed as soon as it became available and then again approximately ten days later. The data was presented as eight separate consolidations. The consolidations were numbered and fictitious names given to the people, places, and things. Demographic information on each district was presented followed by an analysis of the superintendents' responses to the seven research questions which were the focus of the semistructured interviews.

In Chapter V, the results of the content analysis will be discussed. Inferences drawn from the data will be reported and the effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation since H.B. 1017 will be identified.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Although America is no longer a predominately rural nation, "the majority of its school districts are located in very small towns and rural areas" (Glass, 1992, p. ix). Overall, small districts, defined as those having fewer than 3,000 students (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992), constitute approximately 75 percent of districts in the nation and provide the schooling for about 30 percent of the elementary and secondary school-age population (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992). Fifty-one percent of all districts are both small and rural (ERIC, 1991; Schmuck and Schmuck, 1992).

"As rural and small schools are typically the target of school consolidation, the threat of school closures persists as perhaps the most important concern in many American rural communities" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 1). As early as 1874, smaller schools were merging into larger ones (Potter, 1967). In the 1930s "there were 128,000 school districts and over 238,000 schools in America. By 1980, the number of school districts had dropped to 16,000 and schools to 61,000" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 1). Chance (1994) reported that between March 1980 and March 1988, the number of rural farm children decreased by 25 percent from 1.6 million to 1.2 million.

Since 1970, however, the rate of school consolidation has decreased (ERIC, 1990). Sher (1995) stated that "when size is mentioned at all, it is to decry today's mega-schools and to applaud smallness" (p. 145). Of the 15,912 school districts nationwide in 1981-82, 97 percent (15,577) were still operating in 1987-88 (U.S. Department of Education, 1989). Fowler (1992) declared that "it took the better part of half a century to make schools larger. If the next half century devoted itself to making schools smaller, the existing evidence suggests, it will be an effort well spent" (p. 16).

Seal and Harmon (1995) suggested that "changing schools means changing the community and its culture" (p. 119). The schoolhouse is more than just a place for children to receive instruction; it is also a place for many adult activities, such as social gatherings, political rallies, and dances (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Tyack, 1974). Benton (1962) stated that "consolidation is a subject most small, rural communities approach gingerly, if at all. Citizens have too much emotion invested in the local schoolhouse, the sports team, and the community's education heritage to do otherwise" (p. 1).

DeYoung and Lawrence (1995) indicated that school reformers throughout most of this century have attempted to create larger and more efficient schools. "School consolidations have been justified on two primary grounds:

(a) the bigger is better philosophy, and (b) economic efficiency" (Migyanko, 1992, pp. 45-46). DeYoung and Howley (1992) suggested that state policymakers and educational professionals spearhead efforts to consolidate "as moves toward improving cost effectiveness or accountability" (p. 1). Economy of scale, curricular advantages, greater student opportunities, and better facilities are all arguments for consolidating the smaller schools (DeYoung and Howley, 1992; DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Link, 1971; Stern, 1994).

The consolidation of schools has played a major role in school reform. Consolidation as a reform strategy has recently been encouraged and financially rewarded in Oklahoma with the passage of H.B. 1017, yet it is often met with anxiety and hostility from stakeholders. Rural communities across Oklahoma fear a loss of identity without their schools. This study was designed to collect information through semistructured interviews with selected Oklahoma superintendents experienced in school consolidation. The data was used to identify the strategies utilized by the superintendents that enhanced the consolidation process.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study identified effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a

voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017.

POPULATION

Since the passage of H.B. 1017 in November 1989, there have been 51 school consolidations reported in Oklahoma by the State Department of Education (1995) (Appendix A). Nine of the consolidations were voluntary, that is, the districts merged free of local, state, or federal mandates to do so. The schools and the new districts formed are identified below:

1. Carter G. Woodson and Porter formed Porter Consolidated School on January 9, 1990,
2. Fairfax and Ralston Schools became Woodland School, July 1, 1990,
3. Mountain View and Gotebo consolidated into Mt. View-Gotebo on July 1, 1990,
4. Blue and Bokchito became known as Rock Creek School, July 1, 1991,
5. Binger and Oney joined to become Binger-Oney on July, 1, 1991,
6. Fort Cobb and Broxton formed Fort Cobb-Broxton, also on July 1, 1991,
7. Ames and Lahoma merged to become Cimarron, date July 1, 1992,
8. Burns Flat and Dill City became known as Burns Flat-Dill City on July 1, 1993, and

9. Helena-Goltry and Jet-Nash formed Timberlake on the same date, July 1, 1993.

This study included data collected by the use of semistructured interviews from the superintendents involved in eight of the voluntary school consolidations since H.B. 1017. Nine voluntary consolidations have been reported (Appendix A) but one consolidation was not used because a superintendent involved in the process could not be found. This lack of data would have caused inconsistencies in the content analysis. The methodology required contrasting and comparing the data from both superintendents involved in a consolidation. With data from only one participant, this step of the content analysis could not be performed. Consequently, the consolidation was omitted. The superintendents from the other eight voluntary consolidations since H.B. 1017 agreed to participate. Other sources of data included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Borg and Gall (1989) cautioned that selecting a sample was "critical to the whole research process" (p. 215), and they surmised that in many cases small samples were more appropriate than studying a large population, especially when in-depth interviews were employed. In fact, the two researchers stated that "a study which probes deeply into

the characteristics of a small sample often provides more knowledge than a study that attacks the same problem by collecting only shallow information on a large sample" (Borg and Gall, 1989, pp. 236-237). Lincoln and Guba (1989) suggested that the usual criteria for objectivity is intersubjective agreement. A smaller sample was selected which improved the probability that findings would be credible when triangulating the data among multiple sources (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Borg and Gall, 1989).

The eight selected school districts were contacted by telephone in order to inquire about the superintendents serving the districts during the consolidation process. The superintendents were identified through the telephone calls and information acquired as to his or her present status. The superintendents were then contacted by telephone and asked if they would participate in the study.

All of the superintendents participating in the study were guaranteed anonymity and that no individual, school, or school district would be identified in any report of the research. In order to provide anonymity, fictitious names were provided so that the readers of this research might not tell where and from whom the data was collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was a descriptive, qualitative one. The data collected was "in the form of words or pictures rather

than numbers" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 30). Its purpose was to identify the strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort that enhanced the consolidation. The identified strategies may support a superintendent's efforts in designing a voluntary school consolidation process. The strategies were identified from data collected through semistructured interviews with Oklahoma superintendents experienced in a voluntary consolidation process since the passage of H.B. 1017. Other sources of data included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories told by participants (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). "They are also concerned with understanding behavior from the subject's own frame of mind" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 2). A phenomenological approach was utilized in order to better understand the meaning of the events and the interactions of the people involved in the consolidations (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Baden (1994) wrote that qualitative designs allow participants to talk in their own words and at their own level of understanding. The interview method was the primary tool of data collection for this study. Good (1972) found that 90 percent of social science research is based upon interviews and

questionnaires. Whereas, questionnaires are not a part of this research design, other means of data collection were incorporated. Researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the State Department were reviewed for data analysis. "The use of multiple-data-collection methods contribute to the trustworthiness of the data" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 24). Triangulation of the data among these multiple sources also improves the validity and credibility of the information (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

This study reflected a problem orientation, that is, of identifying strategies utilized to enhance an often threatening, fearful process, school consolidation. Bridges (1982) proposed:

If the researcher sought to identify the practical problems confronting school administrators, to uncover the various ways in which administrators deal with these problems, and/or examine the relative effectiveness of these administrative practices in alleviating these problems, the researcher was regarded as having a problem orientation (p. 16).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described the applied research design as one which seeks findings that can be used directly to make practical decisions about programs or practices. The identified strategies utilized by the participants of this study may well be used to improve school consolidation practices, thus establishing this study as applied research. Borg and Gall (1989) developed the notion that applied

research focuses on structures and processes as they appear in education practice, "with the goal of developing knowledge that is directly useful to practitioners" (p. 32).

An interview guide (Appendix B) was developed to help lead the researcher and "offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 92). As qualitative interviews vary in their degree of structure, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) contended:

In keeping with the qualitative tradition of attempting to capture the subjects' own words and letting the analysis emerge, interview schedules and observation guides generally allow for open-ended responses and are flexible enough for the observer to note and collect data on unexpected dimensions of the topic (p. 77).

Interview guide questions were maintained as the central theme for each participant interview.

The validity of the interview questions was strengthened through the involvement of others in the content analysis (Holsti, 1969) (Appendix C). First, the questions were sent to three University of Oklahoma professors for evaluation of content and construction. The process then involved soliciting input from three university professors in educational administration in other states who utilize qualitative research extensively. The third step included two Oklahoma superintendents experienced in school consolidation since H.B. 1017. They were given copies of the questions and asked to analyze them for clarity, appropriateness, and validity. All of the comments and

suggestions from these experts in the field were used to improve the content of the interview questions, thus strengthening the validity of the questions (Holsti, 1969).

One technique for insuring against flaws in the research design was a carefully planned pilot study (Borg and Gall, 1989). Pilot studies may identify biases in interview technique, question type, or question structure. Borg and Gall (1989) surmised:

A preliminary trial of research measures and techniques is essential to the development of a sound research plan. Whenever possible this preliminary trial should be enlarged into a pilot study...Pilot studies are carried out with fewer subjects than will be employed in the main study (p. 54).

An Oklahoma superintendent experienced in school consolidation since H.B. 1017 was used in the pilot study of this research. The semistructured interview was conducted in a manner similar to the actual research interviews. The interview followed the interview guide. It was taped and transcribed.

Upon completion of the pilot study involving the Oklahoma superintendent, the data was analyzed. Comments and suggestions were solicited from the participant and revisions in research design appropriately made. Adjustments in probing strategies and questioning sequence were considered. Pilot studies are the best insurance "against bias and flaws in design" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 464). Having others critique the pilot study and data

collected enhances the validity of the study (Borg and Gall, 1989).

Good (1972) stated that "the dynamics of interviewing begin with the concept that the interview is a process of communication or interaction" (p. 238). Gaining access to an educational institution can be a challenge (Reynolds and Wineburg, 1987). Many times the superintendents in small, rural schools have varied responsibilities and are too involved with other tasks to attend to an interview. Reynolds and Wineburg (1987) suggested that establishing rapport is a necessary part of gathering data from busy superintendents.

A written statement informing the superintendents of the purpose for the study (Appendix D) was provided (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The statement provided focus and structure for the interviews. A signed written consent to participate in the study (Appendix D) was required from each participant (Borg and Gall, 1989). The consent included the permission to tape record the interview. Borg and Gall (1989) suggested that using a tape recorder has several advantages, one being the reduction of the danger of bias. In fact, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) recommended tape recording when "interviewing is the major technique of the study" (p. 128). The tapes were transcribed for data analysis.

