

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **A CASE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS REGARDING THE MICROPOLITICS OF CONSOLIDATING PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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The continued decline of many of America's urban centers has created a myriad of challenges for struggling inner city school systems. As the ills of society drive magnitudes of inner city residents into the suburbs many urban school districts must deal with the challenges of decreasing student enrollment and underused facilities. Many states allocate money to districts based on student enrollment. Declining enrollments often result in decreased fiscal allocations. The combination of declining enrollments and reduced funding often makes school closures necessary.

In response to school closings many systems have re-configured the way they address the issue of underused facilities. In districts like the Mid-Atlantic school system leaders have chosen to consolidate schools into one shared facility to maximize resources. Such organizational change can be a catalyst for micropolitics. Issues related

to micropolitics can have a dramatic effect on any organization especially one as complex as a school.

With the ever-growing demands placed on school leaders particularly those related to high stakes accountability and school climate there is an urgent need to gain further insight into the principals' perception on how micropolitics impacts the total school. This study provided insight into the micropolitical perspectives of seven principals charged with leading consolidated buildings. The research design for this multi-case study was bounded by Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame and Mangham and Morley's research on micropolitics. The study includes a single and cross case analysis of each principal's unique micropolitical perspectives. The findings from this study revealed that from the principal's perspective micropolitical issues occurred in every consolidated school. Data revealed similarities and differences in the manner in which principals perceived the conflicts and power struggles in their buildings and the causes of these disputes. In most cases the discord stemmed from enduring differences among students and staff members. The findings from this study have implications for policy makers, school leadership and future research. Additional research is needed to explore the effect of consolidation on student achievement. School leadership needs to use the data from this study to train principals to deal properly with the micropolitical issues they are sure to confront as school leaders. Policy makers must consider issues of zoning, the allocation of school resources and teacher hiring to ensure that future consolidation efforts are met with success.

A CASE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
REGARDING THE MICROPOLITICS OF CONSOLIDATING PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Naomi Slade, and my father, Odell Slade, who both passed away during this process. Thanks for instilling in me a thirst for knowledge that will never die. Your loving spirits will always be in my heart.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

During the past decade urban school districts throughout the nation have experienced declining enrollments (McMilin, 2010). This decrease in student enrollment has resulted in a number of opportunities and challenges for urban districts. Declining enrollments provide an opportunity for districts leaders to implement program changes that formerly were unfeasible with larger student populations. These changes include improving failing programs, changing curriculums and enhancing school configurations. Conversely, educational leaders often struggle to make the most efficient use of allotted space as fewer students may result in higher costs to operate a particular school facility. More often than not declining enrollment leads to school closings one of the most difficult and emotionally charged experiences for both district personal and school communities. In the Mid Atlantic School District multiple school closings in 2008 led to the creation of several consolidated schools. Consolidated schools are the result of two or more schools merging to share the same building.

Micropolitics

Generally the perennially scarce resources of schools situated in communities with even scarcer resources for their children provide the nutrients for micropolitics (Ball 1987). According to Blasé (1987) micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in an organization. In educational settings micropolitics represent the networks of individuals and groups within the surrounding schools who compete for scarce resources and power. The actors in the

micropolitics of schools include teachers, principals, central office staff, school board members, parents and students (Lindle, 1994).

Organizational change like closing and consolidating a school can be the catalyst for micropolitics. Issues related to micropolitics can have a dramatic effect on any organization especially one as complex as a school.

Closing schools. Newspapers across the country highlight stories about districts that had to close schools. Because many states allocate money to districts based on student counts, declining enrollments often translates to reduced revenues. School districts however rarely structure their expenditures to fluctuate with enrollment. Districts typically treat non-teaching staff, central office administration and building operations as fixed costs which yield higher costs per pupil as enrollment drops. This combination of declining enrollments and stringent fiscal practices often makes school closures necessary but concerns about the effects of such closures on students and communities make the process quite difficult (California Department of Education, 2012).

During the period between 2001 and 2011 school closure was a common response to the mandates of No Child Left Behind (Lipman & Haines, 2007; Maxwell, 2006; Olson, 2006; Wiley, Mathis, & Garcia, 2005). In May 2009, Arne Duncan the Obama administration's secretary of education announced a plan to use new funding resources to prod local officials to close failing schools and reopen them with new teachers and principals (Quaid, 2009). Districts typically justified closure decisions by pointing to school's low performance on measures required by NCLB. Closures disproportionately fell on schools with high percentages of poor and working class students of color (Valencia, 2008). Virtually all major school districts now practice school closure. Some

cities like New York, Oakland, New Orleans, Rochester, Denver and Chicago regard school closure and reopening with new staff and instructional models as a core part of their strategy to improve student outcomes (Hill, 2012).

A report released by the Philadelphia Research Initiative (2011) predicted the long-term outcomes of the Philadelphia district's decision to close a number of schools because of declining enrollments. The report drew conclusions based on data from previous school closings in Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh and the District of Columbia. Each of those districts closed at least 20 schools between 2000 and 2010 and either shuttered or repurposed most of the former school buildings. For example Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) which served approximately 25,300 students went through a right-sizing effort that closed 22 schools in 2006. PPS district leaders discussed the possibility of closing another seven more schools in 2011. Similarly, Kansas City, Missouri Public Schools closed 29 schools and repurposed nearly half of its buildings in 2010 (Samuels, 2011).

Closures often result in significant conflict and controversy within the school district. Lipman and Haines (2007) reported that school closures in Chicago which district leaders described as an effort to improve student achievement levels were in actuality part of a broader effort to gentrify low-income African-American neighborhoods and lay the groundwork for school privatization. Grassroots opponents in Chicago fought to maintain democratic forms of school governance and argued that school closure was destructive to the community. In Washington D.C. where district officials closed schools showing poor achievement similar protests occurred. These examples underscore the political nature of school closure.

During an examination of school closures in California, The Department of Education (2012) found that closing a school involved several specific steps. These steps normally included selecting the school or schools that would close the physical act of closing the building and the final disposition of the physical plant. When districts closed schools they normally weighed the following factors.

- *The condition of a school facility:* A modernized school, one in good repair, and/or one that has technological capacity or other educationally innovative features may be the best school facility in the district, in spite of its declining enrollment. It may be better to close a school that is at-capacity, but physically mediocre.
- *The operating costs of a school:* Operating costs may vary from school to school. Some schools use energy more efficiently, some schools need less maintenance and some schools have minimal transportation costs. District leaders often factor these operating costs into decisions about which school to close.
- *The capacity of a school to accommodate excess students:* When district leaders close a school displaced students must be housed elsewhere in the district so choosing a school site that has unused classrooms or the capacity to add portables without encroaching on playground space is critical. Another important consideration is the ability of the school's essential core facilities, library, multipurpose room, cafeteria, gymnasium, toilets, etc. to accommodate additional students. While the school site may provide room to

add portable classrooms it may not have the room for all students to use a particular area at one time (California Department of Education, 2012).

Ideally, members of the community should be involved in the decision-making process to close a school. The California Department of Education (2012) found that failing to involve the surrounding community could prove problematic. Most citizens who want to become actively involved in school closings feel directly affected. They may be parents with children in school who are concerned about the welfare and education of their children. They may be neighbors who live near the school and who are concerned about the future of the neighborhood and the intended use of the closed school building.

Impact of closing schools. According to a study conducted by the Philadelphia Research Initiative widespread school closings often failed to generate expected savings or meaningful student achievement gains, but such closing often contributed to significant community upheaval and neighborhood blight (Herald, 2011). The study did find however that students appeared to make it through the school closure process with minimal effects on their academic progress (Herald, 2011).

Closing schools can save money but in districts whose budgets add up to hundreds of millions of dollars or more the final savings are relatively small. Even after a school closure districts normally have to spend a significant amount of money on teachers because schools still need those staff members to serve the students who have moved to different locations. The district also has to pay for maintenance on closed buildings so the facilities do not become neighborhood eyesores (Philadelphia Research Initiative, 2011).

Districts also rarely receive a windfall from the sale of their old school buildings. These facilities often are undesirable to businesses for some of the same reasons that districts decided to close them. The buildings typically are located in areas that are losing population, they tend to be in poor condition and new owners may find it difficult to convert the buildings to other purposes (Herald, 2011).

The need for shared facilities. Deteriorating public school buildings particularly in urban and rural areas, a steady rise in the school-age population in many regions of the country and new research showing the benefits of small learning communities have all led to an unprecedented demand for new and improved school facilities and structures. At the same time state budget cuts have severely limited education funding and depleted the resources available for capital spending. Thus in the context of stressed capital budgets and high competition for suitable school space charter schools have become an experiment in nontraditional financing that is obtaining school facilities with little or no public capital funding and involving the private sector in facilities financing. Charter schools were one of the first entities to experiment with sharing school facilities (Institute for Education and Social Justice, 2004).

The American Society of Civil Engineers reported that 75 percent of the nation's public school buildings were inadequate for providing even a basic education. Projections of the financial support necessary to bring these schools into good overall condition vary with the General Accounting Office estimating costs at a low of \$112 billion and a high of \$268.2 billion to conduct deferred maintenance, new construction and necessary renovations. The Society estimated that the school construction costs for remedying overcrowded and outdated facilities and meeting mandated class size reductions fall at

approximately \$3,800 per student, or more than half the current average annual per pupil revenue (Philadelphia School Initiative, 2011).

With many schools already struggling with unmet facilities needs the latest education reforms have made additional financial demands on both instructional and capital budgets. One study attributed reduced class size, higher attendance, lower dropout rates and fewer behavioral problems to the increased internal accountability, low student-teacher ratio and greater parent involvement made possible by small learning communities. Constructing the facilities needed to ensure small schools and classrooms would place a tremendous financial burden on most districts (Philadelphia School Initiative, 2011).

Charter schools which serve a median of 150 students have served as one way to address the trend toward small learning communities. In an effort to establish additional solutions educational leaders especially those in urban areas with large aging school facilities have begun to house several public schools within one large building. These “schools within schools” do not require much new exterior construction but major internal renovations and upgrades have proved expensive.

District/School consolidation. As late as 1930 schools in the United States were small community-run institutions many of which employed only a single teacher. Over the next four decades the number of schools fell by more than 100,000 as districts eliminated nearly two-thirds of all schools through the process of consolidation. Average school size increased fivefold over this short period. In the process school districts evolved into professionally run bureaucracies some educating hundreds of thousands of students. In 2002 fewer than 16,000 school systems existed in the United States (United

States Census Bureau, 2002). Despite the large number of recorded school closings and consolidations the literature on school system consolidation is limited. A review of literature revealed even fewer reports that focused specifically on school mergers and the perceptions of educators affected by the closings (Kamerzell, 1994).

Historically the consolidation of schools has served as part of a larger effort to professionalize education that began in the late nineteenth century (Tyack, 1974). To administrative progressives of the day the concentration of authority over schools in the hands of professional educators seemed a cure for both the corruption of city school systems and the parochialism of rural ones. Consolidation came first to urban areas where one of the cornerstones of the progressive attack on political machines was to place schools under the leadership of professional superintendents. The consolidation of schools and districts contributed to the centralization of authority along two dimensions (Strang, 1987). First, it removed day-to-day authority over education from the school community and locally elected school boards to more distant educational bureaucracies.

Historically school size played a significant role in decisions to consolidate. Because of societal progress and demands educational leaders often targeted smaller schools and school systems for closure or consolidation (Harris, 1992). To facilitate the consolidation process state legislatures would offer smaller school systems financial incentives for transportation and capital authority if they agreed to combine with another school system (McMahon, 1986). These incentives encouraged school leaders to consider consolidation as an opportunity for additional funding and growth.

These consolidation efforts often met fierce local resistance to consolidation particularly in rural areas where these small schools were the central institution of the

community. In the pre-consolidation era the local school typically was the key neighborhood institution binding neighbors and linking them to the larger social and cultural world around them (Reynolds, 1999).

Beginning in the 1980s the focus of the literature on school size shifted from school inputs to student outcomes. Barry and West (2003) found that schools with large populations were particularly detrimental to African-American students. Similarly Lee and Smith (1997) found that students of low socio-economic status also perform especially poorly in large schools. Although research has not yet identified the specific reasons for the superior performance of small schools theories have focused on a number of non-academic factors such as a greater sense of community among students, closer interactions with adults and greater parental involvement (Cotton, 1996).

Consolidation in a large urban school district in the Mid-Atlantic Region. In 2007, a large urban city in the Mid Atlantic Region (LUCMAR) operated and maintained 147 school buildings and the average school building in LUCMAR was 63 years old. The accumulating effects of aging structures, deferred maintenance and delayed improvements created unsatisfactory conditions for teaching and learning. According to OSA data student enrollment in the Mid Atlantic School District decreased by almost 30,000 pupils between 2000 and 2008 with a large portion of the decline occurring in the lower grades (NARPAC, 2007). The ongoing decline was especially visible in Southeast LUCMAR as public housing units were demolished to make way for more expensive real estate properties. By 2008 this decline in student enrollment had created a situation where they had to maintain over 1.9 million square feet of underutilized school space.

