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.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................1

Purpose of Study...........................................................................................................1

Statement Guiding Study and Research Areas Identified........................................2

Statement of the Problem..........................................................................................2

Importance of Study.................................................................................................3

Personal Interest in Consolidation ..........................................................................4

Thoughts on Objectivity and Studying the Outcome of Consolidation ...............4

Usefulness and Limitation of Information...............................................................5

Organization of the Research..................................................................................6

Chapter II: LITERATURE REVIEW ..............................................................................9

Introduction.................................................................................................................9

Overview of the Literature.........................................................................................9

Historical Perspective................................................................................................11

Introduction................................................................................................................11

Consolidation Historical Account #1:

Problems Associated with Rural Schools in the 1890s.....................................12

Accomplishment Associated with Rural Schools in the 1890s..............................13

Consolidation Historical Account #2.......................................................................13

Consolidation Historical Account #3:

National Study from mid 1800s to 2005..............................................................15

School Size: Does it Matter?......................................................................................15
| Consolidation: The Role of Economic Forces | 17 |
| Communities’ Response to and Involvement in Consolidation | 18 |
| Advantages and Disadvantage Associated with Small Schools | 19 |
| Consolidation: Measuring the Impact | 20 |
| Summary of NREA’s Task Force Findings | 21 |
| Consolidation Historical Account #4: | |
| National Study: 2011 | 22 |
| Studies Reflecting the Subjective Perspective of Parents and/or Students | 23 |
| Districts, Schools and Students: Past and Present | 24 |
| Why Consolidate?: Benefits Linked to Consolidations | 26 |
| A Relook at School Size: Does it Matter? | 27 |
| Summary of the NEPC’s Findings | 28 |
| Historical Summary | 29 |
| Consolidation: General Studies | 30 |
| Introduction | 30 |
| Consolidation: Study #1 | 30 |
| Consolidation: Study #2 | 31 |
| Summary | 31 |
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs:

Application to Consolidation Study.................................43

Social and Human Capital Defined..............................................45

Social and Human Capital:

Application to Consolidation Study.................................45

Summary of Theories and Concepts..............................................45

Research Question .................................................................46

Summary ...................................................................................49

Chapter III: METHODOLOGY .........................................................51

Introduction ..................................................................................51

Procedure .....................................................................................51

Data Collection ............................................................................52

Research Design ..........................................................................57

Hypotheses ..................................................................................60

Research Limitations .................................................................60

Methodological Constraints and Concerns .............................60

Ethical, Moral, and Political Considerations ............................62

Study Population ........................................................................63

Distribution of Results .................................................................64

Research Question .....................................................................64

Study Delimitations .....................................................................64

Assumptions ...............................................................................65

Resources ....................................................................................65
Chapter IV: FINDINGS....................................................................................................66

Introduction..................................................................................................................66

Pre-Consolidation: Description and Location
of the Consolidated Schools....................................................................................67

Post-Consolidation: Description and Location
of SCHS, the New School...........................................................................................69

Survey Discussion Concerning Reliability and Validity.................................77

Reliability....................................................................................................................77

Validity .......................................................................................................................77

Quantitative Findings of Parents/Guardians and Educator Surveys........78

Part I: Parents/Guardians’ Survey..............................................................78

Missing Data..............................................................................................................79

Distribution and Response Rate...........................................................................80

Quantitative Findings...............................................................................................81

Summary of Findings for Part I.................................................................95

Disciplinary Problems: Hypothesis No. 1.........................................................95

School Location: Hypothesis No. 2 .................................................................95

Parental Educational Support: Hypothesis No. 3...............................................97

Statistical Analysis of the Parents/Guardians’ Data....................................98

Relationship between Disciplinary Actions of Students
and Parental Educational Support.................................................................99

Relationship between Parental Educational Support
and Physical Location of School..............................................................100
Disciplinary Problems: Hypothesis No. 1 ........................122

Parental Educational Support: Hypothesis No. 3 ..........122

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................122

Chapter V: DISCUSSION ............................................................................................124

Introduction .....................................................................................................................124

Literature Review: Theories and Concepts Revisited along with Relevant Hypothesis .................................................................125

Demographics Applicable to the Area of Study: Sumter County .........................127

Discussion about Disciplinary Actions: Hypothesis No. 1: ..................................128

Disciplinary Actions: Suggestions Offered .................................................................133

Disciplinary Actions: Recommendations for Future Research ..............................135

Disciplinary Actions: Conclusion ..................................................................................135

Discussion about School Location: Hypothesis No. 2 .............................................135

School Location: Suggestions Offered ..........................................................140

School Location: Recommendations for Future Research .......................................140

School Location: Conclusion .........................................................................................141

Discussion about Parental Educational Support: Hypothesis No. 3 .....................141