During the semistructured interviews, the researcher listened carefully to the information presented and tried to

understand the perceptions of the participants (Wolcott, 1990). The researcher's goal was to understand the subjects from their point of view (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

The confidentiality of the participants, the schools, and the communities was protected. Borg and Gall (1989) stated that "whenever possible, names of subjects should be removed from data-collection instruments and replaced by a code" (p. 87). Fictitious names were provided for the people, places, and things so that the readers of this research might not tell where and from whom the data was collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents in order to provide a more efficient, productive and less threatening consolidation process were identified through the data analysis of this study. The strategies significantly enhanced the consolidation process. The seven research questions were maintained as the focus of the study during the collection of the data and the content analysis. Below is a summary of the findings.

Research Questions

Question 1: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?

Strategies that enhanced the consolidation process for teachers included guaranteed job security, teacher

reassignments, an enhanced curriculum, faculty meetings, consolidation plan input, teacher displacement compensation, and community committee input. The strategies are outlined in Table 1.

<p style="text-align: center;">TABLE 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STRATEGIES USED THAT ENHANCED THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR TEACHERS</p>								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Job Security	yes	yes/no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
Reassignments	yes	yes	yes		yes			
Enhanced Curriculum						yes		
Faculty Meetings	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes
Consolidation Plan Input				yes	yes			
Teacher Displacement Compensation			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Community Committee Input					yes			

From the analysis of the data, four of the consolidations specifically indicated job security for teachers as a strategy utilized to enhance the consolidation process. Teachers needed to know their positions were secure before they were able to support the process and enhance it for others. Once their need of personal security was satisfied, teachers were able to encourage others.

One superintendent stated that job security for teachers was "top priority." Mr. Walters, the Mabel superintendent, concluded that "one of the biggest concerns for teachers was if they were going to have a job."

Three of the consolidations saw a loss in the number of teachers. Mr. Taylor, the Nona superintendent, described teacher loss as "sad spots" during the consolidation process. Mr. Steen and Mr. Rich, the Valley and Tin Mill superintendents, disagreed on job security for teachers during their consolidation. Mr. Steen indicated that "the teachers were brought together and told that they all had jobs," but Mr. Rich recalled that some loss of jobs did occur. The consolidation plan revealed that all of the Tin Mill staff were retained but that the teachers from Valley were in jeopardy of not being offered a position.

Reassignments of teachers were utilized as strategies to enhance the consolidation process, also. Without the flexibility of reassigning teachers, job security could not have been guaranteed in at least four of the consolidations. However, not all reassignments were productive. Mr. Martin indicated that his elementary principal at Reid did not accept an elementary teaching position offered him by the consolidated district. The principal resigned and was offered the teacher displacement compensation.

An enhanced curriculum was found as a strategy that proved productive for teachers during the analysis of the

Fayeview-Bowman consolidation. Mr. Hoover, the Bowman superintendent, indicated that additional state aid and access to money from state grants made it possible to enhance programs for teachers.

Faculty meetings were used in seven of the eight consolidations as strategies that enhanced the process for teachers. The Fittsview superintendent, Mrs. Earls, stated that "when somebody needs to talk, you talk to them. The people come before the paperwork." Mr. Alex of Agewater said that "the whole thing was an information thing." He stated that "we answered everything as honestly as we could about what the situation was." Mrs. Peterson, the Stony superintendent, revealed that the teachers "were under so much stress that we could barely keep our heads above water." Faculty meetings, she proposed, were utilized to help teachers feel more positive toward the consolidation.

Input from teachers on the consolidation plan was found to be a productive strategy in two of the school consolidations. Mr. Taylor disclosed that the faculty at Nona had a lot of input deciding "where we thought it would be best to consolidate our school." The Barley Heights-Mabel data revealed that teachers were included on community committees which enhanced the process for teachers. The committees made recommendations to the school boards as to certain things contained within the consolidation plan.

Compensation for teacher displacement was also an effective strategy according to the data analysis. The

information revealed that five of the consolidations compensated those teachers who lost their jobs because of the consolidation. The teachers were offered eighty percent of their salary for one year, plus they could secure a job in another district and continue to receive the money.

From the data presented, job security was found to be one of the most significant strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process for teachers. Five of the eight consolidations disclosed that job security for teachers was crucial during the process. Faculty meetings were also pointed out to be efficient strategies for teachers. Data from seven of the eight consolidations indicated that this strategy was utilized to keep the teachers informed and up-to-date. Compensating displaced teachers was another of the significant strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process. Five of the eight consolidations revealed that teachers who lost their jobs due to the consolidation were offered eighty percent of their salary for one year.

Question 2: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?

There were nine strategies identified through this study that enhanced the consolidation process for parents and the community. Community meetings, newspaper articles,

keeping all sites open, input on the consolidation plan, and open transfer policies for students were all demonstrated. Other strategies included committee input, enhancement of the curriculum and student activities, and utilization of opinion polls and surveys. Table 2 outlines the strategies.

TABLE 2								
STRATEGIES USED THAT ENHANCED THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Community Meetings	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Newspaper Articles	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Maintain All Sites	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no
Consolidation Plan Input	yes		yes	yes			yes	
Open Transfer	yes			yes				
Joint Board Meetings	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes		yes
Committee Input			yes				yes	yes
Enhanced Curriculum & Activities			yes	yes				yes
Opinion Poll/Survey			yes	yes		yes		yes

All eight of the consolidations studied utilized community meetings as strategies to enhance the consolidation for parents and the community. Mr. Alex proposed that "meetings in the evenings" were most advantageous to patrons at Agewater. Mr. Bates, the Big Rock superintendent, stated that after the school board and the staff, the parents should be the next group targeted.

"It was very important not to turn a patron away," Mr. Bates contended.

The eight consolidations also utilized newspaper articles as strategies for parents and the community. The Corndale Beacon, reporting on the Fayeveille-Bowman consolidation, stated that the Fayeveille community now faces the task of retaining its coherence as a town, while improving its capacity to educate its youth. The Fayeveille School site was closed as part of the consolidation plan. Mr. Rich of Tin Mill submitted that newspaper articles kept his community informed. He indicated that when he visited the senior citizens' group to discuss the consolidation, "they were already up on it, they had read the newspaper. Which is another thing, don't forget your local newspaper."

Keeping the schools open in the communities impacted by the consolidations was utilized in six of the eight consolidation processes. One of the consolidations maintained sites in three of the four communities and one consolidation saw a loss of at least one community school. Mr. Hoover discussed the closing of one of their sites at Bowman. He disclosed that the parents "were ready to close it down." The facilities would cost too much to renovate and maintain, Mr. Hoover submitted. Mr. Martin revealed:

Reid was one of the older schools in the state. The community was very supportive of the school and the school was important to the community which made it a little touchy in working with the consolidation.

Mr. Horton, the Lyndale superintendent, contended that "when a consolidation closes a school in a small town, that is about the end of the town." He concluded, "it is a sad day when you lose your school."

Input on the consolidation plan was utilized as a strategy to enhance the process for parents and the community in four of the eight voluntary consolidations. Mr. Myers indicated that parents at Sentry "met several times and talked things out" concerning the plan to consolidate in his district. The Barley Heights-Mabel consolidation data revealed that parents had input as to the name of the new school, which was part of the consolidation plan.

Open transfers for students enhanced the consolidation process for some parents and communities. Two of the consolidations revealed that it was an effective strategy. Open transfer policies were included in the schools' consolidation plans and became part of their official school board meeting minutes.

Joint board meetings were discussed in six of the eight consolidations as strategies that enhanced the process for parents and the community. Mr. Taylor presented that at Nona "we let anyone at the meeting talk or say whatever they wanted to." Mr. Stephens of Fayeveille stated that "we just tried to be honest with people and probably that was the main strategy that we had."

Three of the consolidations cited committee input as a strategy that enhanced the process for parents and the community. Mr. Myers indicated that at Sentry "at least two patrons served on the committee with two board members and the superintendent." He submitted that there were several committee meetings to just "hash things out."

Expanded curriculum opportunities and student activities also enhanced the consolidation process for parents and the communities. Three of the eight consolidations revealed utilization of this strategy. Mr. Martin, the Reid superintendent, disclosed that the consolidation "was to help the kids, not hurt the community or to hurt people."

Data from four consolidations revealed that survey and opinion polls were utilized as strategies to enhance the consolidation process. Mr. Taylor of Nona stated:

At one of our meetings we passed out our ballots, and on the ballots the people who attended more or less voted as to what their preference would be as far as the surrounding districts and where they would like their children to attend.

Mrs. Earls indicated patrons at Fittsview were surveyed at least twice and "maybe a third time. Some of them finally said, just either you know what, or get off the pot."

Community meetings and newspaper articles were utilized in all eight of the voluntary consolidations as strategies to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community. Joint board meetings were disclosed in six of the eight consolidations, as was keeping all existing sites

open for at least one to three years. Four of the eight consolidations cited patron input on the consolidation plan and opinion polls and surveys as strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community in their respective districts.

Question 3: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the students?

Strategies utilized to enhance the voluntary consolidation process for students included expanded curricular and activity opportunities, consolidation plan input, surveys and/or opinion polls, joint student-body activities, committee input, open transfers, and enhanced facilities. Students were very involved in at least three of the eight consolidation processes. Table 3 has a complete outline of the strategies utilized to enhance the consolidations for students.

Expanded curricular and activity opportunities were noted in all of the consolidations studied. Mr. Horton said of the consolidation at Lyndale, "it was a real good thing for kids." Mrs. Earls pointed out that the students in her district "have gotten some of their programs back and are not having to see cuts." Mr. Stephens proposed that chemistry and "other things like, for example, cheerleaders" enhanced the consolidation process for the students at Fayeveville. Mr. Walters summarized expanded opportunities

for the Mabel students. He stated that the students saw "advantages of being offered some things that they would not have been offered before." Mr. Bates from Big Rock indicated that you can say what you want to about athletics, but it has been a real unifying factor there."

<p style="text-align: center;">TABLE 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STRATEGIES USED THAT ENHANCED THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR STUDENTS</p>								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Expanded Curricular and Activity Opportunities	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Consolidation Plan Input	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes
Opinion Poll/Survey								yes
Joint Student- body Activities	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Committee Input					yes		yes	
Open Transfer	yes	yes						yes
Enhanced Facilities	yes							

Student input on the consolidation plan was utilized during seven of the eight consolidations. The consolidation plans included such things as the name of the new school, the mascot, and the school colors. Mr. Bates presented that students at Big Rock "probably had the biggest say in the school colors, school mascot, and school name." Mr. Bates continued, "we let the kids vote on their choices." Mrs. Peterson explained that students at Stony "through

consensus" chose the name of the school, the mascot, and the colors. Surveys were cited in one consolidation as being utilized to enhance the process for students. Mrs. Peterson contended that the students "had the same surveys" as parents and the community members.

Joint student-body activities were revealed by the data from seven of the eight consolidations. Mr. Myers stated that students at Sentry were brought together during a drug-free assembly in the spring, and that the two schools' baseball teams played together before the consolidation. Mr. Hoover revealed the two student councils of Bowman and Fayeville met with school counselors and that the students "went around with some of the kids to different classes and some of that." Mr. Steen explained that Valley students met during the summer "two to four times and put together a first day event."

Two consolidations utilized students on committees that provided input to the school boards concerning the consolidation. School board minutes from Barley Heights indicated that students were placed on a committee with faculty members and parents to gather suggestions for a school name, mascot, and school colors. Mr. Landry explained that students were a part of Andrew's community committee and that the students were appointed by the school board.