In 2003 the Mid Atlantic School District developed a tentative consolidation plan to begin to address the dramatic decline in student enrollment. Co-location was the first term used to describe school mergers and was developed by the superintendent during the 2003 school year. The term for the co-location process was later changed to consolidation when a new superintendent took over the school system. The initial co-location plan was a harbinger of the Master Education Plan (MEP) which served to articulate the educational vision of the Superintendent and the Board of Education. The MEP examined the District's educational needs and addressed configurations for pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) – 12th grades, explored accommodations for additional academy programs at the high school level, created opportunities to provide a combination of centers and increased inclusion classes in schools serving students with special needs, and explored clustering schools in an elementary through high school feeder model. The MEP also addressed possible methods to allow compatible city agencies to provide much-needed human services to the Mid Atlantic School District community using schools as the platform.

The MEP also explored the possibility of combining compatible charter school programs with Mid Atlantic School District programs to enhance the learning process for all. The MEP attempted to recognize short-term opportunities to use space and leverage facilities dollars that the charter schools have at their disposal to operate and improve the Mid Atlantic School District. The consolidation option would provide a limited opportunity to fix and repair buildings and open the door to possible long-term partnerships and would allow charter school funds to serve as a substantive addition to limited Mid Atlantic School District capital dollars. In the short term the consolidation of

Mid Atlantic School District and charter schools could dramatically reduce the square footage the District would have to heat and maintain annually. This decrease in maintenance expenditures would have a positive effect on the system's operational budget (GAO, 2009).

Despite the district's best efforts to increase student enrollment and lure children back from the charter schools enrollment has continued to decline. During the spring of the 2005-2006 school year the district was forced to close one middle and three elementary schools. More recently during the 2007-2008 school year, the district closed and co-located several of its schools.

While speaking to a reporter the superintendent of the Mid Atlantic School District during the 2005 – 2006 school year made the following statement:

We have come to a historic and critical point in time for public education in LUCMAR. It's historic not just because the decision making process involves rightsizing the district by 1 million square feet, but more so because there is an opportunity to strengthen the academic programs of the schools affected by this process. In addition, school buildings that have been vacated can be re-utilized in a number of creative ways, such as enhancing revenue from [consolidations] or modernizing an existing school or constructing a new one. While we realize some savings the educational value added to the local school's program offerings stands out as a principle benefit. (Haynes, 2006, p. 16)

Because of the superintendent's ambitious master plan the district exceeded one million square feet of public school space during the 2006 school year. Several schools closed and hundreds of Mid Atlantic School District employees relocated to new schools. The school closings resulted in significant public outrage particularly in the Black community. The press and the public criticized the superintendent for closing facilities in the Black sections of the city and sparing the schools in the more affluent White neighborhoods.

In February of 2008 the Mid Atlantic School District issued another consolidation plan. Following the superintendents lead the new Mayor and Chancellor closed and consolidated 23 schools during the 2008-2009 school year. In 2008 the Mid Atlantic School District operated with 330 square feet of facilities per student while the national average was 150 square feet. Unlike the previous administration the new Chancellor closed schools all over the city and shut down several facilities in predominately White neighborhoods. The school closings stirred up racial tensions however as the new Chancellor faced criticism from both White and Black parents. The closings also required multiple schools to merge and share the same facility. In some cases elementary schools merged with middle schools creating Pre-K thru 8th grade configurations. Several schools had to undergo major renovations to their physical plants to accommodate the variation of new students. Because of these school mergers students from neighborhoods that had ongoing histories of conflict now had to attend school in the same building.

A new Chancellor was appointed for Mid Atlantic Region during the 2010-2011 school year. In 2011 the new Chancellor informed parents that the Mid Atlantic School District had too many buildings for the number of students it served. She explained that any closures on the scale of the downsizing led by her predecessor would be delayed until her second year in office (Turque, 2011).

K-8 school model. When the large urban city in the mid Atlantic region (LUCMAR) mayor and public school officials unveiled plans for converting some of the district's middle and elementary schools into the Pre-k through 8th grade model in 2007 leaders seemed confident the change would be good for students (Viadero, 2008). At the time several urban school districts such as Baltimore and Philadelphia were in the process

of abandoning both the middle school concept and middle schools. By 2005 the number of K-8 schools in Philadelphia increased from 61 to 130 and Baltimore opened thirty K-8 schools. In the 1990s a number of schools in districts like Brookline, Massachusetts and Cincinnati became exclusively K-8 as well. The goal for these school districts was to increase academic achievement and create atmospheres more conducive to learning (Chaker, 2008).

Studies on the benefits of the K-8 model have yielded mixed results. In Baltimore, researchers undertook a longitudinal study of two cohorts of students: 2,464 students who attended K-5 schools and then went on to middle schools and 407 students who attended K-8 schools (Baltimore City Schools, 2001). After controlling for baseline achievement the researchers found that the students in K-8 schools scored much higher than their middle school counterparts on standardized achievement measures in reading, language arts and math. The students in the K-8 schools also were more likely to pass the required state tests in math. Further, more than 70 percent of the K-8 students were admitted into Baltimore's most competitive high schools compared with only 54 percent of students from the middle schools (Baltimore City, 2001).

A similar study involving the Philadelphia school district which had undertaken what is arguably one of the largest and longest-standing attempts to phase out middle schools in favor of the K-8 model did not garner the same positive results as the Baltimore study. This study conducted in 2004 by researchers at Columbia University, found no academic difference between students in the traditional middle school model and those in the K-8 school setting. The study concluded that all things being equal,

eight graders in K-8 schools had comparable grade point averages and absences to their peers in middle school (Viadero, 2008).

Race & Class. Politics of race and class come into play regarding any discussion of educational reform, restructuring, rightsizing or just plain change in LUCMAR. Race is an extremely important factor in determining how localities respond to the challenges they face (Henig, 1999, p.15). Mary Attea (1997) found that the disparity between race and socio-economic levels of city and county communities impacted schools. According to Attea, principals feared that an influx of Black students into their traditionally White schools would cause problems between students and teachers and taint their school's reputation (Attea, 1997).

Not surprisingly race-based politics historically have been commonplace in the LUCMAR educational arena. LUCMAR was the first major city in the United States to become predominately Black. While the district had a predominately Black student population by 1950 and a predominately Black residential population by 1980 its unique political status as a capital city artificially delayed the translation of demographic change into local political power.

The institution of home rule eventually resulted in the transition of Black control of local offices. In 1968 LUCMAR residents elected representatives to a local governing body for the first time in the twentieth century when they appointed members to the district school board. Between the period of 1968 and 2011, the school board has been comprised almost entirely of African Americans. After Congress passed the first home rule Charter in 1974, LUCMAR voters elected the first Black mayor of the city. Since 1974, every elected mayor in LUCMAR has been Black (Henig, 1999).

By the mid 1970s, the district's Black majority firmly controlled the area's central government including the public school system. White middle-class migration from the District lessened the involvement of White parents in school affairs and White civic and parental involvement in LUCMAR schools dropped dramatically. Most links between the business community and the District's schools had been on an individual rather than a systemic level and those relationships dissolved as well.

Many White parents pointed to the declining quality of education in the public schools as a major contributor to their limited activism in school affairs. During the 1970s, Mid Atlantic school officials concentrated their efforts on meeting the needs of poor and Black children. As a result the district curriculum stressed student mastery of certain basic skills. However, for many White parents most of whom had attractive education credentials themselves the common complaint was that the district's curriculum was not challenging their children. Many of them enrolled their children in private schools and thousands more moved to suburban areas close to the city. Unlike Whites in other cities many of the Whites who remained in LUCMAR paid less attention to local school matters and more attention to national concerns associated with their careers and their political and personal viewpoints. Many of the Whites that remained in the city were less involved in their children's education.

In the 1960s, The Mid Atlantic School District's Teachers Union (MATU) became a driving force in educational policy in the District's public schools. The MATU represented teachers and focused on issues involving wages and work conditions. Historically, the MATU had not supported issues related to school reform and structural change (Henig, 1999).

The public school system is LUCMAR's largest employer with more than 15,000 individuals on staff (Survey of Members, 2005). Many union members utilize the MATU to solidify their continued employment with the District. The MATU vehemently opposed a proposal to hire a private management firm to operate fifteen Mid Atlantic schools because MATU leaders believed that a change in management could result in a reduction in school staff (Horowitz, 2004). In LUCMAR the union is strong but it is not an isolated power.

Starting in the late 1990s many public school systems especially those in urban settings began to move toward site-based management. The site-base management model placed most of the control and responsibility for the daily operations involved in running the school under the direct auspices of the principal. This additional responsibility along with other challenges discussed below made it even more difficult for school leaders to positively impact change. To gain a better understanding of the role that the school principal plays in the consolidation process and how micropolitics can affect the process one must first understand the role of the principal and the myriad of challenges they face in managing the daily operations of a school.

Challenges associated with the principalship. The role of principal continues to become more complex and challenging. Traditionally principals primarily served as the managers of their schools but the nation's current social and educational context demands that principals demonstrate the vision, courage and skill to lead and advocate for effective learning communities in which all students reach their highest potential (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2008). According to Cuban (2004), the principal is the linchpin for success in any school change initiative.

School principals must frequently deal with conflict and ambiguity both within the school building and in the community beyond the school walls (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980). Moreover, their daily work activities typically are fast-paced, unrelenting and composed of many brief, varied, fragmented and interrupted segments (Kmetz & Willower, 1982). At the dawn of the new millennium, principals face new challenges in their efforts to educate the nation's youth. These challenges are often merely variations of existing problems that may require innovative approaches as educators attempt to address them in the context of our rapidly expanding society (Cornelius, 2000).

School principals rarely have a typical daily routine as they often must deal with unforeseen problems and chaotic situations involving students, their parents, weather-related situations, staff and successfully navigating the beginning and end of the school year (Akbaba, 1999). Starrat (1990) explained that school principals often are "reacting to one crisis after another" (p. 13). Lindsey (1989) likened a principal's daily activities to the chaos theory; which is the tendency of dynamical, nonlinear systems toward irregular, sometimes predictable, yet deterministic behavior.

Lemons, Luschei, and Siskin (2003) found that in certain circumstances school leaders must conform to and in some cases choose between their unique educational missions and external accountability pressures. Principals must deal with expectations from multiple accountability sources such as parents, school districts and state mandates. These demands may include parents with their own perceptions of ideal programming, teachers who advocate a particular curriculum and districts leaders who want to see improvement on standardized test scores. Each of these sources has a distinct impact on a

principal's quest to lead for change in their schools and significantly affects each leader's ability to carry out their grand visions of reform (Welner, 2001).

Efforts to improve the quality of education at the school level have focused on the principal as one of the most important figures in school reform (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979). Caught between the external demands of constituent groups and the needs of students and teachers school administrators have a difficult role to fulfill. The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) produced a study that stated, "The school principal, the leader, is the critical force in determining school culture and instructional practices. When schools are effective it is largely because they have effective principals" (Sun, 2011).

Public school administrators must undertake changes directed toward achieving higher levels of learning for all children (Clift, Schacht, & Thurston, 1993). According to Christensen (1992), the traditional role of the principal has evolved in response to the substantial changes and school wide reforms that have taken place in schools. Change-oriented leadership links inherently to the nature of relationships between school principals, school staff, school culture and the community a school serves.

Urban school principals. Urban school principals often face challenges not encountered by their peers in rural or suburban environments. The day-to-day realities of educating poor students in urban school districts has become increasingly challenging for school administrators. To meet these challenges, principals must demonstrate effective leadership practices. Murphy and Datnow (2003) suggested that other issues common to urban communities such as large migrant student populations and high incidents of

homelessness, drugs and violence further complicated the already complex role of the principal.

To function as effective urban leaders, principals must be “jacks of all trades.” They must be instructional leaders that can cultivate learning environments that support and facilitate strong instruction for the school community. In addition a principal must be part social worker, nurse, counselor, fundraiser, special education expert, security officer, internet expert along with being the instructional leader and school manager (Ferrandino, 2000).

School administrators who work in America’s urban centers face the daily challenge of educating large populations of children who are poor, minority and often labeled “disadvantaged.” Standardized test results reveal that achievement levels in urban schools are invariably lower for students who are labeled “poor” or “minority.” (Bamburg, 1994)

Urban school leaders also must deal with “racial isolation, ethnic conflict and economic disparities as they affect academic achievement both in the schools and in the city itself” (Cuban, 2001, p. 5). Urban schools are plagued by low expectations for student learning, lack of focus on learning, lack of a challenging curriculum, discouraged teachers, wary parents and inadequate resources (Kahlenbert, 2010). Those who pressure urban school administrators and teachers to make huge increases in test scores fail to recognize the depth of change that such a task requires.

Challenges in urban teaching also have been framed in terms of urban school personnel. For example, teacher burnout, higher teacher attrition rates, and teacher reluctance and / or lack of preparation to teach in urban areas have been cited as

problematic in many urban districts (Avery & Walker, 1993). Additionally, perceived cultural incongruence between teachers and students, as well as between teachers and parents has been cited as problematic in urban schools (Grossman, 1995). Many urban school districts also have a large number of teachers from organizations like Teach for America. These teachers are sometimes labeled to be hardworking idealists who sometimes have no long term intentions to work in their assigned schools. Many TFA teachers leave the profession after two or three years.

Another distinguishing characteristic of urban schools is the strong belief that schools can revitalize a city's economy, culture and social life. Urban school districts often are among the largest employers in the community. Their superintendents oversee organizations that enroll more students than state universities, cafeterias serve more meals than the local convention hall, school buses transport more people than the city's bus service and school staff do more to provide a preliminary diagnosis of everything from playground scrapes to seizures than most emergency rooms (Harvey, 2003).

