

ABSTRACT

As the economy continues to decline, increasing consideration for schools and districts to merge is possible. Decisions to merge should include the impact to the students and families in their distinctive communities because all are different. This case study examined the impact of the consolidation of two rural south Alabama high schools, Livingston and Sumter County, after one school year, on students and their families in three specific areas: disciplinary actions, the amount of time students spent on the school bus traveling to and from school and parental educational support.

For this case study, the researcher utilized surveys that were distributed to parents/guardians and educators to obtain their perspective about the impact of consolidation in the three specified areas. The surveys of both groups were corroborated to assist in substantiating the validity of the responses.

The findings revealed that the majority in both groups perceived the three surveyed areas were about the same after consolidation. However, a small percentage in both groups perceived some areas were better at the *current* location than the *previous*; some perceived areas were worse. Two major findings were associated with the location of the *current* school. The first finding was that the statistical test used in this study indicated very strong evidence of a relationship between the physical location of the *current* school and parental educational support. The second finding was that travel by school bus to the *current* school's location is longer (in distance and time) than what it was to the *previous* school. The modal group now travels 6-10 miles where before they traveled 0-5 miles. Comments provided by the parents/guardians along with the theoretical and conceptual framework, assisted in explaining the impact the mileage

difference, to include the consolidation of schools, has had on the students and their families. The possible effect on academic achievement was also assessed. Overall this case study, although limited in scope, helps to demonstrate that prior to implementing a consolidation policy a thorough assessment of the area, to include the families of students, is needed. By including in the assessment externalities that impact learning, better consolidation decisions are possible.

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DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Amount of Time: The number of minutes.

Consolidation: The words consolidation, merger, reorganization, and unification are used interchangeably and mean the combining of facilities.

Consolidation of Livingston and Sumter County high schools: The combining of two high schools, Livingston and Sumter County, created a new high school: Sumter Central High School (SCHS).

Disciplinary Problems: A disciplinary action is any infraction occurring during a school-sponsored activity where students, who were under the authority of school personnel, participated in an action that resulted in a parent, guardian, or another person in authority being notified.

Educators: Those directly involved in the instruction and discipline of students to include administrators. When specific terms are used, the word is intended to mean that particular function/person, such as principal.

Guardian: This word is used interchangeably with parent to mean the person responsible for caring for the student.

Indiscipline: This term, derived from two dictionaries, means lack of discipline or control (Haller 1992, 154-155).

Location: The physical address where SCHS is located.

Merger: The words consolidation, merger, reorganization, and unification are used interchangeably and mean the combining of facilities.

Parent: This word is used interchangeably with guardian to mean the person responsible for caring for the student.

Parental Educational Support: The personal involvement of parents/guardians in the academic life of their child. This involvement includes attending school related events such as Open House, parent-teacher conferences, PTA/PTO, etc... Parental educational support does not include pageants, pep rallies, graduation, sporting events and extra-curricular activities.

Poverty: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, "... a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition [is used] to determine who is in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated for inflation using Consumer Price Index (CPI-U)" (2012b).

Reorganization: The words consolidation, merger, reorganization, and unification are used interchangeably and mean the combining of facilities.

Rural Area: Because this research specifically identifies the area of study as rural, the following definitions used by the U.S. Census Bureau are provided for clarity. Rural includes all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area. There are two types of urban areas. Those areas of 50,000 or more people, commonly called Urbanized Areas (UAs), and areas of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people are called Urban Clusters (UCs) (2012e). This research deals primarily with consolidation in rural areas.

School Personnel: This word means all personnel working in the school system besides educators.

Sumter Central High School (SCHS).

Unification: The words consolidation, merger, reorganization, and unification are used interchangeably and mean the combining of facilities.