Open transfers for students were shown to be strategies utilized in three of the consolidations. The third item of

the consolidation plan for Tin Mill and Valley stated that transfers would be given to students if no other possible solution could be found. Newspaper articles reported that the school boards from Fittsview and Lyndale promised open transfers to students not wanting to enter their consolidated district. Enhanced facilities were utilized by one consolidation as a strategy for giving students support. Mrs. Peterson, the Stony School superintendent, stated that "we wanted the kids, when we came back to school, to see that place shine."

Three strategies that enhanced the consolidation process for students were utilized extensively. Expanded curricular and activity opportunities, consolidation plan input, and joint student-body activities were utilized in at least seven of the eight consolidations. Mr. Stephens, the Fayeville superintendent, stated that "a lot people think the students are the problem, but they are the least problem, they are the least." Mr. Taylor admitted that at Nona "it was just unreal. The kids adjusted overnight."

Question 4: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?

Five strategies were identified that enhanced the consolidation process for the support staffs. Job security, maintaining all sites, staff meetings, job displacement

compensation, and community committee input were all noted. Table 4 reveals an outline of the strategies and the consolidation which utilized each one.

Job security for the support staffs was found in all eight of the consolidations. Mr. Walters explained that job security "was the number one issue" with the support staff at Mabel. The Agewater newspaper, reporting on their consolidation, stated that the continued employment of all the support personnel was addressed in the Agewater consolidation plan.

Maintaining sites in the communities affected by the consolidation was another significant strategy. Six of the eight consolidations reported that no community would lose its school. Along with maintaining sites, support staff

<p style="text-align: center;">TABLE 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STRATEGIES USED THAT ENHANCED THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR THE SUPPORT STAFF</p>								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Job Security	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Maintain All Sites	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no
Staff Meetings	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Job Displacement Compensation			yes	yes	yes	yes		
Community Committee Input								yes

job security was further enhanced. Mr. Bates, the Big Rock superintendent, stated:

We were able to preserve all of their jobs because we still had to have custodians. We kept both plants open, and the schools were separated, so we had to have two cafeterias. So all of their jobs were preserved.

Dr. Williams admitted that the Barley Heights-Mabel School "could keep them, because we had extra money."

Seven of the eight consolidations revealed staff meetings as a strategy utilized to enhance the consolidation process for the support staffs. Mr. Steen stated that at Valley "each administrator went to their support people." Mr. Landry indicated that his support staff was kept "equally informed. They were part of it."

Job displacement money was found as a strategy for support staffs in four of the eight consolidations. Mr. Stephens stated that anyone not used at Fayeville would "receive the incentive money for one year." The Gerry-Nona consolidation plan stated that all personnel would be retained or would be paid eighty percent of their salary for one year. The incentive money, if accepted, would allow the employee to secure a position elsewhere and continue to receive the payment.

Community committee input was utilized for the support staff in one of the consolidations studied. Mrs. Earls presented that "bus drivers were in there on how the bus routes could be different and cooks were in on how you could satellite meals." She concluded that at Fittsview "we all

talked together from the beginning and they made choices, too."

Five strategies were identified through the consolidation data that enhanced the process for the support staffs. Job security was utilized in all eight of the consolidations. Maintaining the existing sites supported job security. This strategy was revealed in six of the eight consolidations. Staff meetings were used in seven of the consolidations which indicates that keeping the support staffs informed was an important strategy.

Question 5: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators?

Three strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process for administrators were consistent across the eight consolidations. Four strategies were identified with three being evident in all eight of the consolidations. Those revealed in all eight consolidations were pre-consolidation administrative appointments, job security, and consolidation plan input. The fourth strategy, job displacement compensation, was revealed in three of the consolidations. Table 5 outlines the four strategies and the consolidations in which they were utilized.

Pre-consolidation administrative appointments were found in all eight of the consolidations studied. The

TABLE 5
STRATEGIES USED THAT ENHANCED THE
CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR THE ADMINISTRATORS

	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Pre-Consolidation Administrative Appointments	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Job Security	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Consolidation Plan Input	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Job Displacement Compensation				yes		yes	yes	

feasibility studies submitted by the State Department of Education all recommended that the school boards discuss how the chief administrators for the new districts would be selected. The State Department further contended that administrators should be appointed early in the consolidation agreement process. Mr. Rich stated that at Tin Mill the administrators knew before the election "who would be superintendent, principals, and right down the line." Mrs. Peterson admitted that she recommended to the boards of education they put in the consolidation plan who would fill the administrative positions for her new school.

Job security for administrators was another strategy revealed in all eight of the consolidations. Although all superintendents were not retained as superintendents, they were all offered positions within the new districts. Principals, too, were offered comparable jobs with the

consolidated schools. Mr. Myers of Sentry indicated that "the only job he was interested in was superintendent, and that was only if Mr. Landry didn't want it." Mr. Steen agreed that job security was important to administrators. Mr. Steen reported that at Valley "the administrative staff stayed intact plus we hired one more, and we hired him from within the system." Mr. Taylor disclosed that he and his principal "were both offered positions" with the Nona and Gerry consolidated school district.

The third strategy identified in the consolidations studied was consolidation plan input. Mr. Rich of Tin Mill explained that a plan should "outline everything that is going to happen and everyone should know." Mr. Martin disclosed that at Reid the administrators "were an integral part of the process as it was going on." Mr. Taylor stated that the administrators at Nona "participated actively in the decision-making," which enhanced the process for them.

Job displacement compensation was discussed as a strategy to enhance the consolidation process for administrators in three of the eight consolidations. Mr. Myers stated that he and his principal at Sentry "knew they were going to draw eighty percent of their pay for one year" and that he and "the other guy were wanting to leave that part of the state." The Nona and Gerry consolidation plan stated that administrators there were guaranteed comparable positions or eighty percent of their salary for one year.

Three strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process for administrators were revealed through all eight of the consolidations. Pre-consolidation administrative appointments, job security, and consolidation plan input were significant strategies for the administrators.

Question 6: What strategies did the superintendents who have participated in voluntary school consolidation utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the board members?

Eleven strategies were utilized within the eight consolidations to enhance the consolidation process for board members. Those most evident included joint board meetings, consolidation plans, community meetings, board member selection agreements, and advisement from the State Department of Education. Other strategies included creating a seven-member board, using outside advisement, community committee input, school tours, board retreats, and opinion polls or surveys. A complete outline of the strategies utilized with each consolidation is contained in Table 6.

Joint board meetings were used in all eight of the consolidation processes. Mr. Martin spoke of joint board meetings held at Reid. He indicated that there "were a lot of really late night meetings," and that they proved "interesting." Mr. Martin further disclosed:

The boards would meet in separate rooms and then we would come together and we would meet as a group. Then we would separate again and talk about all the issues.

Mr. Hoover stated that his board "invited the Fayeview board over and they came and met with us, then we went over and met with Fayeview." Newspaper articles reported joint board meetings held between the Fittsview and Lyndale school boards.

TABLE 6
STRATEGIES USED THAT ENHANCED THE
CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR THE BOARD MEMBERS

	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Joint Board Meetings	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Consolidation Plan	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Community Meetings	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Board Member Selection Agreements	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Seven-member Board	yes		yes					
State Department Advisement	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Other Advisement	yes		yes				yes	
Community Committee Input							yes	yes
School Tours				yes		yes		
Board Retreats			yes					
Opinion Poll/Survey			yes	yes		yes		yes

The utilization of a consolidation plan was exhibited in the eight consolidations, also. The feasibility studies

submitted by the State Department recommended that the boards of education agree to certain things and that these agreements be put in writing and made a part of their board minutes. Mr. Steen of Valley indicated that "the consolidation plan helped guide the board's decisions." Mr. Walters, the Mabel superintendent, discussed how his district's consolidation plan was developed. He stated that Dr. Williams and he spent several hours figuring out "how we wanted to present this to our boards." The Tin Mill superintendent, Mr. Rich, concluded that "the main thing is to believe in your program. Don't go forward until you have your plan in sight and both boards agree to it."

Another strategy evident within all eight of the consolidations was community meetings. Dr. Williams revealed that open meetings can be nonproductive. "Every nut in the world came out," he stated. Mrs. Peterson from Stony submitted that "our big problem was that everyone had questions, or demands, or complaints, or wanted to yell and scream, or things like that." Mr. Steen, during his consolidation process, declined at one point to comment to the press until a Valley town meeting could be held. Mr. Hoover presented that Fayeveille "had a community meeting and I went over and visited with them and answered any questions they had."

Pre-consolidation board member selection agreements were utilized in all of the consolidations studied. Mr. Burman submitted that "they decided among themselves, the

two boards did, that Gerry would have three board members on the new board and Nona would have two." Mr. Landry stated that his board members at Andrew "went through their own process to elect their own members." Mr. Taylor submitted that at Nona "they kind of did a lottery thing to see who was going to stay and who wasn't. You know, just put the names in the hat and draw them out or something like that."

The decision to form a new seven-member board was made during two of the consolidations. Mrs. Peterson commented that she worked with their senator "on going to the seven-member board." Mr. Bates indicated that the seven-member board was an idea his board at Big Rock "hashed and hashed a long time. They finally decided to go with a seven-member board, probably because it wouldn't displace as many board members."

Utilizing State Department personnel and reports was a strategy incorporated by all of the consolidations. The feasibility studies submitted by the State Department of Education were used to various degrees by the boards. The studies contained several recommendations for the boards to consider. Reports within the feasibility studies discussed the schools' finances, transportation needs, special education programs, lunch programs, personnel, and the schools' facilities. State Department personnel were also called upon to attend joint board meetings and community meetings in order to answer questions for patrons and board

members. Dr. Williams added that the State Department helped the Barley Heights board "draw up certain agreements" pertaining to the consolidation.

Other outside advisement was utilized to enhance the consolidation process for the board members in three of the consolidations. Mrs. Peterson reported "working with our senator" and other superintendents experienced in school consolidation. Mr. Martin of Reid shared that he "tried to contact as many people as we could and get as much information as to what would be the best way to go." Mr. Myers contended that at Sentry utilizing another superintendent experienced in consolidation helped "a whole lot just on planning and how to do different things."

Board members serving on community committees were utilized in two of the eight consolidations. The Andrew superintendent, Mr. Landry submitted that "each board appointed a committee to work on the consolidation" and that "two board members" served on the committees along with "two community members and the superintendent." Mrs. Earls stated that her committee at Fittsview worked on a "series of surveys" and that they helped compile the results after they were completed by the community.

A tour of school facilities was conducted for board members during two of the eight consolidations. The Fayeview superintendent, Mr. Stephens, whose school was closed due to the consolidation, stated that his "buildings were not in good repair." Mr. Hoover indicated that his

board toured Mr. Stephens' school facilities. Board minutes from the Nona and Gerry consolidation showed that a special board meeting was called there so the two boards could tour the schools. After the tour, according to board minutes, there was considerable discussion over the consolidation.

Mr. Martin, the Reid superintendent, disclosed that he and his board "had several retreats." Mr. Martin stated that "we would get off in the country with the board members." This strategy, board retreats, was utilized in one of the eight consolidations.