The urban context is rich with challenges and opportunities. The educational literature is replete with various factors that converge to increase the complexity of urban education. A great diversity of perspectives exists in the literature relative to challenges in urban education and choices for positive change. As Montero-Sieburth (1989) noted, "Profuse explanations have been sought to address the failure of urban schools and the poor performance of underrepresented urban students" (p. 36). The perspectives of urban educators, however often are underrepresented in the literature and researchers occasionally dismiss their viewpoints as "anecdotal, quaint, and unscientific." Nevertheless it is these perspectives that often shape what occurs in urban schools. It

follows then, that understanding these perspectives is critical to understanding the dynamics of urban schools (p. 36).

Principal's perceptions and their effect on school governance and relationships with stakeholders. The personal qualities of principals have a major influence on their performance as school leaders. However, research has found two other broad influences on the role of the principal in school governance and decision making. The principal's perception of stakeholder status, power, school culture, context and to a small degree structure have a strong influence on behaviors (Ghaleei & Mhajeran, 2008). As a result, principals seem to adopt particular approaches to managing the daily operations of the school that are reflected in leadership style and stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process. These approaches in turn influence the school's culture, context and structure.

The principal's perception of stakeholder status and power can influence the decision-making opportunities the principal provides for different stakeholders. If the principal wants to share power with others in certain areas he/she will provide situations and opportunities for those others to be involved in school decisions. An open and inclusive leader with a distributed leadership style allows and encourages participation of different stakeholders. If a principal believes that particular stakeholders have positive qualities, relevant experience and abilities or higher organizational positions he is more likely to find some way for those individuals to become involved in the school governance and decision-making processes (Ghaleei & Mohazeran, 2008).

The Problem

Urban school districts across the nation face declining enrollments and the continued exodus of middle class students to the suburbs and private schools. Many school systems including those in Oakland, Baltimore, New Orleans, Chicago, New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Cincinnati and San Francisco closed buildings in the years between 2000 and 2011 (Hill, 2012). Governing agencies across the country mandated that these school systems eliminate excess square footage and find the best way to maximize the space available for usage.

Charter schools subsequently became an eminent presence in many of these urban school districts. The burgeoning enrollments of these charter schools left many inner city public school systems to struggle with reduced funding caused by the mass exodus of students. The declining economy during this period also led many school districts across the country to terminate teachers in record numbers. These challenges were prominent in The Mid Atlantic School District where leaders terminated more than 400 teachers in 2008 (Washington Times, 2008).

Because LUCMAR is such a politically charged area issues of race and class also crept into the equation. District leaders targeted Black neighborhoods across the area for revitalization and reformation which in most cases resulted in the exodus of poor Blacks and Hispanics from the area and the entry of middle class Whites.

Despite the considerable amount of existing research on variables that may lead to decreased school enrollments and factors that may cause schools to close very few studies have focused on the consequences of school consolidation. A void also exists in research on the possible challenges that principals may face when two schools combine.

The field needs additional information to help educational policy makers understand the conflicts that principals must address in such situations and the effect those conflicts may have on the way a school functions overall. In short, the field needs additional research on the micropolitics that may arise when schools must close and/or merge with another educational institution.

The Purpose of the Study

This study examined the perceptions of seven principals from an urban Mid-Atlantic school district regarding the micropolitical issues that occurred in their buildings after the staff and students from two schools merged into one facility. The seven principals served students in Pre-K thru 8th grade programs and traditional middle schools. These respondents participated in interviews designed to reveal the micropolitical issues they experienced in their buildings as a direct result of the district's consolidation initiative.

Research Question

This study addressed school consolidation by focusing on the micropolitical issues that arose when two public schools merged. The central research question guiding this study was:

- What micropolitical issues arise in the consolidation of public schools from the perspective of the school principal?

Conceptual Framework

Understanding micropolitics has become an important part of comprehending leadership and power relationships within organizations and schools in particular (Smeed, Kimber, Millwater, & Ehrich, 2009). Referring specifically to schools, Lindle (1999)

described micropolitics as representations of the networks of individuals and groups within and surrounding schools which compete for scarce resources and power (p. 171). Micropolitics encompass the daily interactions, negotiations and bargaining that occurs in a school. In recent decades researchers have explored micropolitical notions in relation to leadership within educational settings.

Study Significance

This study is one of the first of its kind to focus on the perceptions of school principals about the micropolitics of merging multiple public schools into one building. Marshall and Rossman (1999) found that the significance of a study is grounded in its ability to link the research to concerns of policy and practice. As inner city school districts leaders attempt to address declining enrollments they must work to develop new policies to ensure that schools meet the academic needs of students and make efficient use of existing school-based facilities. Policy makers and practitioners consulting this study will gain a variety of perspectives from school-based leaders involved in the consolidation process. Principals of schools with unique configurations caused by the various dynamics associated with low enrollments may also gain some insight into how micropolitics can affect a school.

Definition of Terms

Central Office – The administrative office that acts to support school based employees.

Central office staff members normally include directors, assistant superintendents and the Chancellor

Coalitions – Groups of teachers, students, parents, etc that unite to fulfill a common goal or serve a common purpose

Co-Location – the Mid-Atlantic school district (2005) defined co-location as the merger of a district school with another school-based entity to form one larger school (p. 1). The merger could involve another public school, a charter school, or a private business. The Jackson administration coined the term during the first phase of school closings in 2006.

Consolidation – a Mid-Atlantic school district (2006) defined consolidation as the merger of district's school programs into one facility (p. 1). The term specifically addressed the merger of multiple schools into one building, when the schools remained individual, independent entities. This term was used after the second phase of school closings in 2008. In most related research, the term consolidation described the merger of two or more school districts or school systems. Previous studies typically used the terms *school merger* and *shared school facility* to describe the combination of two or more schools into one facility.

Enduring Differences – Philosophical and sometimes cultural differences that are long standing and difficult to eliminate. Enduring differences often invoke a strong sense of passion

Micropolitics – Lindle (1999) defined micropolitics in educational settings as the networks of individuals and groups within neighboring schools that compete for scarce resources and power. The actors in the micropolitics of schools include teachers, principals, central office staff, school board members, parents, and students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The ongoing demographic, social, economic and cultural changes that occur daily in this nation's biggest cities have dramatically affected the educational landscapes in many of the country's urban centers. As demographics continue to shift the quest for power and control of U.S. schools has become a burgeoning issue. The politics of educating our nation's youngest citizens is at the forefront of discussions about improving the overall quality of public education through innovative school reform efforts. In this chapter I will further review the literature associated with merging schools and micropolitics.

Enrollment Trends

Obtaining data on local and national population distribution as well as economic and social patterns is crucial for educators who serve rapidly changing communities. The number of students enrolled in a local public school varies in response to changes in birth rates, migration patterns and social conditions. The popularity of local private schools might also affect the number (Klauke, 1989).

Nationally, total K-12 public school enrollment peaked in the 1970's at 46.1 million and hit a low in 1984 at 38.5 million a 16 percent decrease (Bussard). Enrollment declines started gradually but accelerated in the second half of the 1970s. Current data indicate that these historical trends are reversing and that total K-12 enrollment will increase through 2017 with public schools increasing an additional eight percent and private schools an additional five percent (McMillen, 2008). McMillen predicted that most of these changes would occur in the south and west with 37 states and the District of Columbia anticipating notable growth. He also predicted that significant increases of 20

percent and higher would take place in eight states with Arizona and Nevada expecting increases of over 40 percent. Overall enrollments will increase 19 percent in the south, 15 percent in the west and less than one percent in the Midwest. In contrast, enrollment in the northeast will decrease between 2005 and 2015 twenty percent. Student populations in urban districts in the Midwest and East which have been experiencing waning enrollments in the past few years will continue to decline throughout the next decade (McMillen, 2008).

The number of school-aged children compared to the total population in the studied school district LUCMAR is among the lowest in the nation as it relates to the country's 50 largest cities (Quality Schools Report, 2010). Only five other cities (i.e., Boston, Honolulu, Minneapolis, San Francisco and Seattle) rank as low or lower. While the Mid Atlantic School District's child population has remained flat its school-aged population has fallen and total public school enrollment declined by 8 percent between 2000 and 2009. One explanation for the declining share of children in the population is the city's failure to provide quality public schools in all neighborhoods. Another explanation is the steep increase in home price, rent and the loss of affordable housing options which make it more difficult for families with children to move into or stay in urban centers.

These declines also may result from the changing composition of households and families nationwide. The average number of people living together in a single household has been decreasing steadily. The proportion of family households that include a husband, wife and one or more children decreased dramatically in the 1990s. Non-family households increased more than 40 percent and unmarried couples doubled. The last

decade also has seen the number of single-parent families almost double to the point where close to one in five children lives with only one parent. The ratio of divorced to married people doubled in the 1990's (Quality School Report, 2010).

Regardless of a child's family background all school-aged children legally are required to attend school. Schools are not just places where children go to learn they also provide a place of employment for a number of adults and serve other vital functions in the community. As a central part of the American fabric, schools are not immune to politics.

Political Frame

According to Berger and Cookson (2002), public education has always been contested ground. History has yet to see a time when public education was not a political issue. Olson (1965) defined politics as the process of determining who gets what, when, and how. In the educational arena politics plays a defining role in who goes to what school, what curriculum students will learn and how teachers will deliver classroom instruction. Bolman and Deal (2003) defined politics as the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests. According to Bolman and Deal, politics are at the heart of all decision making.

The Mid-Atlantic region offers an excellent opportunity to gain insight into the kinds of political dynamics likely to develop when competing entities jockey for scarce resources and political influence. Beginning in the early 2000s the struggle between public and charter schools for students, building space and federal funding created an educational climate fueled by competing political interests.

Many school systems in the United States have undertaken both individual and collective efforts to restructure the legal and regulatory regime to make the rules of the game more favorable to their survival and growth. Such efforts are a form of strategic political behavior, both tactical and systemic rather than an economic adjustment to consumer demand.

Olson (1965) explained that rational actors sharing common interests do not necessarily coalesce into a collective force because each individual actor has an incentive to sit back and let others do the work. Since the emergence of charter schools in the late 1990s, the competition for students increased dramatically. The situation in the Mid Atlantic School District pits charter schools against charter schools and public schools against fleeting enrollments. Student enrollment in charter schools has grown by leaps and bounds in LUCMAR. Charter schools are the biggest threat to public school enrollment in LUCMAR. In some parts of the city charter schools have depleted the traditional public schools of students.

Private actors operate within market systems respond to signals from consumers about how to maximize profits and take their cues from the discipline of intra-market competition. Public actors on the other hand operate within governmental institutions and pursue political goals including maximizing power, protecting bureaucratic privilege and attaining purposeful goals in an elaborate framework of rules and regulations. Implicit in this distinction is what Rein (1989) labeled the dualist perspective which assumes that the government is different from the rest of the world and that sharp demarcations between government and the rest of society can be drawn systemically. Theorists interested in urban politics have long recognized the inevitable intermingling of private interests and

public power (Stone, 1989). The implications of that insight have barely penetrated either public discourse or academic theorizing about contemporary privatization.

Although researchers frequently discuss the issue of charter schools in terms of market theories these entities typically straddle the line between public and private and are one of the clearest manifestations of the ways in which market-oriented policy initiatives blur the boundaries between government and markets (Henig, 2003). The dualist perspective portrays markets and governments as distinct institutional arenas each with its own defining characteristics. Among these characteristics are differences in products, incentives, norms, problem definitions and dominant actors (Henig, 2003).

The distinction between governments and markets has never been crisp and clean, but recent phenomena reveal a growing crossover from the government arena into the market. This privatization movement is driven by the belief that the discipline of market competition and the innovation of the entrepreneur are more effective and efficient means of delivering public services than those employed by traditional public systems. Private organizations both for profit and nonprofit are moving deeper into arenas typically managed by the public sector and the responsibility for providing many of these formally public services is becoming a function of both sectors. Some analysts take the need to grapple with blurring of boundaries quite seriously (Salamon, 1997). However at a theoretical level the dualist model continues to hold that the incentive structures guiding the behavior of service providers in each arena is distinctly different and encourages a discourse that pits government entities against free market organizations (e.g., charter schools versus public schools; Henig, 1994). This ongoing problem continues to drive the ever-growing conflict between maintaining school traditions and efforts of reform.

A basic proposition of the political frame is that the combination of scarce resources and divergent interests produces conflict as surely as night follows day (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Bolman and Deal noted the following:

From a political perspective conflict is not necessarily a problem or a sign that something is amiss. Organizational resources are notoriously in short supply; there is rarely enough to give everyone everything they want. There are too many lower level jobs and too few at the top. If one group controls the policy process others may be frozen out. Individuals compete for jobs, titles and prestige. Departments compete for resources and power. Interest groups vie for policy concessions. Conflict is natural and inevitable. (p. 197)

Literature - Micropolitics

Different authors have developed a number of varying definitions for micropolitics but typically such descriptions involve discussions of power, influence and control among individuals and groups in a social context often an organization (Hoyle, 1986). The concept of micropolitics has much to offer in a discussion of current educational systems as it deals with political processes that can provide decision makers with alternative ways of seeing, interpreting and explaining what goes on in those organizations (Willower, 1991). Micropolitics commonly have permeated the subtext of organizational life in which conflicts, tensions, resentments, competing interests and power imbalances influence everyday transactions in institutions (Morley, 2000). Micropolitical awareness renders competition and domination more visible and reveals processes of stalling, sabotage, manipulation, power bargaining, bullying, harassment and spite.