Parental Educational Support: Suggestions Offered ..............................................147

Parental Educational Support: Recommendations for Future Research .............148

Parental Educational Support: Conclusion ..................................................................148

Researcher’s Reflections ..................................................................................................149

Summary and Conclusion .............................................................................................149
REFERENCES ................................................................................................................152

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Oversight Screening Form
   Student Research........................................................................................................161

Appendix B: Letter of Consent to Parents/Guardians .................................................163

Appendix C: Letter of Consent to Educators.................................................................165

Appendix D: Questionnaire for Parents and/or Guardians of
   Students at Sumter Central High School ...............................................................167

Appendix E: Questionnaire for Educators at Sumter Central
   High School ..............................................................................................................172

Appendix F: List of Staff at Sumter Central High School.........................................175
LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 1: Total Number of Public School Districts, 1931-1997 .........................................25
Chart 2: Total Number of Public Schools and Students 1869-1999 ...............................25
Chart 3: Student Disciplinary Actions ...........................................................................83
Chart 4: School Location: Distance from Home to Physical Location of Previous School ........................................................................................................85
Chart 5: School Location: Distance from Home to SCHS ..............................................86
Chart 6: Parents/Guardians Comparison of School Location Distances .........................87
Chart 7: Amount of Time Students Spend Traveling on School Bus from Home to School at Previous Location ........................................................................88
Chart 8: Amount of Time Students Spend Traveling on School Bus from Home to School at Current Location ........................................................................89
Chart 9: Comparison of Time Students Ride the School Bus .........................................91
Chart 10: Acceptable Length of Time for Students to Ride School Bus .........................92
Chart 11: Level of Parental Educational Support ............................................................93
Chart 12: Does the Physical Location of the School Affect Parental Educational Support? ................................................................................................................94
Chart 13: Grade Level of Students to which Service is Provided at SCHS ....................110
Chart 14: Student Disciplinary Actions .........................................................................111
Chart 15: Level of Parental Educational Support ............................................................112
Chart 16: Comparison of Parents/Guardians and Educators Data: Student Disciplinary Actions ........................................................................................................120
Chart 17: Comparison of Parents/Guardians and Educators Data:
Level of Parental Educational Support ............................................................121
**LIST OF FIGURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Map of Alabama Cities – Alabama Road Map [Location of York, Alabama]</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ALSDE: School Information: County [Alabama State Board of Education Districts]</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Alabama Maps</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sumter County, Alabama – Location of Previous and Current High School(s)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sumter County, Alabama – Distance of the Previous Schools from the New School (SCHS)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Alabama State Board of Education Districts</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Alabama’s Black Population by County: 2010</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>State of Alabama: Population in Poverty by County, 2008</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Population 25 Years or Older with a Bachelor’s Degree, 2010</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Three Ring Communication: Teacher, Parent/Guardian and Student Communicating</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Three Ring Communication: Teacher, Parent/Guardian and Student Not Communicating</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: U.S. Department of Commerce Data: Poverty ....................................................54
Table 2: Alabama Department of Education: Free and Reduced Meals School Year
School Year 2011-2012 ..................................................................................................61
Table 3: Alabama Department of Education: Race/Black (B) School Year 2011-2012 ...61
Table 4: Junior High Schools Serviced and Mileage Information for SY2010-2011........68
Table 5: Livingston and Sumter County High Schools’ Social Demographics
for SY2010-2011 .............................................................................................................69
Table 6: Parents/Guardians Questionnaire Overview ...................................................79
Table 7: Number of Respondents by Question Content/Variable .............................82
Table 8: High School Attended Prior to Merger ............................................................82
Table 9: Current Grade Level of Students .................................................................82
Table 10: Student Disciplinary Actions .....................................................................83
Table 11: School Location: Distance from Home to Physical Location
of Previous School ...........................................................................................................84
Table 12: School Location: Distance from Home to SCHS .....................................86
Table 13: Parents/Guardians Comparison of School Location Distances .............87
Table 14: Amount of Time Students Spend Traveling on School Bus from Home
to School at Previous Location ................................................................................88
Table 15: Amount of Time Students Spend Traveling on School Bus from Home
to School at Current Location ................................................................................89
Table 16: Comparison of Time Students Ride the School Bus .................................91
Table 17: Acceptable Length of Time for Students to Ride School Bus .....................92
Table 18: Level of Parental Educational Support ..........................................................93
Table 19: Does the Physical Location of the School Affect Parental
Educational Support? ...............................................................................................94
Table 20: Educators’ Questionnaire Overview.................................................................105
Table 21: Number of Educators Responding to Survey Questions .........................109
Table 22: Previous School Where Educators were Employed ..................................109
Table 23: Grade Level of Students to which Service is Provided at SCHS ...............109
Table 24: Student Disciplinary Actions......................................................................110
Table 25: Level of Parental Educational Support.........................................................111
Table 26: Parents/Guardians and Educators Corroboration of Data Overview ..........118
Table 27: Comparison of Parents/Guardians and Educators Data:
    Student Disciplinary Actions..............................................................................119
Table 28: Comparison of Parents/Guardians and Educators Data:
    Level of Parental Educational Support..............................................................121
Table 29: Hypothesis with Corresponding Theories and Concepts.............................126
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to everyone for helping me to complete a journey that was challenging, yet very fulfilling. A few of the many acknowledgements that I wish to convey are provided below.