Utilizing opinion polls or surveys to enhance the consolidation for board members was indicated in four of the eight consolidations. Mrs. Peterson explained that the board at Stony helped develop a series of community surveys and also to compile the results. Mrs. Peterson stated:

We tallied, I tallied, and combined, and we looked, and we turned it this way and that way, to see what their lines of thought were.

Mr. Stephens concluded that the consolidation at Fayeveille "wasn't an overnight thing. They had done some surveys, checks, and different things." Board minutes from Reid indicated that patrons there were surveyed at a basketball game in order to allow them input on their consolidation.

Five strategies to enhance the consolidation process for board members were found to be utilized in all of the eight consolidations studied. They were joint board meetings, consolidation plans, community meetings, pre-

consolidation board member selection agreements, and State Department advisement. The six remaining strategies appear inconsistently across the consolidations. These strategies may be more situational, that is, utilized according to the needs of the people and communities involved in the consolidation process.

Question 7: What strategies for voluntary consolidation were not productive?

There were nine strategies revealed during the consolidations that proved nonproductive. Three of the nonproductive strategies were indicated in more than one consolidation process. They were community meetings, closing schools, and the State Department feasibility studies. The remaining six nonproductive strategies were each found in one of the consolidation processes. These included forced consolidation, relocating or removing school memorabilia, relocating administrative furniture, seven-member boards, school name and mascot agreements, and job security for teachers. Table 7 outlines the nine nonproductive strategies and the consolidation in which each was revealed.

Forced consolidation proved nonproductive in the Stony-Agewater consolidation process. Mrs. Peterson stated that "there was a section of the Stony School District that was closer to Puma than it was to Stony. It was called Seaver." She added that some of the patrons of Seaver wanted their

<p style="text-align: center;">TABLE 7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STRATEGIES USED THAT WERE NOT PRODUCTIVE</p>								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Forced Consolidation	yes							
Removing School Memorabilia		yes						
Relocating Administrative Furniture		yes						
Seven-member Board			yes					
Community Meetings					yes			yes
School Name and Mascot Agreements					yes			
School Closings						yes		yes
State Department Feasibility Study						yes	yes	
Job Security for Teachers							yes	

children to attend the Puma schools, and the Agewater paper reported that the residents of Seaver wanted their tax money to follow their children there, also. Mrs. Peterson admitted that the Seaver community caused the first consolidation election in her district to fail. Mr. Alex presented that when another election was called "it was agreed upon that no one would be forced to consolidate." He continued that the Seaver community was given the option of annexing with Puma before the second election. The Agewater paper then reported that many issues of concern seemed to

have been resolved and the second election to consolidate passed.

A nonproductive strategy found in the Tin Mill-Valley consolidation was relocating and removing school memorabilia. Mr. Steen explained:

We promised the people that we would move some of the pictures, the senior panels, over to the other school. That was something that we thought of and really the public didn't care, so we just left those senior panels in the original building they were in.

Mr. Steen also explained that he had proposed the old mascots be removed from the gym floors, but "as it turned out, nobody really cared about that either."

Another strategy that Mr. Steen stated as nonproductive was the notion to relocate the administrative furniture. Mr. Steen admitted that "we decided that was kind of silly because most of our administrators don't necessarily have a this is my desk. They work with what they are given."

Mr. Bates asserted that "one thing I would really try to keep them from doing is going with a seven-member board." He explained that "it is hard enough to get five on the same track, and it is much more difficult to get seven."

Dr. Williams, the Barley Heights superintendent, stated that community meetings allowed "every nut in the world to come out." He admitted that "I swore I would never have another one." Other strategies that proved nonproductive during the Barley Heights-Mabel consolidation were the school name and mascot discussions and agreements. Mr.

Walters indicated that the two schools "had difficulties that were sometimes very stupid. One of the things was the name itself." Dr. Williams presented that "of all things, we got hung up on the name and I guess a lot of people do that." Dr. Williams also stated that selecting a mascot was nonproductive. He presented that "the mascot thing reared its ugly head before the election."

School closings were found in two of the eight consolidations. Mr. Hoover contended that his "big concern" was in closing the site at Fayeville. He pointed out that operating two sites "wasn't going to benefit either one of us." The Fittsview superintendent, Mrs. Earls, concluded that "you do what you have to do because it is the right thing." Mr. Alex of Agewater submitted that "when you get into your schools, it is kind of like closing your church somewhere."

The State Department feasibility study was shown to be nonproductive in two of the eight consolidations. Mr. Stephens stated that at Fayeville one of "the hardest things" to do was predict next year's revenue from the feasibility study. He contended that "the figures were not as current" as they needed to be "to do the planning that you wanted to."

One of the eight consolidations revealed that securing all of the teachers' jobs was nonproductive. Mr. Myers proposed that during his consolidation at Sentry the hiring of both agriculture teachers was not a productive strategy.

He revealed that the State Department told the boards they didn't need both of them but the teachers "were well liked and they didn't want to get rid of either one of them."

Three strategies presented as nonproductive were revealed in more than one of the eight consolidations. They were community meetings, school closings, and the feasibility studies submitted by the State Department of Education. There were nine nonproductive strategies reported by the superintendents involved in the eight consolidations. It should be noted that nonproductive strategies are situational, that is, a strategy proposed as not being productive during one consolidation could have been a very worthwhile process in another.

INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

The strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in eight selected voluntary consolidation efforts in Oklahoma since H.B. 1017 have been identified and documented through this study.

For teachers, job security, faculty meetings, and teacher displacement compensation were the most significant strategies utilized in the eight consolidations. Teachers wanted to know that they would still have a job with the consolidated district, and if not, that they would be compensated for being displaced. The displacement compensation offered teachers eighty percent of their salary for one year plus the option to secure a position in another school district. Faculty meetings were utilized to keep the

teachers informed and up-to-date on the consolidation process in their district. Table 8 outlines the most significant strategies utilized for teachers.

TABLE 8								
SIGNIFICANT STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR TEACHERS								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Job Security	yes	yes/no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
Faculty Meetings	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes
Teacher Displacement Compensation			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	

Four strategies that enhanced the process for parents and the communities were most evident throughout the eight consolidations. Community meetings and joint board meetings were means to which superintendents and boards of education could communicate with the public. The meetings allowed board members to stay in touch with their constituents and served as vehicles for sharing information efficiently. Others experienced in school consolidation were able, through joint board meetings and community meetings, to discuss and answer questions for patrons. Newspaper articles, too, kept the patrons informed as to the consolidation plan and dates for board meetings, community meetings, and elections.

The closing of schools was an important issue for parents and the communities. Six of the eight consolidations were able to maintain all of the existing sites. Communities feared a loss of their populace and identity without their school. Table 9 illustrates the strategies that were most utilized for parents and the community.

<p style="text-align: center;">TABLE 9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SIGNIFICANT STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY</p>								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Community Meetings	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Joint Board Meetings	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes		yes
Newspaper Articles	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Maintain All Sites	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no

Expanded opportunities, consolidation plan input, and joint student-body activities were most evident in enhancing the consolidation process for students. Expanded opportunities included more classes, especially higher-level courses, additional programs such as art and cheerleading, and enhanced athletics. Consolidation plan input allowed the students opportunities to select the school name, mascot, and school colors. Students worked on community

committees or with other students. Joint student-body activities included visiting schools, meeting teachers, attending programs together, and planning events for the upcoming school year. See Table 10 for an outline of the significant strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process for students.

<p style="text-align: center;">TABLE 10</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SIGNIFICANT STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR STUDENTS</p>								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Expanded Curricular and Activity Opportunities	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Consolidation Plan Input	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes
Joint Student- body Activities	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes

Significant strategies that enhanced the consolidation process for the support staffs were job security, maintaining all sites, and staff meetings. In these small, rural schools the support staffs were treated much like other staff members. Their concerns were similar, also. The support staffs wanted to know they had a job with the consolidated school or how they would be compensated if a job was not available. Support staff displacement compensation was similar to the teachers'. The displaced employees were offered eighty percent of their salary for

one year plus the option to secure other employment and still receive the payment. Staff meetings were utilized to inform the support personnel of the consolidation plan and the decisions made as it progressed. Table 11 indicates the strategies most utilized during the eight voluntary consolidations to enhance the process for the support staffs.

<p style="text-align: center;">TABLE 11</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SIGNIFICANT STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR SUPPORT STAFFS</p>								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Job Security	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Maintain All Sites	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no
Staff Meetings	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Administrators were important during the consolidation process and three strategies that enhanced the process for them were significant during the eight consolidations. The strategies included pre-consolidation administrative appointments, job security, and consolidation plan input. Pre-consolidation administrative appointments enhanced organizational stability. The administrative appointments established a chain of command and eased decision-making issues. Job security was enhanced through pre-consolidation

administrative appointments. Those administrators not accepting the positions offered them by the boards of education were compensated eighty percent of their salary for one year plus the option to secure other employment and still receive the payment. Input on the plans to consolidate was a significant strategy utilized to enhance the consolidation process for the administrators. Teacher placement, curriculum programs, and student activities were just some of the decisions administrators helped to make. See Table 12 for an outline of the significant strategies utilized for administrators.

<p style="text-align: center;">TABLE 12</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SIGNIFICANT STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR ADMINISTRATORS</p>								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Pre-Consolidation Administrative Appointments	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Job Security	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Consolidation Plan Input	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

The strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process for board members included five that were evident in all eight consolidations. Joint board meetings, consolidation plans, community meetings, pre-consolidation board member selection agreements, and State Department

advisement were significant strategies throughout the voluntary consolidations. Joint board meetings and community meetings were means of sharing information and discussing issues with the patrons of the communities. State Department personnel and others experienced in school consolidations were often in attendance. Pre-consolidation board member selection agreements enhanced decision-making during the consolidations, as well as, enhanced organizational stability. The board approved consolidation plans provided direction and focus for the board members when making consolidation process decisions. Table 13 outlines the strategies that were most significant in enhancing the consolidation process for board members.

TABLE 13

SIGNIFICANT STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE
THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS FOR BOARD MEMBERS

[illegible]

Strategies that were not productive were situational and dependent upon many variables. Leadership styles of the boards and superintendents, politics within the schools and communities, and the demographics of the communities and the districts all played significant roles in the consolidation processes. A strategy indicated as nonproductive by one superintendent may have been essential in another consolidation. Those strategies presented as not productive included forced consolidations, removing school memorabilia, relocating administrative furniture, creating seven-member boards, community meetings, school name and mascot agreements, closing schools, the State Department's feasibility studies, and job security for teachers. Three of the nine strategies presented as nonproductive were

TABLE 14 SIGNIFICANT STRATEGIES USED THAT WERE NOT PRODUCTIVE								
	Consolidation 1	Consolidation 2	Consolidation 3	Consolidation 4	Consolidation 5	Consolidation 6	Consolidation 7	Consolidation 8
Community Meetings					yes			yes
School Closings						yes		yes
State Department Feasibility Study						yes	yes	

evident in more than one consolidation. These included community meetings, closing schools, and the feasibility studies submitted by the State Department of Education.