The micropolitical perspective on organizations provides a valuable and potent approach to understanding the day-to-day operation of schools (Blasé, 1991). Serious discussions of organizations as political entities in the United States first began in the

early 1960s. Much of the early work took place in the field of public administration and in the mid 1970s the micropolitical viewpoint lent its perspective to educational organizations (Iannaccone, 1975).

Burns (1961) was one of the earliest public administration theorists to depart from traditional organizational thinking. His view of micropolitics was relatively comprehensive, “the exploitation of resources, both physical and human for the achievement of more control over others and thus of safer or more comfortable or more satisfying terms of individual existence” (p. 257). Burns associated political activity in organizations with making use of others as resources. Burns demonstrated a strong interest in integrating both cooperative and conflicting processes into a political theory of organizations. He considered political behavior to be the instrument of social change in organizations and explained that it could occur within a system of shared beliefs or “across a division of values, in which the basic rules of the game are in dispute” (p. 267).

Other researchers have examined competition and conflict among interest groups in the context of the organizational decision-making process. Cyert and March (1963), for example discussed the problem of choice under conditions of uncertainty and complexity. They discovered that decision making often occurred within a framework of disparate goals and that from this process coalitions emerged to achieve political ends. Wamsley and Zald’s (1973) highlighted the interactive nature of organizations in relation to their external political environments. They argued that public organizations interact both reactively and proactively with their external environment and that they “manipulate, ameliorate and influence their environment and relevant others” (p. 45).

Further examination of the literature reveals a host of theoretical approaches to understanding micropolitics. Mayes and Allen (1977), for example constructed a political model of organization that extends beyond formal decision processes about resource allocations. To these writers micropolitics were the “management of influences to obtain ends not sanctioned by the organization or to obtain ends through non-sanctioned influence means” (p. 675).

Schein’s (1977) model of organizational politics focused on the individual rather than on group political behavior. Central to this approach are the intentions of organizational actors and their relative congruence with organizational goals. Schein’s loose conceptual framework attempts to link political tactics employed by individuals to power bases and the intentions (goals) of political actors. In contrast to other micropolitical models this approach explicitly ignores group behavior and formal organizational factors.

It was not until the 1980s that theoretical and empirical work in micropolitics proliferated in the fields of both management and education. Although there were several approaches to micropolitics all emphasized the strategic use of power in organizations for the purposes of influence and protection. In management Bacharach and Lawler (1980) and Blasé (1987) defined politics in organizations as the tactical use of power to retain or obtain control of real or symbolic resources. These writers described a political model of organization that emphasized the power and conflict dynamics of coalitions within a framework of bargaining relationships and bargaining tactics.

More broadly, Pfeffer (1981) defined organizational politics as activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop and use power and other resources to obtain

preferred outcomes in a situation in which little certainty or consensus about the choices existed. Coon and Knockhelmann (1999) found that the strategies used most frequently by principals to gain political influence over teachers and parents were rationalizing, followed by mobilizing then controlling. Similarly, Greenfield (1984) argued that disagreement and contention among individuals and groups inevitably would exist in a society that recognizes and values plurality. Since educational settings can serve as contexts for the expression of individual willfulness educational leaders often engage in persuasion, calculation, guile, persistence, threat or sheer force to achieve the preferred ends.

The micropolitical perspective in schools. As previously discussed, Iannaccone (1975) was one of the earliest theorists to apply the idea of micropolitics to public schools and education. He conceptualized micropolitics in two ways: in terms of the interaction of administrators, teachers and students within the school and in terms of interaction between lay and professional subsystems at the school building level. He noted that the actions of one subsystem invariably influenced the other. Iannaccone's discussion of micropolitics provided concrete insights about how teachers' demands for autonomy served as a political ideology and how such demands interacted with the interests of school administrators and the public.

Ball (1987) described the major leadership styles interpersonal, managerial and political used by British school heads to control teachers. Such control typically resulted in fatalism, frustration and occasionally satisfaction. Like many political theorists, Ball stressed the importance of group-level analysis and conflict dynamics. Ball's work targeted the interests of actors the maintenance of organizational control and a focus on

conflict over policy. Ball discussed all of these concepts in terms of different actors' perspectives on the school environment.

Only a few studies of cooperative/consensual political relationships between teachers and school leaders have appeared in the micropolitical literature. Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1990) for example studied innovative working relationships between school principals and teacher leaders in one school district and described strategies employed by both groups to shape effective working relationships. Similarly in a study of the micropolitics of leadership in an elementary school, Greenfield (1991) discovered that effective leadership by both the school principal and teachers relied heavily on moral sources of influence. A commitment to serve children dramatically affected the development of cooperative political relationships between the principal and teachers. Martin (1997) found that principals used micropolitical techniques to influence planning committees through the selection and recruitment of members. Marshall and Mitchell (1991) explored the assumptions of assistant principals and their subjective understandings and common language about ways to gain and maintain power and control in their work environments. The authors detailed how these administrators used the assumptive worlds of their subcultures to limit conflicts to manageable arenas and issues.

Taken together these school-based micropolitical studies completed during the last thirty years addressed a wide range of issues related to administrator/teacher political relationships at the school level. For the most part they tended to emphasize the overt, adversarial and conflictive aspects of politics in schools rather than political processes identified with cooperative relationships.

Blau (1973) believed that the distribution of decision making and influence between the administration and the faculty in an academic institution represents the extent to which bureaucratic or professional authority predominates. This perspective also permeates the work of Bennett and Wilkie (1973), who drew attention to the crucial relationship between political dispute and the allocation of resources.

McNay (1995) identified the location of power and influence in the decision making process as the essential issue involved in the changing culture of universities from collegial to corporate enterprises. Power according to Mechanic (1962), is “any force that results in behavior that would not have occurred if the force had not been present” (p. 351). In other words power is the ability to get others to behave in ways that they ordinarily would not. Power exists only where there are opportunities to exercise influence on others. Thus an individual manager or leader cannot be powerful except in the context of other individuals. Authority and legitimized power generally adhere to a position and are distributed in such a way that those in the most prestigious positions have the greatest amount of it. Scott (1981) indicated that those in positions above the leader in an organization’s hierarchy shared the social norms that legitimized this exercise of influence.

Parsons (1957) argued that power was a specific mechanism designed to bring about changes in the actions of other units, individuals or collectives in the process of social interaction. Ardent (1970) contended that an individual’s power actually manifested in the actions of the group to which he belonged and as such power sprang up whenever that group of people got together and acted in concert. According to Lukes

(1974), power rests on some normatively specific conception of interests which are research-driven in the school setting.

Machiavelli as cited by House (1984) described a process of political influence where leaders accomplished their ends in an indirect manner through control of information contacts with others. The practitioners of this type of political influence typically are adept at concealing their manipulations (Christie & Geis, 1970). The exercise of this power often manifests in another party outside the group having to do something that he would not otherwise do (Dahl, 1957) and emerges within the school setting in outcomes like the reallocation of teaching and administrative duties. This scenario often can result in conflict especially when there are competing values and interests such as those evidenced within the divisions of the school. The exercising of power in organizations can be overt and identifiable but also may prove subtle, complex and confusing. The examination of daily practices, relationships and emotions in organizations can reveal power operating in structures of thinking and behavior that previously seemed devoid of such power relationships (White, 1986).

Micropolitics within the school community. Local decisions about schools rarely are made in a vacuum. Many analyses of school politics focus on local stakeholder groups as if their interests, resources and the relative balance of power among them are the sole determinants of policy (Henig, 1999). Few political symbols in the United States carry the power associated with the local control of education.

Schools typically reflect closely the character of their local communities. In the *Micropolitics of School*, Ball (1987) emphasized that one cannot understand what happens inside schools without accounting for the environment in which schools operate.

Although “not always explicitly evident,” micropolitics “pervade the organizational lives of those involved in schools” (Mawhinney, 1999, p.159-161). External values and beliefs, along with efforts to impose these values and beliefs on the school environment commonly affect the daily interplay among administrators, central office staff, teachers, parents and students. In this age of the public’s resolute call for legislative reform and increased educator accountability this lack of autonomy among local educators has never been so dramatically notable. Whatever the historical causes of this apparently drastic change in the locus of control in education the fact is that the public has become an increasingly integral force in the decision making process (Blasé, 1991).

Schools are the public institutions that most affect the private realities of families and communities (Litwak & Meyer, 1974). For many families schools are the most accessible part of their government. As citizens, taxpayers and former students, community members are more likely to notice and comment on the activities and connections of students and schools (Lindle, 1999). School officials, including teachers, are more available and more approachable than most government representatives. With a predominately female teaching force many community members feel comfortable contacting schools and trying to impose their will (Marshall & Anderson 1995).

A few teacher work life studies have yielded descriptive data relevant to understanding political interactions between school-based staff and parents. The results of several comprehensive studies conducted in the 1970s confirmed that teachers typically viewed relationships with parents as distant, distrustful and hostile (Becker, 1980). Such characteristics often are due to the different perspectives of teachers and parents regarding the student. Bates and Babchuk (1961) considered teacher-parent

conflicts inevitable because they result from differences linked to primary and secondary group affiliations. In addition to conflicts that stem from differing perspectives on the student, teacher authority and parental authority regarding school matters often are contradictory and unclear. Teachers and parents each believe that they have the right to determine educational practices in the school (McPherson, 1972).

Connell (1985) found that teachers infrequently responded to parental pressure through genuine power sharing. Generally teachers responded defensively and they often created tokenistic ways of involving parents in the school or worked to minimize contact with parents. Connell also found that the teachers' general view of education often pitted them against parents. Becker (1980) described teacher's attempts to establish common bonds of parenthood and invoke bureaucratic rules to deal with critical and obtrusive parents. McPherson (1972) identified other devices such as politeness, avoidance, conferencing and forming coalitions with students to deal with parental challenges to decisions about student promotions, group placement, instructional materials and practices that departed from the "tried and true." Lortie (1975) noted that teachers often develop coalitions with school principals to protect themselves from intrusions by parents.

Researchers reported that school superintendents and principals functioned as protectors of their organizations (Willower, 1991). The principal determines what is important and what will not be tolerated and sets the tone for tension, worth, openness and fear (Sikes, 1985). Conversely, Lortie (1963) and Dreeben (1970) argued that for a number of reasons the school principal's formal authority with teachers is limited at least in comparison with managers of other types of organizations. Although a principal's

authority in the school officially is supreme, teachers expect principals to make allocative decisions fairly. Sikes (1985) found that in some British schools teachers believed that school heads unfairly used appointments and promotions to develop latent status hierarchies to support their own orientations. Blasé (1984) linked violations of norms for fair and equitable treatment to decreases in teacher morale, increases in teacher stress, teacher role conflict and teacher alienation.

Hunter (1979) showed how a school administrator maintained control of decisional processes through indirect means despite the existence of a democratic governance structure. Hunter found that the consultative structures designed to facilitate faculty participation also kept the principal informed and actually increased his control and substantiated the claim that he alone had a global view of the school. Hunter underscored the importance of taken for granted assumptions that make up the political culture of the school (e.g. the staff's acceptance of an advisory rather than power-sharing role in the decision-making process) in explaining the head's control.

Blasé (1995) asserted that school principals often use micropolitical tactics to wield power over teachers through formal and informal means. Blasé indicated that some school principals use leadership styles that depart from strict domination and subordination of teachers. The resulting teacher behavior contradicts simplistic portrayals of teachers as compliant and submissive. Lightfoot (1983) discovered that principals whom teachers defined as open and effective tended to be highly interactive with teachers rather than unilateral, arbitrary and authoritarian. Their leadership style positively affected teacher motivation, involvement, morale and performance and influenced the

development of productive and open relationships between teachers and students, teachers and teachers and teachers and parents.

Hanson (1976) further indicated that bureaucratic authority is inadequate in explaining political dynamics between school principals and teachers. Hanson discovered that administrators and teachers controlled different spheres of influence or decision zones in the schools he studied and that each sphere involved relative degrees of power, autonomy, decisional discretion and legitimacy. Hanson also found that administrators and teachers developed informal tactics to manipulate one another even in their own sphere of influence. Principals, for example tried to control teachers by manipulating their concept of professional behavior. Teachers on the other hand tried to affect change by forming coalitions with colleagues and taking stands on issues at faculty meetings.

Studies of teachers' perspectives consistently have emphasized that, although significant differences exist in the leadership orientation of school principals and result in profoundly different effects on teachers few principals exhibit a fundamentally democratic, collegial style of leadership. Most principals are oriented towards control of teachers although the strategies they use to achieve such control range from openly directive and authoritarian to diplomatic and subtle (Ball, 1987). According to Caruso (2011), novice principals must know the effect of their decisions on existing micropolitical structures in their schools. A principal's success in managing power relations is critical to understanding why some principals have chosen to leave challenging schools while others have made the decision to stay. To understand the perspectives behind these choices, districts should build micropolitical literacy by talking about power relations with principals and discussing successful strategies for dealing

with major stakeholders at school sites such as teachers, parents and district leaders (Evans, 2010).