My heavenly Father, Who is the source of my strength and the reason for my existence, thank You for opening this door, and for the wisdom and determination needed to persevere. I am extremely grateful for those whom You brought into my life for such a time as this!

My family members, especially my husband, Len, for believing in me, for the family time sacrificed and the love and encouragement provided knowing that one day, this marvelous day would come to past!

Dr. Chester Ballard, Professor of Sociology, I will always be grateful to you for accepting the invitation to serve as chair of my committee. Through it all, your patience, comments, suggestions, and support kept me focused and on the path to completion. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and knowledge with me. Working with you on this project has been an honor and an experience I will always treasure;

Dr. Brian Gerber, Professor of Education thank you for your role as a committee member. From the very beginning, you recognized the passion in me and have been very supportive of my endeavor. Your comments were instrumental in ensuring that a balanced perspective of this study was maintained;

Dr. Robert Yehl, Professor of Political Science, I am very appreciative of your acceptance to serve on my committee. Your watchful eye contributed profoundly to this project in many ways;

Dr. Mary Eleanor Wickersham, Assistant Professor, School of Business and Public Affairs, College of Coastal Georgia, a former committee member, I am thankful for the encouragement you provided at the very beginning of the writing process;

Dr. James Peterson, my capstone advisor, thank you for your guidance. I am appreciative of the careful oversight provided throughout the process;

Dr. Nolan Argyle, my program advisor, thank you for your guidance throughout my studies in the Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) program. Those brief moments when our paths crossed in the rotunda of West Hall were instrumental in keeping me focused and excited about completing my studies.
Two of my former professors in the Political Science Department at Valdosta State University (VSU), Valdosta, Georgia, Dr. Napoleon Bamfo, and Dr. David Winder, (retired), along with my former pastor, Dr. William C. Morgan of Morning Star Baptist Church, Valdosta, Georgia, thank you for the recommendation to the screening committee petitioning on my behalf for acceptance into the DPA program. Your support was very significant in this journey. I will always be appreciative of the confidence bestowed in me.

Mrs. Katie Jones-Powell, Superintendent of Education for Sumter County, Alabama, thank you for granting permission to conduct this study and your willingness to assist in this endeavor.

Mr. Eric J. Hines, principal at Sumter Central High School (SCHS), in York, Alabama, thank you for the opportunity to conduct this study and for your cooperation. Your suggestions and the role you played to ensure a great number of surveys were returned were very much appreciated;

Mrs. Glory McAboy, my sister and counselor at SCHS, thank you for the enormous role you had in this project. You wore many hats, which included taking orders from your younger sister! You are commended for your patience and fortitude;

To the parents/guardians of students and educators at SCHS who took part in this study, THANK YOU! This dissertation would not have been possible without your participation. I have learned much though your experience with consolidation;

Ms. Victoria Wood, a friend and fellow military spouse, thank you for being an excellent editor, coach and cheerleader! You never pretended to understand everything I wrote which guided you to ask the appropriate questions to prompt me to provide additional information that was needed for clarity. You are truly a gem!

Mr. Eric Jackson, thank you for the assistance you provided. As a ram in the bush, your expertise is a treasure well guarded;

To The Sontag Foundation’s Northeast Florida Brain Tumor Support Group, thank you for the continuous support provided during two very challenging times in my family’s life. You are making a difference in the lives of patients and caregivers!

Last, but certainly not least, to my family, friends, colleagues, faculty, and employees at VSU whose names are not mentioned, but were instrumental in sharing your knowledge, offered assistance, provided encouragement, and prayed for me, THANK YOU! For each act of kindness shown, please know that I appreciate what you did to help me!
DEDICATION

My husband, TSgt Lenon C. Harvey, (Retired) USAF, thank you for the tremendous contributions you have made to my life. Every act of love you have shown since our marriage in 1979, especially during this season of my life, is cherished.

**********

This project is also dedicated to the loving memory of my Mom, Selena Lindsey Foster. Three things I treasure most about my Mom are, her faith in God, love for her children, and the courage she displayed in trying to complete her education even after giving birth to ten children.
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.