Table 14 illustrates the strategies reported by more than one consolidation as being nonproductive.

The strategies that worked for the superintendents who participated in the eight voluntary consolidations provided a more efficient, productive, and less threatening consolidation process within their district. School consolidation will continue to be a tool for local, state, and federal educational reform. These strategies, if implemented appropriately, could benefit others when faced with a consolidation issue.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

"The worth of a study is the degree to which it generates theory, description, or understanding" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 46). This study identified strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents experienced in voluntary school consolidation that enhanced the consolidation process. This researcher found no other study of this type on the topic of consolidation. The reported data served both practical and theoretical purposes. The strategies reported in this study could benefit Oklahoma superintendents who must address the issues of consolidation. Applied research seeks findings that may be used "to make practical decisions about or improvements in programs and practices" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 199).

The data collected from this research could aid Oklahoma superintendents, school board members, community leaders, parents, teachers, and others faced with a school

consolidation issue. Losing the school may be the most traumatic experience a community ever faces. These identified strategies, if implemented appropriately, could enhance that process.

Another significance of this research is the implications it could have on higher education and the programs offered aspiring school superintendents. With the data contained in this study, departments of educational administration could assess the courses offered through their superintendent certification programs and the measures taken to prepare the candidates for the superintendency in rural schools. "If we are to begin seriously reconsidering the way we prepare our educational leaders, then this is the appropriate time to seriously reconsider the way we intend to prepare them to serve our rural districts as well" (Jacobson and Woodsworth, 1990, p. 41). Rural school superintendents have much to consider in leading their schools. This study is significant in that the data it contains could enhance educational administration programs and provide a resource to superintendents faced with a consolidation issue.

The availability of strategies that enhance the consolidation process and the assurance that these strategies have been researched and documented could provide some relief to an otherwise stressful experience. Although consolidation is at the forefront of many school reform

efforts, how much it has actually improved schools is still being debated. Regardless whether it is or is not advantageous to young people's education, once the decision to consolidate has been made, these strategies could play a major role in providing an efficient, collegial, and productive process. "Win-Win" strategies are difficult to construct, but in the case of school consolidation, it can be done. It was the intent of this researcher to provide strategies to support a superintendent's efforts in developing a cooperative school consolidation process.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) acknowledged that a study's potential significance is something to consider. Also, the point must be made that research almost always draws political consequences. School consolidations are processes of "give and take"; they require political strategies. This research indicates some of those strategies.

A superintendent's decisions should be based on sound educational theory. Applying theory and current research to practice is a challenge facing all leaders of education. It is the intent of this researcher to provide reliable research for practical application. Borg and Gall (1989) indicated that the significance of research is contributing to the knowledge base of education. "There is the satisfaction in thinking that our work may one day influence the practice of teacher education" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 39).

LIMITATIONS

At the passage of H.B. 1017 in November 1989, Oklahoma ranked sixth nationally in the number of local school districts in the state. Because of this ranking, consolidation and annexation were often topics of reform debates across the state (Chance and Deering, 1993).

One limitation of this study may be the researcher's personal biases toward the subject of small, rural schools and school consolidation. Since qualitative researchers view themselves as a primary instrument for collecting data (Borg and Gall, 1989), the values and experiences of the researcher could bias the study. This bias was controlled by enhancing the reliability of the data. Intrarater reliability was strengthened by analyzing the data more than once with a significant period of time between the two analyses (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Reliability was further enhanced by utilizing multiple data collection techniques and by triangulating data collection and content analysis (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992).

Borg and Gall (1989) exposed another limitation of research that could be relevant to this study, and that is response effect. "Response effect is the tendency of the respondent to give inaccurate or incorrect responses, or more precisely, is the difference between the answer given by the respondent and the true answer" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 448). Whether or not people will tell you the truth is a

risk that may be a factor in collecting responses from a participant. Risk is defined by Borg and Gall (1989) as the exposure to the possibility of physical, psychological, or social harm as a result of participating in a research project. While codifying the data will protect the participant somewhat, no study is fully without risk. These external risks lend themselves to weak internal validity. Internal validity of qualitative research has been criticized for distortions to data caused by extraneous variables (Borg and Gall, 1989).

External validity may also be a limitation to the study. Generalizing to a population from which the participants were drawn should be done with caution. The methods of descriptive research, especially interviewing, are subject to weak external validity. The degree to which the data can be generalized to the population, called "population validity" (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 404), may be a limitation to the study. Firestone (1993) contended that "one criticism about qualitative research is that it is difficult to generalize findings to settings not studied" (p. 16). Also, the fact that only voluntary consolidations were utilized in this research could be a limitation. Forced consolidations and school annexations were not used as part of the sample population.

Other potential limitations to this study may include the interviewing skills of the researcher, the use of a tape

recorder and its influence on the respondents, the smallness of the sample size, and the researcher's ability to accurately synthesize and report the data. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) concurred, "part of demonstrating the trustworthiness of your data is to realize the limitations of your study" (p. 147).

CONCLUSIONS

School consolidation has been a tool for school improvement for over 100 years (Rosenfield and Sher, 1977). It will continue to be encouraged and financially rewarded by state and local governments. Yet, patrons fear a loss of community identity without their school. This study has identified thirteen strategies that, if implemented appropriately, could facilitate the consolidation and enhance the overall process for teachers, parents and the community, students, support staffs, administrators, and board members. Table 15 contains an outline of the thirteen strategies and the voluntary consolidation in which they were utilized.

Job security was the number one issue for teachers, administrators, and support staffs in each of the voluntary consolidations studied. Administrators and support staffs were guaranteed their positions in all eight of the consolidations, while five of the new districts retained their entire teaching staff. In those that reduced teachers, the superintendents indicated that telling the

Employee displacement compensation further enhanced the consolidation process. The superintendents in five of the consolidations indicated that displaced employees were offered eighty percent of their salary for one year plus the opportunity to secure another job. This strategy may have relieved the personal anxiety felt by those employees losing their jobs due to the consolidation.

In seven consolidations staff meetings were utilized to enhance the process. Teachers, support people, and administrators should be kept informed. The most efficient means may be through faculty meetings in which employees have an opportunity to ask questions. Two-way communication is vital to the success of the consolidation process.

Maintaining all of the sites was another strategy that greatly enhanced the consolidation process. Patrons, students, and staff members all have a viable stake in maintaining the school. While only six of the eight consolidations were able to keep all of their sites open, this strategy enhances the process for most stakeholders and is a key element to a successful consolidation process.

Data from all eight of the consolidations studied revealed that community meetings were utilized to enhance the consolidation process. Community meetings are a productive means of sharing information with interested patrons. Open meetings allow two-way communication and an

opportunity for community members to ask questions of school officials. Accurate information is vital to a consolidation process and this strategy can help ensure that parents are well informed and that the information they are receiving is factual.

Media releases were found in all eight of the consolidations studied. Newspaper articles were the most common form of media releases utilized, but radio and television were also used in unique situations. The media is crucial to a successful school consolidation. The timely dispersion of accurate, factual information can calm the nerves of stakeholders anxious over what effects a change in their school may bring. The media can be utilized to report consolidation plans, meeting agendas, dates and times, election information, and/or letters of support through editorials. Letters from supportive patrons can also be published in the newspaper to further enhance the consolidation process.

The primary focus of school consolidation should be to expand the curricular and activity opportunities for students. Superintendents involved in all eight of the consolidations cautioned others that if the decisions made during a consolidation process are not made for the children, then they are made for the wrong reasons. Immediate financial advantages were not necessarily gained by all of the consolidated districts, but every district

expanded the curricular offerings and enhanced the activity opportunities for their students. Consolidations focused on the students are difficult to dispute. Stating these plans early can facilitate the process.

Joint student-body activities can greatly facilitate a consolidation process. Attitudes of students are a major influence on parents and the community. Through joint activities students begin to feel more relaxed with new teachers, administrators, and peers. Joint student-body activities may include athletic ventures, student council meetings, dances, academic teams, assemblies, and/or meals together. Superintendents participating in this study indicated that students were the least of their problems during the consolidations and the activities designed to bring them together may have been the primary reasons why.

There are several reasons that pre-consolidation administrative appointments are important to a consolidation process. Job security for administrators is one, but beyond that, organizational stability, an established chain of command, and the essential beginnings of developing a vision for the new district are vital. Leadership within the organization should be announced early in the process in order to provide stakeholders the confidence that the consolidation will work. Pre-consolidation administrative appointments were utilized in all eight of the consolidations studied.

Joint board meetings were also revealed in all of the consolidations. Joint board meetings provided many opportunities that facilitated the process. Board members were able to address issues and concerns together. Others experienced in school consolidation advised the joint groups, and patrons were allowed opportunity to voice their opinions through joint school board meetings. Other agenda items utilized during the meetings included tours of facilities, opportunity for State Department advisement, student input, and joint executive sessions. Joint board meetings can provide accurate information to patrons and are critical to a successful consolidation process.

A well written consolidation plan, approved by both boards, can enhance a consolidation process. All of the superintendents involved in this study helped develop a plan, had it approved by both boards, and focused on it during the consolidation process. The consolidation plans provided direction for school officials and eased their decision-making. Fears of stakeholders fueled from not knowing what may happen next were alleviated by the announcements of the consolidation plans. Consolidation plans made available to patrons and then carried through as written are most effective.

State Department assistance was evident in all eight of the voluntary consolidations studied. Feasibility studies, participation in board meetings, and consolidation plan

input were some of the means by which the State Department of Education facilitated the consolidations. State Department personnel also attended staff meetings and community meetings. The State Department's feasibility study addressed personnel issues, transportation needs, and the financial status of the districts. Federal programs, such as child nutrition, special education, and Title I, were also outlined in the studies. Feasibility studies provided a projected outline of the consolidated districts internal programs. No district should pursue a consolidation without utilizing the expertise and experience offered by the State Department of Education.

In the eight consolidations studied, pre-consolidation board member selection agreements were utilized. The means by which the board members were selected differed, but the strategy of naming the board members of the new district before the consolidation election remained constant. This strategy is important to the stability of the organization, the efficiency of decision-making, and the confidence in the overall process. Pre-selected board members provide an avenue for constituents to voice their concerns and support for the consolidation. Naming the new board members should be done early in the process, allowing them time to appoint their chief administrator and then support his efforts in providing a successful merger of the school districts.

School consolidation persists as perhaps the most important concern in many American rural communities

(DeYoung and Howley, 1992). Seal and Harmon (1995) suggested that "changing schools means changing the community and its culture" (p. 115). The thirteen strategies outlined in Table 15 have been utilized in eight selected voluntary consolidations in Oklahoma since H.B. 1017 to enhance the consolidation process. These strategies, if implemented appropriately, can alleviate the fears of stakeholders and provide for a more collegial, efficient school consolidation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Clearly, more research is needed in the area of effective strategies utilized by superintendents to facilitate the consolidation process. The research population should be broadened to include not only voluntary consolidation, but school annexation and forced consolidation, as well. Additional research may also be needed in the area of a more in-depth study of a single school consolidation. With additional data, a model for facilitating school consolidation may be developed.