According to Mirochnik (1991), the position of school superintendent is among the most challenging positions of leadership in today's educational system. Eastman and Mirochnik (1991) described the responsibilities and problems inherent in the position of the superintendent as wide in scope and variety. Johnson (1995) found that superintendents exercised political leadership by interacting with city officials, school board members and union leaders in an effort to secure the funds, decision-making authority and public regard needed to improve their schools. Additionally, part of the present day context of the superintendency is the notion that the superintendent is key to implementing various school change efforts (Eastman & Mirochnik, 1991). Lily (1992) posited that much of the strategic leadership tasks of the school superintendent involve making decisions regarding the strategic position of the school district relative to its environment.

School reform and the micropolitics of change. The process of consolidation represents a dramatic change in the traditional structure of schools especially in the Mid Atlantic School District (Jackson, 2006). Within the educational arena, many stakeholders believe that change falls somewhere between chaos and over control (Fullan, 1991). Political scientists often write about how politics and policy slow the processes of change (Lynd, 1937). Rapid demographic change is one force powerful enough to overwhelm these forces of inertia particularly at the local level where population inflow and outflow can be highly concentrated and selective (Henig, 1999).

Change breeds ambiguity and ambiguity provides opportunity for shifts in the power structures of most schools (Malen, 1995).

Education reform policies are fertile territory for change and micropolitics (Lindle, 1999). To advance reform efforts and sustain innovation reformers must understand how micropolitics and macro influences will affect reform effort change makers must take politics into account (McBride, 2002). Schools house informal political affiliations and are the center for formal decision-making processes as reforms all over the world have de-centralized and de-regulated issues of instructional practice and financing from intermediate government agencies to the schoolhouse. The politics of school-level decision making makes the context of schools even more political (Ogawa, 1994).

For principals, school-level decision making integrates the competing demands of external constituencies and internal factions among teachers and staff. Such competing demands may have existed before but with school-level decision-making forums these contesting groups are more apparent (Wirt & Kirst, 1989). By providing a forum for discussing the dilemmas of practices the conflicts between administrators and teachers have become more evident. If the structure of school decision making includes parents or other community representatives voices from outside of the profession join the melee. The demands of these myriad stakeholders increase the range of choices for each decision and the competition for the decision is more political (Cistone, 1994).

To ensure survival schools leaders must be prepared to change. According to Fullan (1993), the initial starting point is to determine the school's readiness for change coupled with the capacity to take ownership of the change process which may involve a

radical change in the existing school culture. School improvement, whether primary, secondary or tertiary essentially involves change (Milliken, 2001). Stoll and Mortimer (1995) equated the process of improvement with the symbiotic agreement of priorities that leaders can achieve through effective policy formulation. To achieve effectiveness in any strategic sense the emphasis must be on the development of trust, the sharing of information and the common interest between all parties involved. This approach necessitates cooperation rather than conflict (Dowling & Robinson, 1990).

The increasing attention to education reform has politicized schools in ways that are more overt. Before the current wave of reform schoolhouses were romanticized and removed from the everyday turmoil of communities. Now schools are the focus of community aspirations and development and education is the political link to a stronger economic future. Though public schools have always had an ambitious mission the increased expectations for reform make schools and their communities more political.

One of the most common types of school restructuring involves decentralizing the decision-making process and providing schools, teachers and occasionally parents with more decision-making authority. These changes can help to improve the functioning of schools but also may affect the micropolitical environment of schools and the roles of principals (Peterson & Warren, 1993).

According to Blasé (1991), some research on school decentralization and shared decision making examines the nature and dynamics of micropolitics at the school level but this perspective still has not produced a large set of systemic studies across multiple sites. In many schools that are restructuring governance structures this perspective provides some useful issues for consideration. As Blasé (1991) and Ball and Bowe (1991)

have suggested schools are places where individuals and groups seek to maximize their values and goals by exerting power in formal and informal arenas. These researchers found that the transformation of decision-making and governance structures changed jurisdictions, shifted the micropolitics of the school, heightened conflict and altered the roles of the principal. In the face of such transformation principals may face increased complexity and uncertainty in their roles due to these unclear governance processes. They face the complex task of moderating potential conflict and helping manage decision-making processes that are not always clear. Without well-defined structures and carefully developed processes for decision making and review, disagreements can go underground and ultimately increase conflict and discord (Peterson & Warren, 1993).

Notwithstanding the vast amount of literature which directly and indirectly addresses the pervasive and consequential nature of politics in promoting change and development in school researchers seem to be surprisingly unaware of the micropolitical aspects of organizational life (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

Micropolitics of conflict. Blasé (1991) found that the transformation of school governance systems seemed related to an increase in school conflict and a more heightened micropolitical environment. According to Blasé, change invariably created conflict and spawned a hotly contested tug-of-war to determine winners and losers. Based on Blasé's research, some individuals and groups supported the change others were dead set in opposition. Too often conflicts smoldered beneath the surface then on occasion burst back into the open as outbreaks of unregulated warfare (Bolman & Deal, 2003). As Machiavelli observed many years ago in *The Prince, 1514*

It must be realized that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more uncertain of success, or more dangerous to manage than the establishment of a new order of

things; for he who introduces change makes enemies of all those who derived advantage from the old order and finds but lukewarm defenders among those who stand to gain from the new one. (chapter 6)

The school is an organization (Johnson, 1970) and like any organization its operation cannot be understood without noting the significance of conflict (Johnson, 1973; Robins, 1974). Conflicts among school personnel, between students and school personnel and among students are inevitable. Such conflicts can test the health of the relationships within the school. According to Johnson (1974), conflicts are critical events that can bring increased learning, creative insight, high-quality problem solving and closer relationships; or they can bring lasting resentment, smoldering hostility, psychological scars, closed minds and a refusal to perform role responsibilities. Conflicts can contain the seeds of destruction or the seeds of a more unified and cooperative organization. Conflicts may bring aggression or mutual understanding. Conflicts have the potential for producing both highly constructive and highly destructive consequences.

Micropolitics assume that any complex organization comprises several constituencies that contend with each other over resources, power, interests and alternative perspectives such as interpretations of goals, means and even institutional identities (Ball, 1997). Conflict and competition are more likely to characterize educational organizations than shared visions and collaborations because schools are vulnerable to a host of powerful external and internal forces. They exist in a vortex of governmental mandates, social and economic pressures and conflicting ideologies associated with administrators, faculty and students. Political organization is possible in loosely coupled organizations like schools because they are arenas of struggle between a mandated singular way of doing things and new initiatives designed to fix the old ways (Berry & Dempsey, 1991).

Educational organizations are political systems both internally and in their external relationships. In educational organizations at all levels, constant tactical power struggles occur in an effort to obtain control over real or symbolic resources (Bacharach, 1993). The decision-making process is the primary arena of political conflict. Each stakeholder commonly approaches a decision with the objective of maximizing his specific interest or goals rather than maximizing some general objective. Given the importance of the decision-making process and groups efforts to have their views reflected in decision outcomes the nature of congruence in the location of power in the decision making process is consequential for the level of conflict and ultimately for educational quality. The passing of a sensitive issue such as school closings back and forth between the administration and the school board would be an illustration of this.

Conceptual Framework

This case study explored the micropolitics present in seven school buildings that housed the staff and student bodies of two merged schools. As noted in the literature above micropolitical activities normally occur in organizations when coalitions compete for scarce resources and power. In a school teachers compete for various resources like positions, materials, room assignments and favor from the principal. Differences among teachers particularly those differences that revolve around values and belief systems inevitably result in conflict. A principal's ability to handle the micropolitics that arise in a school over issues stemming from power and conflict could be the difference between a school's success and failure.

Mangham (1979) developed one of the most thorough analyses of the micropolitical perspective. Using a symbolic interactionist perspective Mangham

discussed in detail some of the underlying precipitants to political behavior in organizations. He argued that opportunities for individual discretion inevitably would bring to the surface different views on organizational goals and the means to achieve them. Differences in consequences he maintained would lead to political interactions. Mangham contended that all organizational behavior can be considered political under certain conditions.

Mangham (1979) also insisted that organizational politics included both conflictive and consensus-building processes: "Where there are rival positions and rival advocates competition for support ensues and all the techniques of politics may be displayed: persuasion, compromise, bargaining and destabilization of the other's position" (p. 18). Mangham contended that organizational leaders produce shared realities through political interaction and suggested that even commonplace interaction required varying degrees of political accommodation. Consequently, Mangham characterized joint action as both the competition and collaboration of individuals and groups attempting to manage their own behavior and the behavior of others to achieve their self interests. To Mangham, power was the common currency of all negotiation and the basis of all social and organizational behavior.

Morley, (2000) furthered Mangham's research and provided multiple characteristics of micropolitics. According to Morley micropolitics have permeated the subtext of organizational life in which conflicts, tensions, resentments, competing interests and power imbalances influence everyday transactions in institutions.

In close alignment with the major philosophical assumptions associated with micropolitics, Bolman and Deal (1991) developed theory based on various political

attributes. According to Bolman and Deal the job of managers and leaders is to recognize the major constituencies, to develop ties to their leadership and to manage conflict as productively as possible (p. 361). Above all they need to build power bases and use power carefully. They cannot give every group everything it wants although they can try to create arenas for negotiating differences and developing reasonable compromises. Managers and leaders also have to work hard at articulating commonalities among members of their organizations. They also must strive to eliminate infighting among internal stakeholders and focus instead on common goals, particularly in the face of external opposition. Groups that fail to work well together internally often find themselves overpowered by well-organized outsiders that have their own agendas.

Bolman and Deal (2003) established a more elaborate description of the political assumptions associated with most organizations. They summarized their political perspective using five propositions:

1. Organizations are *coalitions* of diverse individuals and interest groups.
2. There are *enduring differences* among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
3. The most important decisions involve allocating *scarce resources*—who gets what.
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences make *conflict* central to organizational dynamics and underline *power* as the most important asset.
5. Goals and decisions emerge from *bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position* among competing stakeholders.

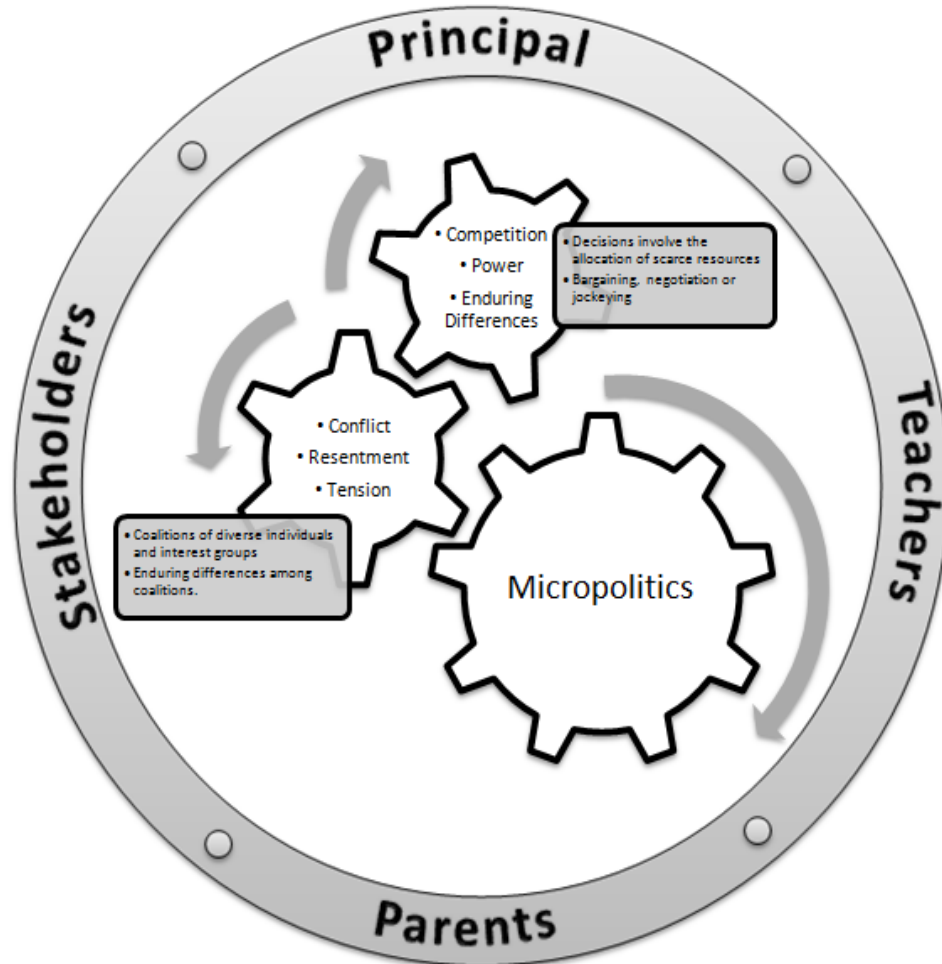
The tenets established in Bolman and Deal's (2003) political framework and Mangham and Morley's research on micropolitics served as the basis for the conceptual framework employed in this study. This political framework provided a mechanism for describing the various issues of contention that arose in the district around the competing interests of the stakeholders in the co-located public schools. Most of the research on this topic builds on the belief that public and private actors operate in two relatively distinct arenas and orient their strategic behavior around separate frames of reference and opportunity structures (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coulson, 1999; Friedman, 1962; Lieberman, 1993). This study centered on the assumption that when staffs from different schools co-located into one facility issues revolving around enduring differences and the allocation of scarce resources would result in power struggles and conflict. As a result micropolitical issues will evolve characterized by conflict, resentment, tension and competition.