The strategies presented by this study may be utilized by rural, Oklahoma superintendents facing a consolidation process. As the researcher found no other study on school consolidation focusing on the strategies utilized by superintendents to enhance the consolidation process, the strategies found in this study could, if implemented appropriately, provide for a more collegial, efficient consolidation process.

University professors of educational administration should also be cognizant of the strategies contained within this study. They may incorporate the data in course work designed to prepare superintendent candidates for rural, Oklahoma schools. Some of the strategies may be utilized to facilitate not only a consolidation process, but other restructuring efforts in rural schools, as well. In other words, the identified strategies could enhance a superintendent's efforts when bringing about a variety of changes in rural schools, changes such as, building/grade level configurations, block scheduling, or integrated curriculums.

Another recommendation of this study includes State Department personnel utilizing these identified strategies when assisting Oklahoma schools with a consolidation process. Although a model has not yet been developed, these strategies have been researched and documented, and could provide some relief to an otherwise stressful situation. The State Department should acknowledge the research significance and the practical application of the strategies and incorporate them into their work with consolidating school districts.

SUMMARY

This study was a descriptive, qualitative one. Its purpose was to identify the strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents involved in a voluntary school consolidation

process since H.B. 1017. Data was collected on eight voluntary consolidations. The data included semistructured interviews with the superintendents serving the districts at the time of the consolidation. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Other data included researcher notes, school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies submitted by the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Data analysis was performed following Holsti's (1969) four step content analysis. The four steps include: (1) selecting a sample of data, (2) selecting content categories, (3) comparing the categories, and (4) drawing inferences (pp. 25-27). The emerging themes were identified as the strategies utilized by superintendents experienced in voluntary school consolidation to enhance the consolidation process.

Through data analysis, thirteen strategies utilized to enhance the consolidation process were identified as significant. The thirteen strategies were utilized in at least five of the eight consolidations studied. Table 15 provides an outline of the significant strategies and the consolidation in which they were utilized. These identified strategies, if implemented appropriately, could provide for a more collegial, efficient consolidation process.

Clearly, more research is needed in the area of strategies utilized by superintendents that facilitate a

school consolidation process. Research populations should be broadened to include school annexations and forced consolidations. A more in-depth study of a single consolidation may be productive in providing additional strategies, also. As the researcher found no other study of this type on the topic of school consolidation, the strategies reported, if implemented appropriately, may be used by school districts, State Department personnel, and university professors to prepare for an enhanced school consolidation process.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX ASTATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
FINANCIAL SERVICESCONSOLIDATIONS/ANNEXATIONS
April, 1976 through July 1, 1995

<u>DATE</u>	<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>SCHOOL(s)</u>	<u>RECEIVING SCHOOLS</u>
04-09-76	Woods	Capron C031	Alva 1001
05-05-76	Lincoln	Springdale C075	Meeker 1095, White Rock C005, & Chandler 1001
05-26-76	Seminole	Wolf C013	Bowlegs 1003
08-26-76	Wagoner	Miller Washington C035	Coweta 1017 & Porter 1003
05-23-78	Kingfisher	Big Four C004	Dover 1002, Cashion 1089 Kingfisher 1007 & Crescent 1002 (Logan Co.)
08-03-79	Okfuskee	Castle C019	Okemah 1026
05-02-80	Coal	Lehigh C002	Coalgate 1001
09-24-80	Osage	Indian Camp C023	Pawhuska 1002
07-23-81	Pittsburg	***Alderson C018	Haileyville 1011
04-29-82	Kiowa	Mt. Park 1006	Snyder 1004
04-29-82	Washington	*Oglesby C014	Caney Valley 1018 & Bartlesville 1030
07-21-83	Bryan	* Utica C045	Blue 1006
05-15-85	Cleveland	Falls-Lakeview C031	Norman 1029
07-01-85	Craig	*** Ideal C009	Welch 1017
06-01-87	Payne	* Pleasant View C017	Stillwater 1016
07-01-87	Rogers	*** Gregory C016	Inola 1005
06-01-88	Harmon	* Arnett 1011	Hollis 1066
08-01-88	Creek	* Shamrock C056	Depew 1021 & Drumright 1039
07-01-89	Noble	**Red Rock 1003 & Marland 1005	Frontier 1004
07-01-89	Johnston	*** Connerville, C040	Wapanucka 1037, Tishomingo 1020 & McLish 1022 (Pontotoc Co. Oklahoma Union 1003
07-25-89	Nowata & Wann	** Lenapah 1001 1002	

*Schools Mandatorily Annexed

**Schools Consolidated

***Schools Dispensed with and Mandatorily Annexed

Annexations/consolidations
Since — H.B. 1017

11-09-89	Coal	Centrahoma	C005	Coalgate	I001
01-09-90	Wagoner	** Carter G. Woodson	I065	Porter Consolidated	
		& Porter	I003	Schools	I365
07-01-90	Osage	** Fairfax	I025 &	Woodland	I090
		Ralston	I069		
		(Pawnee Co.)			
07-01-90	Carter	Graham	I046	Springer	I021
				Healdton	I055,
				Lone Grove	I032
				& Fox	I074
07-01-90	Carter	Gene Autry	C071	Springer	I021 & Dickson
					I077
07-01-90	Dewey	Camargo	C004	Leedey	I003 (Leedey is now
				in Roger Mills Co.) &	
				Vici	I005
07-01-90	Kiowa	** Mountain View	I039 &	Mt. View-Gotebo	I003
		Gotebo	I050 (Washita Co.)		
07-01-90	Harmon	Gould	I006	Hollis	I066
07-10-90	Comanche	* Medicine Park	C007	Lawton	I008 & Elgin I016
07-11-90	Caddo	Alfalfa	C004	Carnegie	I033, Ft. Cobb
				I007, Eakly	I132,
				Washita Heights	I009
				(Washita Co.)	
07-11-90	Grady	Bradley	C063	Alex	I056
08-08-90	Muskogee	DuBois	C042	Muskogee	I020
08-09-90	Kay	Union	C061	Blackwell	I045 & Tonkawa I087
12-14-90	Johnston	Fillmore	C034	Milburn	I029
04-10-91	Jackson	Southside	I212	Altus	I018
05-31-91	Blaine	Longdale	C070	Canton	I105
				Fairview	I084 (Major Co.)
06-01-91	Major	Progressive	C010	Fairview	I084
				Okeene	I009 (Blaine Co.)
06-12-91	Noble	Sumner	C007	Perry	I001
				Morrison	I006
				Frontier	I004

*Schools Mandatorily Annexed

**Schools Consolidated

***Schools Dispensed with and Mandatorily Annexed

06-19-91	Bryan	Yuba	I012	Achille I003
06-19-91	Blaine	Greenfield	I097	Geary I080
06-26-91	Osage	Academy Central	C055	Tulsa I001 (Tulsa Co.)
06-30-91	Caddo	Apache	I006	Boone C056 (Boone-Apache I056)
07-01-91	Bryan	**Blue Bokchito	I006 & I023	Rock Creek I002
07-01-91	Caddo	**Binger Oney	I015 & I010	Binger-Oney I168
07-01-91	Caddo	**Fort Cobb Broxton	I007 & I068	Fort Cobb-Broxton I167
07-31-91	Garvin	Walker	C008	Stratford I002
08-08-91	Muskogee	Moton	I017	Boynton I004
08-19-91	Texas	Adams	C088	Hooker I023
06-15-92	Garvin	Pernell	I004	Elmore City I072
06-15-92	Seminole	Vamoosa	C008	Konawa I004
06-23-92	Roger Mills	Crawford	C011	Cheyenne I007
06-30-92	Beaver	Gate	C038	Laverne I001 (Harper Co.)
07-01-92	Major	**Ames	I003 & Lahoma I061(Garfield Co.)	Cimarron I092 (Major Co.)
07-01-92	Craig	Big Cabin	I050	Vinita I065
07-01-92	Woods	Carmen-Dacoma	I025	Alva I001
08-26-92	Atoka	Bentley	C035	Harmony C021
08-26-92	Seminole	Nobletown	C019	Butner I015
06-01-93	Pottawatomie	St. Louis	C066	Konawa I004 (Seminole Co.)
06-01-93	Murray	Dougherty	C002	Davis I010
06-01-93	Murray	Joy	C001	Wynnewood I038
06-01-93	Lincoln	Sparks	C077	Meeker I095
06-15-93	Kiowa	Roosevelt	I007	Snyder I004
06-15-93	Cleveland	Schwartz	C004	Mid-Del I052 (Ok Co.)
06-15-93	Adair	Christie	C013	Stillwell I025 & Westville I011
06-30-93	Logan	*Langston	C006	Coyle I014

*Schools Mandatorily Annexed

**Schools Consolidate

***Schools Dispensed with and Mandatorily Annexed

07-01-93	Nowata	*Alluwe	I050	Ok-Union I003 Delaware I030 Nowata I040 Chelsea I003 (Rogers Co.)
07-01-93	Tillman	Weaver	C013	Frederick I158
07-01-93	Tillman	Manitou	C187	Tipton I008
07-01-93	Washita	**Burns Flat	I007	Burns Flat-Dill City
I010		& Dill City	I003	
07-01-93	Alfalfa	**Helena-Goltry	I089	Timberlake I093
		& Jet-Nash	I004	
06-15-95	Comanche	Faxon	C128	Chattanooga I132

*Schools Mandatorily Annexed

**Schools Consolidate

***Schools Dispensed with and Mandatorily Annexed

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX BINTERVIEW GUIDE

The answers to these semistructured questions will be tape recorded and transcribed. The information provided will then be analyzed.

1. Tell me about yourself, both professionally and personally. (Descriptive)
2. Tell me about the school district of which you were superintendent before the voluntary consolidation. (Descriptive)
3. Describe your method of decision making during the consolidation. (Structural)
4. Discuss your role in managing the human, material, and financial resources during the consolidation. (Structural)
5. Do you consider the consolidation of which you were involved a success? Why or why not? (Structural)
6. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers? (Structural)
7. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community? (Structural)
8. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for students? (Structural)

9. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?
(Structural)
10. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for administrators?
(Structural)
11. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the school board?
(Structural)
12. Tell me about the other stakeholders involved in the consolidation issue. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for them? (Descriptive)
13. Tell me what strategies were non-productive and did not enhance the consolidation process.
(Contrast)
14. Tell me which stakeholders opposed the consolidation process and why. (Contrast)
15. Did you follow the consolidation plan submitted to the State Department of Education or did you find it necessary to modify it? How did you modify it? (Contrast)
16. Are there additional strategies you utilized to enhance the consolidation process that we have not discussed? (Descriptive)

17. If you had the consolidation process to do over, what strategies would you change, delete, or add?
(Contrast)
18. Are there additional concerns or issues pertinent to an enhanced consolidation process we have not discussed? (Descriptive)
19. Are there any responses you might like to change, delete, or add before we end the interview?
(Contrast)

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

P.O. Box 281
Altus, OK 73522
Date

Addressee
Address
City, State Zip

Dear :

I am a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Ed Chance is co-chair of my committee along with Dr. Charles Butler. I am writing to request your review of the interview questions for my study.

The problem statement for my research is: "The purpose of this study is to identify effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017."

These questions are being provided in the form of a working copy. Any suggestions you might offer will be appreciated. A self-addressed return envelope is provided for your convenience. Thank you for your assistance in my research.

Sincerely,

Craig Cummins

Enc:2

P.O. Box 281
Altus, OK 73521
May 16, 1996

Dr. Charles Butler
African and African/American Studies
University of Oklahoma
455 W. Lindsey, No. 804
Norman, OK 73059-0535

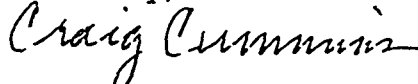
Dear Dr. Butler:

Thank you for taking time for my orals exam on May 3rd. I am working on the interview questions for the study and would appreciate your review.

The problem statement for my research is: "The purpose of this study is to identify effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017."

These questions are being provided in the form of a working copy. Any suggestions you might offer will be appreciated. A self-addressed return envelope is provided for your convenience. Thank you for your assistance in my research.

Sincerely,



Craig Cummins

Enc:2

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The answers to these semi-structured questions will be tape recorded and transcribed. The information provided will then be analyzed.

1. Tell me about yourself, both professionally and personally.
2. Tell me about the school district you were superintendent of before the voluntary consolidation.
3. Describe your method of decision-making during the consolidation.
4. Discuss your role in managing the human, material, and financial resources during the consolidation.
5. Do you consider the consolidation you were involved in a success? Why?
6. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?
7. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?
8. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for students?
9. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?
10. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for administrators?

11. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the school board?
12. Tell me ^{ident} ~~who~~ the other stakeholders ~~were~~ involved with the consolidation issue. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for them?
13. Tell me what strategies were non-productive and did not enhance the consolidation process.
14. Tell me which stakeholders opposed the consolidation process and why.
15. Did you follow the consolidation plan submitted to the State Department of Education or did you find it necessary to modify it? *How did you modify it?*
16. Why, do you think, since most of the state's school districts are located in the southeast did the the fewest number of consolidations occur there and the southwest saw the largest number of consolidations?
17. Are there additional strategies you utilized to enhance the consolidation process that we have not discussed?
18. If you had the consolidation process to do over, what strategies would you change, delete, or add?
19. Are there additional concerns or issues pertinent to an enhanced consolidation process we have not discussed?

20. Are there any responses you might like to change, delete, or add before we end the interview?

21. [~~Perhaps~~ If you might want to combine this with question 20.]

Are there other things about the consolidation process that you think are important to mention or discuss

Colleg,

If I were going to add anything, it would be what I suggest in questions 12, 15 and 20/21

P.O. Box 281
Altus, OK 73521
May 16, 1996

Dr. Fred Wood
O.U. College of Education
Room 227, Collings Hall
820 Van Vleet Oval
Norman, OK 73019

Dear Dr. Wood:

Thank you for taking time for my orals exam on May 3rd. I am working on the interview questions for the study and would appreciate your review.

The problem statement for my research is: "The purpose of this study is to identify effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017."

These questions are being provided in the form of a working copy. Any suggestions you might offer will be appreciated. A self-addressed return envelope is provided for your convenience. Thank you for your assistance in my research.

Sincerely,

Craig Cummins

Craig Cummins

Enc:2

*Craig
I see no major
problems w/ your
question but its
difficult to tell
without knowing
your research
questions
better*

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The answers to these semi-structured questions will be tape recorded and transcribed. The information provided will then be analyzed.

1. Tell me about yourself, both professionally and personally.
2. Tell me about the school district you were superintendent of before the voluntary consolidation.
3. Describe your method of decision making during the consolidation.
4. Discuss your role in managing the human, material, and financial resources during the consolidation.
5. Do you consider the consolidation you were involved in a success? Why?
6. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?
7. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?
8. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for students?
9. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?
10. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for administrators?

11. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the school board?
12. Tell me who the other stakeholders were involved with the consolidation issue. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for them?
13. Tell me what strategies were non-productive and did not enhance the consolidation process.
14. Tell me which stakeholders opposed the consolidation process and why.
15. Did you follow the consolidation plan submitted to the State Department of Education or did you find it necessary to modify it?
16. Why, do you think, since most of the state's school districts are located in the southeast did the the fewest number of consolidations occur there and the southwest saw the largest number of consolidations?
17. Are there additional strategies you utilized to enhance the consolidation process that we have not discussed?
18. If you had the consolidation process to do over, what strategies would you change, delete, or add?
19. Are there additional concerns or issues pertinent to an enhanced consolidation process we have not discussed?

20. Are there any responses you might like to change, delete, or add before we end the interview?

P.O. Box 281
Altus, OK 73521
May 16, 1996

Dr. Courtney Vaughn
University of Oklahoma
College of Education
Department of Educational Leadership
and Policy Studies
820 Van Vleet Oval, Room 227
Norman, OK 73019

Dear Dr. Vaughn:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Ed Chance is co-chair of my committee. I am writing to request your review of the interview questions for my study.

The problem statement for my research is: "The purpose of this study is to identify effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017."

These questions are being provided in the form of a working copy. Any suggestions you might offer will be appreciated. A self-addressed return envelope is provided for your convenience. Thank you for your assistance in my research.

Sincerely

Craig Cummins

Craig Cummins

Enc:2

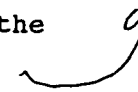

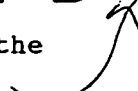
good luck!
CAV

*That's -
more important
for evaluating
the instrument*

*What's
the
research
question?*

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The answers to these semi-structured questions will be tape recorded and transcribed. The information provided will then be analyzed.

1. Tell me about yourself, ^{beginning with your early years/childhood} both professionally and personally.
2. Tell me about the school district ^{of which} you were superintendent ~~of~~ before ~~the~~ voluntary consolidation.
3. Describe your method of decision making during the consolidation ^{period}.
4. Discuss your role in managing the human, material, and financial resources during the consolidation.
5. Do you consider the consolidation ^{in which} you were involved ~~is~~ a success? Why? ^{or why not}
6. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers? ^{explain with examples}
7. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community? ^{ditto}
8. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for students? 
9. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff? 
10. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for administrators? 

maybe
be more
specific

11. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the school board? *ditto*
12. ~~Tell me~~ ^{who were} the other stakeholders ~~were~~ involved with the consolidation issue. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for them?
13. ~~Tell me~~ ^{what} strategies were non-productive and did not enhance the consolidation process.
14. Tell me which stakeholders opposed the consolidation process and why.
15. Did you follow the consolidation plan submitted to the State Department of Education or did you find it necessary to modify it? *why - why not*
16. ~~Why, do you think,~~ ^{because} ~~since~~ most of the state's school districts are located in the southeast, ^{why} did the the fewest number of consolidations occur there, and while the southwest saw the largest number of consolidations?
17. Are there additional strategies you utilized to enhance the consolidation process that we have not discussed? *explain with examples*
18. If you had the consolidation process to do over, what strategies would you change, delete, or add?
19. Are there additional concerns or issues pertinent to an enhanced consolidation process we have not discussed?

of the interviewee or detractors?

Good question

20. Are there any responses you might like to change, delete, or add before we end the interview?

P.O. Box 281
Altus, OK 73522
May 29, 1996

Dr. Larry McNeal
Department of Educational
Administration and Foundations
Illinois State University
Normal, IL 61761

Dear Dr. McNeal:

I am writing in reference to a request I made in a letter sent May 16, 1996. In the letter I requested your review of the interview questions for a research project I am conducting. I am a doctoral candidate at Oklahoma University and Dr. Ed Chance serves as co-chair of my committee along with Dr. Charles Butler. I very much need your suggestions and comments in order to complete this phase of my study.

The problem statement for my research is: "The purpose of this study is to identify effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017."

These questions are being provided in the form of a working copy. Any suggestions you might offer will be appreciated. A self-addressed return envelope is provided for your convenience. Thank you for your assistance in my research.

Sincerely,

Craig Cummins

Craig Cummins

Enc:2

> Does this mean that consolidation occurred? Or, are you just looking at strategies? Or, are you looking at effective strategies in only those districts that did consolidate?

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The answers to these semi-structured questions will be tape recorded and transcribed. The information provided will then be analyzed.

1. Tell me about yourself, both professionally and personally.

-> Question
Have you ~~ever~~ been involved in a consolidation effort prior to the passage of HB 1017?

2. Tell me about the school district you were superintendent of before the voluntary consolidation.
3. Describe your method of decision making during the consolidation.
4. Discuss your role in managing the human, material, and financial resources during the consolidation.

(This question may lead to a lot of questions of interest & importance!)

If the voluntary effort is unsuccessful, what about a question like 5 for that?

5. Do you consider the consolidation you were involved in a success? Why?
6. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?
7. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?
8. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for students?
9. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?
10. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for administrators?

11. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the school board?
12. ~~Tell me~~^{Why were} the other stakeholders ~~were~~^{were} involved with the consolidation issue. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for them?
13. Tell me what strategies were non-productive and did not enhance the consolidation process.
14. Tell me which stakeholders opposed the consolidation process and why.
15. Did you follow the consolidation plan submitted to the State Department of Education or did you find it necessary to modify it?
16. Why, do you think, since most of the state's school districts are located in the southeast did the the fewest number of consolidations occur there and the southwest saw the largest number of consolidations?
17. Are there additional strategies you utilized to enhance the consolidation process that we have not discussed?
18. If you had the consolidation process to do over, what strategies would you change, delete, or add?
19. Are there additional concerns or issues ^{that} pertinent to an ~~enhanced~~^{the} consolidation process ~~we~~^{that} have not discussed?

You may want
to move 15, 13,
to another
place, may be
(16, 17) to
17, 18 & 19!

May be
make these
no. 18 & 19.

20. Are there any responses you might like to change, delete, or add before we end the interview?

This will be a good study!
Keep me posted & good luck!

P.O. Box 281
Altus, OK 73521
May 16, 1996

Dr. George E. Pawlas
Associate Professor
Department of Education Services
University of Central Florida
Suite 215-F
12424 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-0650

Dear Dr. Pawlas:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Ed Chance is co-chair of my committee. I am writing to request your review of the interview questions for my study.

The problem statement for my research is: "The purpose of this study is to identify effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017."

These questions are being provided in the form of a working copy. Any suggestions you might offer will be appreciated. A self-addressed return envelope is provided for your convenience. Thank you for your assistance in my research.

Sincerely,

Craig Cummins
Craig Cummins

Enc:2

*Hello Craig!
Thanks for allowing me to share some thoughts
with you regarding your interview questions. The
questions you have formulated seem very
comprehensive. They should yield useful answers.
I have added a few comments for you to consider.
Good luck with your work. Share my "hello" to Dr.
Chance.*

*Cordially,
George Pawlas*

Craig,
How you estimated how
much time each of these interviews
will take? I assume you'll alert the
shupts.
who will
participate of the
time commitment
needed.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The answers to these semi-structured questions will be tape recorded and transcribed. The information provided will then be analyzed.