Summary

Traditional theories of school organization and leadership have failed to capture the complicated and dynamic nature of school life (Blasé, 1991). Micropolitics remind us that as public institutions schools are more, not less, susceptible to the conflicts, ploys and tactics of various internal and external interest groups (Lindle, 1994). Schools are perhaps the most accessible public arena for individuals and groups to pursue their interests. Schools are brokers, repositories and dialectics of knowledge. Knowledge, power and conflict are traditionally associated with micropolitics at the school level. According to the research, micropolitics effect school personnel at every level. Teachers, principals, parents and even superintendents are susceptible to the forces associated with

micropolitics. Figure 2.1 below provides an illustration of how micropolitics might occur in consolidated schools. Based on Bolman and Deal's political frame conflict and power struggles erupt in organizations as a result of enduring differences and disputes over the allocation of scarce resources. Teachers, parents, community members and the principal influence micropolitical activity in a school. These micropolitical activities will most likely manifest themselves with the involved stakeholders displaying acts that reflect tension, resentment, conflict, power and competition.

Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework – Micropolitics in Consolidated Schools



Chapter 3: Design and Methodology

Overview

This qualitative case study identified the micropolitical issues that arose when two or more schools co-located into the same facility. This inquiry sought to answer the research question: How do principals perceive the micropolitical issues that arise when two or more schools merge and have to share the same facility?

This exploration focused specifically on micropolitical issues in a Mid-Atlantic school district where between 2006 and 2009 several schools closed because of low enrollment. As a result the students and faculty from those buildings had to merge with existing schools into one facility. This phenomenon of consolidation had become common in many of the nation's urban areas. As such, I developed a guiding conceptual framework that bounded my investigation by the time, place and phenomena to be studied. This chapter describes the design and methodology employed in this inquiry and details the rationale for using a qualitative multiple case study approach.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative methods served as a useful tool for exploring the perspectives of school leaders about the micropolitics of consolidation. For decades the academic community debated the validity of qualitative research methods as a valid means to generate knowledge. In recent years this debate has dwindled as faculty, graduate students and administrators use observation, interviewing and document analysis to better understand new phenomena and inform policy (Manning, 1992).

Qualitative research methods are appropriate for research problems where the variables are unknown and need to be explored (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative methods

permit the researcher to approach the fieldwork without the constraints of predetermined categories of analysis. Qualitative methods also allow the researcher to study the selected issue in depth and detail. This flexibility contributes to the profundity and openness of the qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1990). When conducting qualitative research the investigator seeks to gain a complete picture of the phenomenon of interest. According to Stainback and Stainback (1988), a holistic description of events, procedures and philosophies, occurring in natural settings aids in the facilitation of accurate situational decisions. This differs from quantitative research which examines selected, pre-defined variables.

Qualitative design displays an interactive, dynamic and emergent character in which the researcher weaves together the aims, strategies, data, analysis and validity in the process of the study (Maxwell, 1996). The qualitative researcher is the key instrument in the design process and continually applies reflexivity and evaluative skills to data analysis and to the decisions concerning the direction of the next step in the study. The design of each qualitative study is unique (Lloyd-Jones, 2003).

Qualitative methods were the best choice for the current study because the tenets of qualitative research allowed the researcher to access and understand the views of the research participants, while also focusing on the natural setting or context. This study was exploratory because limited information existed about the micropolitical issues that arose when public schools close and have to merge with schools already in operation.

Assumptions of Qualitative Research

In qualitative research the investigator must embrace certain assumptions. These philosophical assumptions consist of a stance toward the nature of reality (ontology), how the researcher knows what he or she knows (epistemology), the role of values in the

research (axiology), the language of research (rhetoric) and the methods used in the process (methodology) (Creswell, 2003).

Ontological assumptions focus on reality and the way that the researcher reports different takes on said reality. Everyone involved in a qualitative study embraces a different truth. When studying individuals, qualitative researchers must embrace the idea of reporting these multiple realities.

Qualitative researchers that adopt the epistemological assumption try to get as close as possible to the participants they are studying. The epistemological assumption construes that the researcher constructs knowledge as he interacts and develops relationships with the participants in the study. In short, the researcher tries to minimize the distance or objective separateness between him and those being researched (Guba & Lincoln, 1988).

The axiological assumption focuses primarily on values and stresses the importance of identifying the researcher's belief system in the given study. In a qualitative study the inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden information gathered from the field (Creswell, 2003).

Based on the rhetorical assumption the researcher uses an active personal voice in the narrative. Researchers that embrace the rhetorical assumption believe that qualitative writing should be personal and in literary form. The language of the qualitative researcher becomes personal and based on the definitions that evolve during a study (Creswell, 2003).

The process of qualitative research often employs a methodological assumption. According to the methodological assumption, researchers use inductive logic, study a topic within its context and use an emerging design. Researchers that utilize the methodological assumption use a ground-up approach.

When I developed this study I considered all five of these philosophical assumptions. First, I employed the ontological assumption by choosing to focus on more than one school principal. This decision helped to ensure that the data reflected the multiple realities shared by the targeted group. My status as an insider within the school system allowed me to collaborate, spend a vast amount of time in the field and limit the distance between me and the targeted group. This elimination of barriers helped me to address the epistemological assumption. I considered the axiological assumption in the development of my research design which clearly identified my values and biases as they relate to the study. I used the language of qualitative research as put forth by the rhetorical assumption by including personal voice and an engaging style of narrative. My study focused on the particulars associated with my identified research question and included those specific details that helped clarify the context of the study.

In a qualitative research study it is important to identify those assumptions that may not be implicit. My research included the following assumptions:

- Micropolitical issues will arise when two or more schools share the same building.
- The consolidation process will create micropolitical issues that can be identified by the principal
- Each school site may produce different micropolitical issues

Rational for Case Study (Multiple Approach)

My research focused specifically on the perspectives of seven principals that led schools involved in the consolidation process in the Mid Atlantic School district during the 2008-2009 school year. Because each consolidated school had a different principal and its own unique situation I employed a multiple case study approach.

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007). The quintessential characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1990). Cultural systems of action refer to sets of interrelated activities engaged in by the actors in a social situation. Case studies have been increasingly used in education (Boisjoly & DeMichiell, 1994). Stake (1995) also referred to case studies as triangulated research strategies. Feagin et al. (1991) asserted that triangulation could occur with data, investigators, theories and even methodologies. Stake (1995) stated that protocols ensure accuracy and alternative explanations are called triangulation. The need for triangulation arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes. In case studies researchers accomplish this goal by using multiple sources of data (Yin, 1984).

A frequent criticism of case study methodology is that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing a generalizable conclusion. Yin (1993) presented Giddens' view that considered case methodology "microscopic" because it "lacked a

sufficient number” of cases (p. 26). Hammel (1993) forcefully argued that the relative size of a sample; whether 2, 10, or 100 cases does not transform a multiple case into a macroscopic study. The goal of the study should establish the parameters and the researcher should then apply those parameters to all research. As such even a single case could be acceptable provided it met the established objective.

Defining the case. This study met all of the identified criteria for a case study. As the investigator, I examined multiple bounded systems (7 different K-8 schools in the Mid Atlantic School District). My study was bounded by time (i.e. investigation was done during the 2010-2011 school year). My study involved in-depth data collection from multiple sources (e.g., interviews, documents, and informal observations). The study also focused on an important phenomenon of interest (perception of school principals regarding the micropolitics of leading a consolidated school). Data gathering took place over the course of a year. The Institutional Review Board from the University of Maryland and the school district being studied approved all data collection protocols.

Site and Sample

The perspectives of the seven principals involved in this study provided the foundation for my research and findings. Each principal’s perspectives of the micropolitics involved in the consolidation of his or her school drew from their unique background and their own personal philosophy on leadership and education. Creswell (2007) defined the multiple case study as a collective study where the inquirer purposively selects multiple cases to illustrate one issue or concern to maximize different perspectives on the phenomenon studied. The present study examined the micropolitical concerns that arose when students, teachers and parents from different schools were

forced to occupy the same building and share resources. The perceptions of each consolidated school principal about these issues and the similarities and differences reflected in the micropolitical issues in each school.

Stake (2006) indicated that the single case of interest in multi-case study research belongs to a particular collection of cases categorically bounded by a common characteristic or condition. In the present study each principal led a consolidated school and dealt with the micropolitical repercussions of working with a merged student body and staff. Each distinct case study was bound by the individual school site and the unique experiences of the principal.

The principals all had the consolidation process in common. Comparing the data obtained from principals with varying years of experience in their positions allowed the researcher to identify those micropolitical issues that were a direct result of consolidation. According to Stake (1988), a case study focuses on a bounded system normally under natural conditions so the researcher can understand the system in its own habitat. Even though the present study focused on principals in one Mid-Atlantic school district the dynamics of urban schools and the behavior of teachers are similar across various settings. As a result the findings will apply to school leaders from various types of school systems. The multiple case format also strengthened the results by replicating the pattern-matching thus increasing confidence in the robustness of the theory (Yin, 1993).

The consolidation process in the Mid Atlantic School District had an effect on all of the stakeholders involved with the individual schools. Teachers, custodians, parents and students all could have provided discourse on the subject of consolidation. The perspective of the stakeholders involved in the consolidation process would have most

likely been different based on each individual's roles and duties in their particular school. Teachers, students and custodians would all most likely describe the micropolitics involved in the consolidation of their schools in a different manner.

The researcher chose to focus on principals as the primary participants in this study because they have a unique macro-level view of what occurs in a school. Unlike teachers they are not isolated in one area all day and are generally involved in every aspect of daily school operations. Principals also normally interact with most of the stakeholders involved in the day to day operations of running a school. Teachers rarely interact with community and business members during the course of a normal school day. The principal's perspective is different than the other stakeholders found in most schools because they are the final decision maker in most school activities and ultimately have the power to influence the majority of school-based micropolitics.

Limiting my study to seven participants also helped with validity issues. There are fewer than 30 K-8 schools in the Mid Atlantic School district and having more than ten participants would have made it easier to identify the actual principals.

Data Gathering Methods

Site selection. The researcher utilized a purposeful sampling strategy for this study. Purposeful selection allows the researcher to ensure that the setting, individuals, and observed activities align with the given research and provides an opportunity to compare differences between settings and individuals. While such comparisons are more common in quantitative inquiries researchers commonly use comparative designs in multi-case qualitative studies as well as in mixed method research (Maxwell & Loomis, 2002).

The researcher recruited seven principals from different schools to participate in this study. All of the school sites served students in grades K-8 and were traditional public schools in the city. The school names were omitted from the study and the principals from each school were identified by fictitious names to ensure confidentiality. The name of the city studied and school system were also created to ensure anonymity.

All of the targeted school principals led consolidated schools. Each of the selected schools consolidated with at least one other school for the 2008-2009 school year. Every possible grade except those traditionally found in high schools was represented during the study. The experience of the targeted principals ranged from less than one year to more than five years. The schools also differed based on student enrollment and pupil socio-economic levels as measured by the percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Table 1 details the characteristics of each of the seven principals and their respective schools.

Table 1: *Characteristics of Principals / Specific Schools*

Principals Name	Years Experience	School Enrollment	% Students Free & Reduced Lunch
Angela	2-3 Years	350 - 500	85%
Frank	2-3 Years	251 - 350	58%
Kam	1 Year	Less Than 250	80%
Max	6 Years	350 - 500	90%
Renee	4-5 Years	251- 350	90%
Rick	9 Years	251 - 350	78%
M.J.	7 Years	251 - 350	85%

By selecting seven principals and seven different sites I had the advantage of identifying the differences and similarities between the micropolitical issues that arose in the various schools. According to Maxwell (2005), explicit comparisons are usually not very productive in a small-scale qualitative study because the small number of cases in any group limits the researcher's ability to draw firm conclusions about the differences between the groups. The multi-case format allowed for more definitive and conclusive results.

Data collection. Most qualitative studies combine several data collection techniques over the course of the research (Marshall, Rossman, 1989). Data for this case study came from five different sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2003). Over the course of this study I employed each of these methods to build an in-depth detailed picture of each case. As mentioned above although data related to my specific topic could be collected from teachers, students, parents and community members most of my information came directly from each school's principal.

Documents. According to Yin (2003), documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic. In this study documents helped to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources and provided detailed, case-specific information for each school. Documents from the Mid-Atlantic school district also provided data on school enrollment, details of school mergers and the experience/background of designated principals. The researcher thoroughly reviewed all documents for accuracy and validity.

Interviews. Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information (Yin, 2003). In this study, I used a focused interview format which allowed me to ask the identified principals a specific set of prepared structured questions to gauge their perception of the micropolitics involved in school consolidation. The majority of the interview questions focused on the principals' perceptions of the issues that occurred when they had to consolidate with another school. A subset of questions was also developed to explore the principals' level of experience and their daily routines (See Appendix A). Most of the interview questions reflected the tenets of Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame and the various behavioral characteristics associated with micropolitics

I interviewed each principal once during this study. The interviews took place at the school site in each principal's office. The researcher asked all principals the same set of prepared questions along with a set of unique questions posed to them based on their individual responses to the established protocol. All of the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed using Microsoft Word. The interviews transcripts were stored electronically as Microsoft word files and printed out in hard copy. The transcripts were then imported into NVivo 9.2 a qualitative research and data analysis software program. The principal interviews provided the primary source of data for this study.