1. Tell me about yourself, both professionally and personally.
2. Tell me about the school district you were superintendent of before the voluntary consolidation.
3. Describe your method of decision making during the consolidation.
4. Discuss your role in managing the human, material, and financial resources during the consolidation.
5. Do you consider the consolidation you were involved in a success? Why?
6. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?
7. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?
8. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for students?
9. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?
10. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for administrators?

11. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the school board? .
12. Tell me who the other stakeholders were ^{you} involved with the consolidation issue. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for them?
13. Tell me what strategies were non-productive and did not enhance the consolidation process.
14. Tell me which stakeholders opposed the consolidation process and why.
15. Did you follow the consolidation plan submitted to the State Department of Education or did you find it necessary to modify it? *If so, how?*
16. Why, do you think, since most of the state's school districts are located in the southeast did the the fewest number of consolidations occur there ^{while} ~~and~~ the southwest saw the largest number of consolidations?
17. Are there additional strategies you utilized to enhance the consolidation process that we have not discussed?
18. If you had the consolidation process to do over, what strategies would you change, delete, or add?
19. Are there additional concerns or issues pertinent to an enhanced consolidation process we have not discussed?

20. Are there any responses you might like to change, delete, or add before we end the interview?

P.O. Box 281
Altus, OK 73521
May 16, 1996

Dr. Joseph Newlin
Executive Director
National Rural Education Association
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523


Dear Dr. Newlin:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Ed Chance is co-chair of my committee. I am writing to request your review of the interview questions for my study.

The problem statement for my research is: "The purpose of this study is to identify effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017."

These questions are being provided in the form of a working copy. Any suggestions you might offer will be appreciated. A self-addressed return envelope is provided for your convenience. Thank you for your assistance in my research.

Sincerely,



Craig Cummins

Enc:2

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The answers to these semi-structured questions will be tape recorded and transcribed. The information provided will then be analyzed.

1. Tell me about yourself, both professionally and personally.
2. Tell me about the school district you were superintendent of before the voluntary consolidation.
3. Describe your method of decision making during the consolidation.
4. Discuss your role in managing the human, material, and financial resources during the consolidation.
5. Do you consider the consolidation you were involved in a success? Why?
6. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?
7. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?
8. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for students?
9. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?
10. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for administrators?

May overlap!



11. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the school board?
12. Tell me ^{ABOUT} ~~who~~ the other stakeholders ^{WHO} were involved with the consolidation issue. ^{NOT ALREADY MENTIONED} What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for them?
13. Tell me what strategies were non-productive and ~~did~~ ^{Seemed} ~~not enhance~~ ^{To Impede} the consolidation process.
14. Tell me which stakeholders opposed the consolidation process and why.
15. Did you follow the consolidation plan ^{you} submitted to the State Department of Education or did you find it necessary to modify it ^{LATER?}
16. Why, do you think, since most of the state's school districts are located in the southeast, did the the fewest number of consolidations occur there ^{WHILE} and the southwest saw the largest number of consolidations?
17. Are there additional strategies you utilized to enhance the consolidation process that we have not discussed?
18. If you had the consolidation process to do over, what strategies would you change, delete, or add?
19. Are there additional concerns or issues pertinent to an enhanced consolidation process we have not discussed?

20. Are there any responses you might like to change, delete, or add before we end the interview?

Hodes Good,
Good Luck.
Dr. Joe Newlin
5/21/94

P.O. Box 281
Altus, OK 73522
June 6, 1996

Mr. Ed Robinson, Superintendent
Hollis Public Schools
415 N. Main
Hollis, OK 73550-3041

Dear Mr. Robinson:


I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Ed Chance is co-chair of my committee along with Dr. Charles Butler. I am writing to request your review of the interview questions for my study.

The problem statement for my research is: "This study will identify effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017."

The study is designed to identify strategies Oklahoma superintendents utilized in order to provide a more efficient, productive and less threatening consolidation. Its purpose is to develop a model for voluntary school consolidation.

The interview questions are being provided in the form of a working copy. Any suggestions you might offer will be appreciated. A self-addressed return envelope is provided for your convenience. Please return this cover letter and the questions with any suggestions for enhancing them. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,


Craig Cummins

Enc: 2

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE

The answers to these semi-structured questions will be tape recorded and transcribed. The information provided will then be analyzed.

1. Tell me about yourself, both professionally and personally.
2. Tell me about the school district you were superintendent of before the voluntary consolidation.
3. Describe your method of decision making during the consolidation.
4. Discuss your role in managing the human, material, and financial resources during the consolidation.
5. Do you consider the consolidation you were involved in a success? Why?
6. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for teachers?
7. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for parents and the community?
8. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for students?
9. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the support staff?
10. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for administrators?

11. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for the school board?
12. Tell me who the other stakeholders were involved with the consolidation issue. What strategies did you utilize to enhance the consolidation process for them?
13. Tell me what strategies were non-productive and did not enhance the consolidation process.
14. Tell me which stakeholders opposed the consolidation process and why.
15. Did you follow the consolidation plan submitted to the State Department of Education or did you find it necessary to modify it?
16. Why, do you think, since most of the state's school districts are located in the southeast did the the fewest number of consolidations occur there and the southwest saw the largest number of consolidations?
17. Are there additional strategies you utilized to enhance the consolidation process that we have not discussed?
18. If you had the consolidation process to do over, what strategies would you change, delete, or add?
19. Are there additional concerns or issues pertinent to an enhanced consolidation process we have not discussed?

20. Are there any responses you might like to change, delete, or add before we end the interview?

Craig - This looks like a good list of questions you might want to ask - Who decided it was time to consolidate or annex? Do they understand the difference? Which would be more beneficial to the districts involved? etc.

Annexation can take place with less red tape if the district losing their school can live with the process.

Good luck with your studies.
Ed.

P.O. Box 281
Altus, OK 73522
June 6, 1996

Dr. Mike Copeland, Superintendent
Altus Public Schools
219 N. Lee
Altus, OK 73521

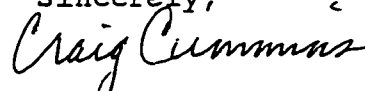
Dear Dr. Copeland:

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Ed Chance is co-chair of my committee along with Dr. Charles Butler. I am writing to request your review of the interview questions for my study.

The problem statement for my research is: "This study will identify effective strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents who have participated in a voluntary school consolidation effort in Oklahoma since the passage of H.B. 1017."

The study is designed to identify strategies Oklahoma superintendents utilized in order to provide a more efficient, productive and less threatening consolidation. Its purpose is to develop a model for voluntary school consolidation.

The interview questions are being provided in the form of a working copy. Any suggestions you might offer will be appreciated. A self-addressed return envelope is provided for your convenience. Please return this cover letter and the questions with any suggestions for enhancing them. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Craig Cummins

Enc: 2

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

August 20, 1996

Addressee
Address
City, State Zip

Dear

Thanks for agreeing to participate in my research project. Your interview will be very important to the final data analysis and resulting conclusions.

Enclosed please find an informed consent which I need you to sign and return as soon as possible. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

Thanks again for your cooperation. If you have any questions feel free to call.

Sincerely,

Craig Cummins

APPENDIX DENHANCING CONSOLIDATION IN OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS:
a DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE STRATEGIESINFORMED CONSENT

The research study you are consenting to participate in is designed to identify the strategies utilized by Oklahoma superintendents experienced in a voluntary school consolidation since H.B. 1017 that enhanced the consolidation process. The purpose is to identify the strategies that may be useful to practitioners who are confronting school consolidation. The information gathered from the research will have both theoretical and practical value.

The anonymity of all participants is guaranteed and no individual, school district, or community will be identified within this study. There are no discomforts or risks associated with the procedures. All procedures conform to acceptable standards of professional practice. All interviews will be tape recorded to insure accuracy. A copy of the transcribed session is available upon request.

Any questions concerning the purpose of the study will be fully answered. Participants are free to withdraw their consent and discontinue participation at any time.

Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.

Name

Date

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Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.


Name

8-13-96
Date

Craig - Please send me a copy of the interview transcripts.
THANKS

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Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.

Ron Frech
Name

8-13-96
Date

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Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.


Name


Date

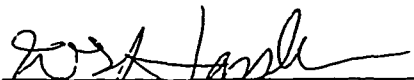
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Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.


Name

8-23-96
Date

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Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.

James L. Daily
Name

8-21-76
Date

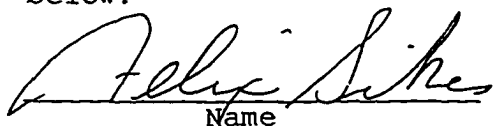
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Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.

Elwin Randall
Name

8-28-96
Date

APPENDIX DENHANCING CONSOLIDATION IN OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS:
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Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.

Steve Black
Name

8-26-96
Date

APPENDIX DENHANCING CONSOLIDATION IN OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS:
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Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.

Mary Burton
Name

8-30-96
Date

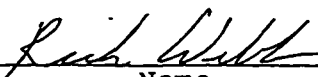
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Name

9/6/96
Date

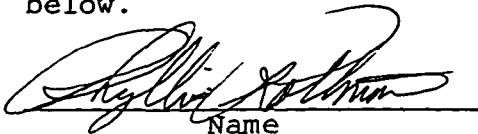
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9/3/96
Date

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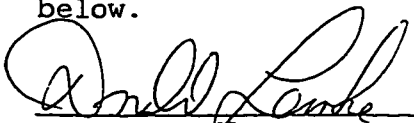
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below.



Name

9-11-96

Date

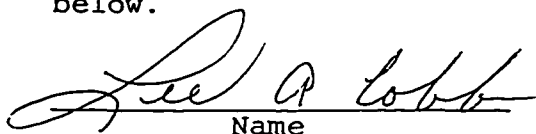
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Name

9 - 12 - 96
Date

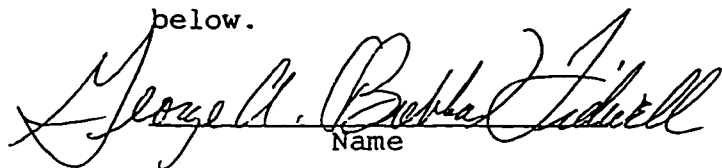
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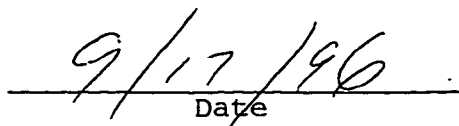
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Name


Date

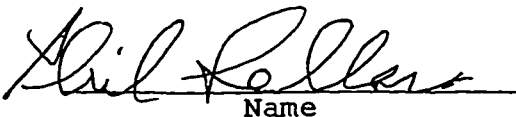
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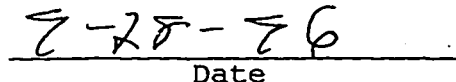
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Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.

Rocky Sutton
Name

9-22-86
Date

APPENDIX DENHANCING CONSOLIDATION IN OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS:
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE STRATEGIESINFORMED CONSENT

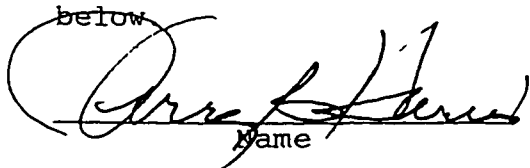
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Please indicate your consent to participate by signing

below


Name

10-15-96
Date