Observations. As a member of the school district's Consolidation Task Force, I attended numerous planning meetings and had the opportunity to partake in the development of the district's consolidation plan. During this time I had the chance to observe district leaders in action as they worked collaboratively to develop a plan that

addressed the possible pros and cons of consolidating elementary and middle schools. These observations helped me develop the context for my study and provided me with the opportunity to compare the actual outcomes of consolidation with predicted challenges. The school system was primarily concerned with possible student violence and parent reaction to the various consolidations during the initial planning stages.

Prior to each interview, I walked around each of the principal's respective schools to gauge the climate of each facility. My unofficial tour of each building also provided me with the opportunity to talk to teachers and parents.

Data Management, Analysis, and Reduction

According to Yin (2003), data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study. During the data analysis process the researcher gives meaning to both first impressions and final suppositions (Stake, 1995). Data analysis involves working with data to organize and synthesize the information in an effort to find themes, patterns and categories. Data analysis is also used to determine the key lessons and decide what to report (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998).

Data analysis brings order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion and is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data it builds grounded theory (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in field notes or transcriptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction also includes such activities as writing summaries, coding, writing memos and clustering data.

During the study I thoroughly reviewed the principals' interview transcripts and arranged the resulting data in an organized manner. I created a chart that listed each principal's years of experience working in a co-located school and years in the system. The chart also identified various characteristics of each school site. These included reconstitution status, number of students enrolled and each school's history of violence. I identified specific themes, similarities, consistencies and differences in the principals' responses and developed an analytic framework that identified the primary themes of the data and identified related theories and definitions.

I used all of the collected data including the analytical framework to form primary and secondary codes. I also prepared memos for each code to ensure clarity and to provide basic explanations. I then described each particular case as I began to analyze the data.

Categorical aggregation and direct interpretation helped me to analyze the data further. In categorical aggregation the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge. In direct interpretation the researcher looks at a single instance and draws meaning from it without looking for multiple instances. Direct interpretation involves pulling the data apart and putting it back together in more meaningful ways (Creswell, 2007). After establishing general themes I

looked for specific patterns and identified relationships between the various categories. I then developed natural generalizations and applied them to all of the collected data.

Data analysis began in the field during the initial principal interviews. I categorized, analyzed and coded the data as I collected it so I could retain information and not let any information amass. One of the most common problems in qualitative studies is letting your unanalyzed field notes and transcripts accumulate which can make the data analysis process much more difficult in the long run (Maxwell, 2005).

Coding the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) asserted that coding is a part of the analysis process. Codes are “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 97). Ryan and Bernard (2000) described data coding as a reduction method.

After reading the data several times and organizing it in the ways described in the previous section Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggested that words, phrases, patterns of behavior and ways of thinking will begin to surface. Categories, themes and patterns will also begin to emerge. Codes represent regularities and patterns (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998) and are attached to units of data. These units include words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Several researchers maintain that coding begins at a basic or descriptive level and becomes more interpretive and inferential with continued reading of the data and ongoing data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, Miles & Huberman, 1994). Bogdan and Biklen suggested beginning with major or general codes. Subcodes then break major codes into smaller categories and from these subcodes the researcher can infer patterns and explanations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The codes in this study originated from the principal's responses to the research questions. Codes helped to identify specific problems encountered by the principals, the direct effect of consolidation on the schools and each principal's unique perspective on the overall consolidation process. The codes also helped with determining which responses related to the introductory and guided questions and distinguished any specific patterns that arose during the interview process.

The researcher then developed subcodes to identify principal responses related to minor themes. Some of the principals responded to the interview question in the same manner so subcodes were used to further classify the data.

Situational codes served to categorize the data according to each unique setting. For example, I attempted to capture the data that specifically identified each principal's feelings about the new configurations of their schools. Situational codes proved useful in categorizing this information.

Due to the nature of the study a cross case synthesis served to fully analyze the data from every case. The technique is especially relevant if a study consists of at least two cases. The analysis is likely to be easier and the findings likely to be more robust than having only one case (Yin, 2003). I conducted my cross case analysis by creating matrixes that identified similarities between the cases. The matrixes identified similar words, phrases and statements used by principals as they responded to the interview questions. This form of analysis helped to identify similarities between different groups of cases.

Using data management software. Qualitative computer programs have been available since the late 1980s and they have become more refined (Miles & Huberman, 1995).

Computer programs can facilitate data analysis in the following manner:

- Storing and organizing qualitative data
- Locating text or image segments associated with a code or theme
- Locating common passages or segments that relate to two or more code labels
- Making comparisons among codes
- Conceptualizing different levels of abstraction in qualitative data analysis
- Providing a visual picture of codes and themes
- Creating a template for coding data (Creswell, 2007)

For this study, I utilized NVivo 9.2 to analyze my data. The NVivo software program allows the user to classify, sort and arrange thousands of pieces of information. NVivo also allows the user to examine complex relationships in the data and conduct subtle analysis with linking, shaping, searching and modeling. NVivo is most useful to qualitative researchers working with very rich, text-based information. NVivo accommodates a wide range of research methods including network and organizational analysis, action or evidence-based research, discourse analysis, grounded theory, literature reviews and mixed methods research. By using the NVivo software I was able to achieve a deeper level of analysis on the large volume of data I obtained from the interviews and school visits.

After I completed my interviews, organized my data and wrote my transcripts; I imported these transcribed word files into NVivo and stored them in the *Sources* category of the program. Once I imported the documents into NVivo I used the analytic plan to identify and categorize the general themes associated with the primary concepts of my study.

The NVivo 9.2 program allowed me to format the data from each principal as a separate case and create a set of characteristics for each case that became useful when I analyzed the data from the combined cases. These characteristics included the principal's race, gender, years of experience and school demographics.

Major efforts to develop understanding from coded data usually require early identification of relevant variables and situations in which variables are observable (Stake, 1995). Proponents of qualitative research advise that researchers develop a list of preliminary coding categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I used my conceptual framework as a guide and created a series of categories which included micropolitics, change, politics, power, questions, participants and consolidation.

I then created secondary nodes and attached them to the respective primary code. The secondary nodes evolved from the primary nodes and the definitions associated with the stated literature. For example the secondary nodes associated with micropolitics included power, scarce resources and competition.

I continued the coding process for each of the data sources by identifying meaning units for each case and labeling the primary and secondary nodes. I enhanced the coding process with the use of written descriptions and summaries for each meaning unit. After I developed codes for all of the participants I used coding stripes to make the

data more salient. The NVivo program uses coding stripes (colored bars) to make the nodes easier to see.

Standards of Quality and Validity

The traditional criteria for validity has its roots in the positivist tradition and to an extent positivism has been defined by a systemic theory of validity. Within the positivist terminology validity resided amongst and was the result and culmination of other empirical conceptions including universal laws, evidence, objectivity, truth, actuality, deduction, reason, fact and mathematical data (Winter, 2000).

The concept of validity threats and how they can be dealt with is a key issue in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2005). All research must respond to canons that stand as criteria against which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). All researchers recognize the need to be accurate in measuring data and logical in interpreting the meaning of those measurements (Stake, 199).

Researchers have proposed various methods for increasing the credibility of research conclusions and ruling out validity threats. Becker and Geer (1957) for example claimed that long-term participant observation provides more complete data about specific situations and events than any other method. Repeated observations and interviews as well as the sustained presence of the researcher in the setting studied can help to rule out spurious associations and premature theories. Both long-term involvement and intensive interviews enable the researcher to collect “rich” data that are detailed and varied enough to provide a full revealing picture of the case (Becker, 1970).

Trustworthiness/Verification

Throughout this inquiry I used multiple techniques to ensure the study's validity and to capture the mandates set forth regarding trustworthiness and verification. Creswell and Miller (1997) identified eight verification procedures that ensure the trustworthiness of a study. These techniques include triangulation, clarification of the research bias, prolonged engagement and providing rich thick descriptions.

Triangulation. In triangulation researchers make use of multiple sources, methods, investigations and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I interviewed seven principals to ensure that the data gained from my study was trustworthy. I also included corroborating theories and evidence in my literature review.

Clarification of research bias. As a seasoned principal of a consolidated school I was fully aware of my personal bias regarding the topic before I even started this research. This chapter contains a section that identifies my vocational history my relationship with the research topic and the possible biases I hold that could have influenced my findings.

Prolonged engagement. My years of experience as a principal also allowed me to establish a strong sense of trust with the participants of my study. Working in a co-located urban school, I understand the culture and daily activities that take place in an elementary / middle school.

Rich descriptions. Finally I employed rich descriptions to develop the data I obtained from the principals. With such detailed descriptions the researcher enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings are transferable because of shared characteristics (Erlandson, 1993).

Reliability

In qualitative inquiry a researcher can address reliability in several ways (Silverman, 2005). Creswell (2005) explained that reliability often refers to the stability of responses to multiple codes of data sets. During my study I used NVivo 9.2 to code the data I received from the multiple respondents.

Credibility

The goal of credibility is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). I employed several tactics to ensure that this study was credible. I made sure that the data obtained from respondents was thick and rich with description. I asked one of my colleagues to evaluate my work (member checks), I exposed my biases and I recorded the interviews to ensure their validity.

Transferability

External validity pertains to the transferability of quantitative data and to the degree to which a study's findings are generalized beyond the immediate case to other populations and settings (Yin, 1994). A qualitative study's transferability or generalizability to other settings can be problematic. To counter these challenges, the researcher can refer back to the original theoretical framework to show how data analysis and collection was guided by specific concepts and models (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Bolman and Deal's (2003) political model established the theoretical framework for my study. I used Bolman and Deal's framework to provide the overall context for the study. All of my codes and interview questions were developed from Bolman and Deal's model.

Confirmability

The construct of confirmability captures the traditional concept of objectivity by determining whether another researcher could confirm the findings of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) removed evaluation from some inherent characteristic of the researcher and placed it squarely on the data themselves (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). This study's generalizability was enhanced and its usefulness strengthened for other settings through the triangulation of data from document analysis. I was able to establish evidence that would allow an external observer to justify the overall validity of my study.

Personal Experience with the Research Topic

My personal experience with consolidated schools began during my fourth year as an assistant principal in Baltimore City. I served as an assistant principal for five years in one of Baltimore's largest middle schools. During the late 1990s and early 2000's several schools in Baltimore were overcrowded. Most of the schools suffering from over enrollment were elementary schools located on the city's east side. One of the elementary facilities that was over enrolled by more than 200 hundred students was located one block from my school. In an effort to address the elementary school's enrollment issues the district housed 200 of the school's primary students in our middle school facility for two years. During the school's two-year stay numerous micropolitical issues arose that affected the entire building. Most of the micropolitical issues dealt with the fact that the elementary school teachers did not like being housed in the basement of a middle school. The elementary school teachers were resentful of the fact that their classrooms, bathrooms and main office did not meet the same construction standards as the

elementary school they left. The elementary school teachers also had issues with parking and various members of the middle school staff. Some of the middle school teachers grew tired of the ongoing complaints from the elementary school staff. Various members of the middle school staff interacted with the elementary school teachers in a rude and unprofessional manner.

In 2002, I received my first appointment as principal of a very small elementary school in the Mid Atlantic School District. The school's population had dwindled from more than 500 students to less than 200 students in a two-year period. Most of the students enrolled in a brand new charter school that opened the year before I became principal. The charter school enrolled at least 60% of the school's former students. During my stint as the principal the school only serviced 185 students. Because of the extremely low enrollment the school had to consolidate with one of the District's *Head Start* programs. During my first year as principal, I had to share my building with more than 40 *Head Start* students. During the one-year consolidation I had to deal with various micropolitical issues caused by the merger. In this case the majority of the issues revolved around the fact that the Head Start classrooms were not adequately equipped to handle younger students. The school system did not make the proper accommodations to the former 5th grade classroom so this resulted in conflict involving the Head Start teachers and parents all school year.

During the spring of the 2005-2006 school year the Mid Atlantic School district was forced to close one middle and three elementary schools in an effort to reduce 2 million square feet of public school space by 2008. My elementary/middle school was one of the four schools closed in the district's consolidation effort. As a result, my

student body and a significant portion of my staff had to merge with the students and faculty of another District middle school. Part of the movement involved my participation as a member of the consolidation task force. The superintendent of the Mid Atlantic School district during the 2006 school year developed the Consolidation Task Force to ensure a smooth transition for students and staff as they moved from one school to another. As a member of the task force I played a primary role in developing a plan to ensure the successful transition of the six schools targeted for consolidation.

My experience during the 2007-2008 school year involved the consolidation of my middle school with a charter school for emotionally disturbed students. During this particular consolidation I had to work closely with district and charter school officials to negotiate a contract involving the shared use of my middle school facility with the charter school, after which my public middle school shared the same facility with the charter school for an entire school year. The micropolitics I experienced as a result of this experience revolved around my interaction with the charter school owners and board members. They had to pay the district to use the space so they expected certain entitlements as it related to using the building. They wanted to use the computer lab beyond their assigned time and they wanted increased use of the gym. A fair schedule was developed but some of the owners felt that they should be entitled to more time since they were paying the city to use the building.

Ironically student behavior was never a problem. That was the initial fear my staff had prior to the consolidation. The student population was extremely low (30 students). The owners eventually found another private building to lease.

During the 2008 -2009 school year, I led another consolidation effort. During the spring of 2008, the Chancellor of the school district proposed to close 23 schools in an effort to meet the mandate of eliminating 2 million square feet of public school space in the District by end of 2008. Because of the school closing my middle school had to acquire the student populations of one middle school and the entire 9th grade population of one high school. The consolidation effort also resulted in the acquisition of 17 new teachers and 8 support staff members. During the consolidation effort the Chancellor's Transition Team identified me as an expert in the field of consolidation and I had to work with several other principals to guide them through the process. This work, as well as my extensive experience as a principal involved with consolidated schools provided an excellent foundation to lead an investigation on the micropolitics of schools forced to merge and share the same facility.

During the 2011-2012 school year I was charged with leading another consolidation effort. The district closed their alternative middle school for emotionally disturbed students (60 students) and merged the entire school with my traditional middle school campus. This consolidation effort was unique because we had to plan a curriculum and develop a set of rules and procedures for governing the staff and student body. The students identified as emotionally disturbed in the district are bound by a different set of mandates regarding discipline and instruction.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Insider Status

My status as an established principal in the school district presents various advantages and disadvantages for this study. The most significant advantage to being an insider involved my access to the proposed target group (principals) and their particular

school buildings. This advantage made it easier to schedule interviews, collect artifacts related to the study and gain approval from the required district officials. My knowledge and experience as a principal of a consolidated school also allowed me to discern school issues that are typical and related to the normal operation of a school from those that are unique and possibly the result of consolidation.

My insider status also allowed me to gain a better understanding of the consolidation process in each school, by giving me the opportunity to talk to teachers, parents and other staff members of those schools identified in my research design. Having this type of access to a school and its stakeholders gave me the opportunity to unofficially triangulate the data and gauge the validity of the interview data obtained from the principals.

As a member of the district's Consolidation Task Force my insider status also provided me with the opportunity to communicate with prominent individuals associated with this new phenomenon. I have established positive relationships with prominent members of school facilities, governing members of charter school boards and various political officials. These associations provided me with additional opportunities to validate my data. I also benefitted from maintaining a positive relationship with the superintendent. Some of these individuals also served as critical friends as I underwent the research and writing process.

My experience as a principal in the district also had the potential to have a negative impact on this study. Two important threats to the validity of qualitative conclusions are the selection of data that fit the researcher's existing theory or preconceptions and the selection of data that stands out to the researcher (Miles &

Huberman, 1994; Shweder, 1980). Both of these concerns involve the subjectivity of the researcher, a term that most qualitative researchers prefer to “bias” (Maxwell, 2005).

Serving as a principal in a consolidated school, I had my own personal views on the micropolitical events in my building that were a direct result of the consolidation process.

To counter any resulting bias I ensured that my research design and interview questions did not reflect my preconceived notions about any of the issues surrounding the micropolitics of consolidation. I also understood that although I serve as a principal in a consolidated school my experiences did not define or necessarily reflect what happens in all consolidated schools. I ensured that as I collected data I did not dismiss or minimize any of the information I obtained from the participants even if my personal opinions did not correspond with the principals I interviewed.

The fact that I was a principal working in the same system as my targeted group during the study did not negatively influence the interview responses I received. Due to the extremely high level of accountability that principals have to face while performing their daily professional duties, school leaders could have been reluctant to tell an insider that they were experiencing any problems or conflicts related to consolidation. School leaders may also have feared possible repercussions from central office if they speak negatively against one of the Chancellor’s initiatives to a fellow colleague. Some principals’ especially those in their first year may have found it difficult to discuss “school business” with a colleague who had a good relationship with the Chancellor and most of the assistant superintendents in the district. Establishing trust with some of the principals especially those new to the system, may be an issue.

I designed my study in a manner that accounted for my personal bias and possible negative effect on the targeted group. Maxwell (2005) termed the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied “reactivity.” Eliminating all influence of the researcher is impossible (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), and the goal in a qualitative study is not to eliminate this influence but to understand it and to use productively. Becker (1970) noted that in natural settings an observer is generally much less of an influence on participants’ behavior than is the setting itself. For interviews in contrast the fact that the researcher is part of the world he or she studies is a powerful and inescapable influence. The interviewer and the interview situation always influence the informant’s response (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Chapter 4: Principal Case Studies

The problems in the Mid Atlantic public school system have persisted for years despite numerous efforts at reform. In 1989 a report by the LUCMAR committee on Public Education noted declining achievement levels as students moved through the grades, the poor condition of the school system's physical facilities, declining enrollment, and the lack of accountability among LUCMAR agencies responsible for monitoring the schools (Council of the Great City Schools, 1989).

Recent reports have continued to cite these problems. In 2004 the Council of the Great City Schools reviewed the LUCMAR school system and cited its continued failure to improve students' academic performance. In 2006, an analysis of the school district's reform efforts by a consulting firm found no progress and recommended a change in district governance to improve student achievement and system-wide accountability (Parthenon Group, 2006).

In response to these problems the LUCMAR Council approved the 2007 Reform Act which significantly altered the governance of the Mid Atlantic Public Schools. The Reform Act transferred the day-to-day management of the school district to the Mayor's office as a cabinet level agency.

Prior to the consolidation effort the school district operated and maintained 147 school buildings. The average school building in the district was 63 years old. The accumulating effects of aging structures, deferred maintenance and delayed improvements created unsatisfactory conditions for teaching and learning. This situation was exacerbated by declines in enrollment which left the district leaders to maintain over 1.9 million square feet of underutilized space in schools. According to recent data student

enrollment in the district has decreased by almost 30,000 pupils during the last 10 years (NARPAC, 2008). The system currently operates 128 schools.

The ongoing decline in enrollment was especially visible in Southeast LUCMAR where public housing units were demolished to make way for more expensive real estate properties. While the population in LUCMAR has grown significantly over the last decade there are fewer school-aged children. Charter schools have also had a negative effect on school enrollment in the district.

Plans to Close and Reorganize

In February of 2008, the District issued a consolidation plan that identified more than 20 schools that needed to be closed and consolidated. The school closures were recommended after Congress raised concerns about the inefficiency of maintaining millions of square feet of underutilized and underused space in district facilities. According to district officials the cost of staffing and maintaining these underutilized facilities took funding and resources away from academic programs and students.

According to the district consolidation plan closing schools would improve the overall quality of education for all students in the district by equalizing resources. Low enrollment and the unequal distribution of funding resulted in the uneven allocation of human and material resources in the public schools in LUCMAR. Some students have the benefit of art and music teachers, counselors and nurses while some students go without. Some schools have deans and counselors to support students with behavior and discipline issues while other schools lack these basic resources. Based on the plan consolidating schools would give parents more options for high quality academic programs in their school neighborhoods. According to the consolidation plan merging schools would allow

every ward to offer Montessori and early childhood programs, more high tech campuses and lab schools and more fine arts and gifted and talented programs.

Criteria for Closing Schools

The list of schools proposed to be closed was derived from a research project conducted by The Brookings Institution, The Urban Institute, and 21st Century School Fund that analyzed school enrollment patterns and neighborhood changes (A Mid-Atlantic School District, 2007). The factors considered included student demand, school supply and neighborhood context. The researchers reportedly collaborated with city officials through several reviews that included how alternative scenarios for school closings or consolidations would affect the distance student's traveled, the redistribution of enrollments among schools and likely effects on surrounding neighborhoods. Using this criteria an initial list of 40 schools were candidates for closure. A secondary analysis was then completed that considered other factors. These included geographic isolation, proximity to other schools and the overall current and future impact on the school system as a whole. Through this process, some schools were removed from the proposed list while other schools were added.

Community Response to the Proposed Plan

The community response to the proposed school closings fell into four major categories. These categories included student travel, effect on quality school programs, fairness across school wards, and safety / student dynamics.

Ensuring that students could walk to and from school safely was one of the primary concerns of parents and the general community regarding the proposed plan to close and merge some of the district's schools. To ease the concerns of all of the school's

stakeholders, district leaders enlisted the help of the metropolitan police department and ensured that students would be safe as they traveled to and from school. Additional crossing guards were placed along school routes. In some cases school buses were provided for students that had to cross multiple busy streets on their way to school.

The community was also concerned regarding the effect closing facilities would have on the overall quality of instruction and school programs in the receiving schools. The community in general did not want the receiving schools, which in some cases were high performing to lose quality programs and resources as a result of the proposed mergers. In response to this issue the district assured the communities of all the receiving schools that no programs would be lost as a result of consolidation. The system actually promised each receiving school additional resources and stronger school programs. Most of the receiving schools were given additional funds in their school budgets to hire additional gym, music and art teachers. Each school had to adopt a consolidation model that would take the form of academic, wellness, enrichment or administrative support.

School stakeholders in some of the poorer wards did not feel that the selection of schools to be closed and the consolidation process in general was conducted fairly. The brunt of the school's to be closed were in the district's two poorest wards that were also predominately African American. Many residents also felt that the schools were not really being closed to benefit children but were being closed to make way for the city's growing number of charter schools. Some community stakeholders believed that the plan to consolidate schools was part of the district's alleged plot to remove minority residents

Table 2: Academic Resources / Behavioral Supports

MODEL	COMPONENTS
Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Media Specialist *Guidance Counselor(s) *Reading Specialist, Literacy Coach *Math Coach *Instructional Assistant Principal
Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Social Worker *Psychologist *Nurse *Behavior Counselor / In-School Suspension Coordinator *Dean of Students
Enrichment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Visual Arts Classes *Music Classes *Health and Life Skills Classes *Physical Education *Before and After Care Program
Administrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Principal *Business Manager *IT Support *Registrar *Custodian / Custodian Foreman

from the city. Some of the poorer wards were beginning to see an infiltration of more affluent White families. Most of these families sent their school aged children to private and charter schools in the cities more affluent neighborhoods. Some of these new residents vocalized their desire to have quality schools that they would feel comfortable sending their kids to in their immediate school neighborhood. Central office officials attempted to ease the fears of the community by reassuring parents that the move was being done to provide a stronger academic program for students in every ward. Table 2

above displays the various academic and behavioral support models offered to the consolidated schools.

Safety and Student Dynamics

Safety issues revolving around the impact of housing students from rival neighborhoods in the same school sparked concern and outrage among many members of the community. LUCMAR is a city known for juvenile violence and many neighborhoods have youth gangs that have feuded with each other for generations. Some of the proposed consolidations would involve housing students from rival gangs in the same schools. Parents were also concerned because the majority of the proposed school consolidations involved elementary schools merging with middle schools. As expected a substantial number of elementary school parents did not want their young children in the same building with 13 and 14 year olds. To quell parent concerns each receiving principal was required to develop a plan that specifically addressed how the school would ensure a safe transition for every student involved in the consolidation. Schools had to identify the specific steps they would take to ensure that students got along. Most schools planned various school events including open houses, cookouts, movie nights, sporting events and parent forums to help unite the student bodies and all school stakeholders.

Implementing the Plan

In the summer of 2008, the district closed 23 of the schools that were identified on the district's consolidation list. According to district leaders, about 5000 students from the closed schools enrolled in one of the 26 receiving schools (GAO, 2009). The District updated facilities at all of the receiving schools and offered a more comprehensive version of the staffing model. Additional staff members like school psychologists and

math coaches were given to each school to strengthen the layers of instructional and social support already being provided. The District redirected 15 million dollars saved with the elimination of some staffing positions from closing schools to provide funding for these additional staff members.

During the consolidation effort the district also created several new pre k thru 8th grade campuses. The campuses were designed to create a smoother transition for elementary students entering middle school. The system also wanted to reduce the number of elementary schools with varying grade levels that eventually sent their students to the same middle schools. Configurations of elementary schools in the Mid Atlantic School District varied with some offering 6th grade programs while others stopped at the 5th grade level.

School Leadership / Restructuring

School leadership was a vital component of the success of these new campuses and the district held meetings to discuss their expectations for a smooth opening day and the overall success of the new school configurations. Principals were already on edge because of the recent firing of 23 of their colleagues for poor performance mainly resulting from poor test scores and failing to meet the required mandates established by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The district had recently restructured 22 of its lowest performing schools after the schools failed to meet academic targets for 6 consecutive years. Staffing changes were made in 18 of the 22 schools identified for restructuring. Principals, teachers and support staff from these schools were released from the district if they were identified as a possible source of the school's poor performance. Specifically one-fifth of the teachers and one third of the principals in the

district resigned, retired, or were terminated from the school system at the end of the 2007-2008 school year (GAO, 2009). For the remaining schools in restructuring the district elected to contract with other organizations or undertake actions such as adding more intensive school level services to support students and facilities. Three of the district's new pre k thru 8th grade centers fell into the restructured school's category. To support these efforts the district hired 46 new principals for the 2008-2009 school year. A new Principal's Academy was developed during the summer of 2008 to improve the quality of principals working in the system. Consistent with district beliefs the principals should be the instructional leaders of their respective buildings. The goal of the academy was to increase the principal's skill set in the areas of monitoring instruction, data analysis and decision making.

In 2007, the public school system of a city in the Mid-Atlantic region decided to close several facilities in response to the ever-growing challenge of declining enrollment and underutilized buildings. The district developed a plan that called for closing 23 schools and merging most of them into other fully functioning facilities. In some cases elementary and middle schools would consolidate to form one educational campus. The plan was met with initial resistance from school and community stakeholders who feared the possible negative repercussions of combining students with such vast differences in age and in some cases children from feuding neighborhoods. The District's plan addressed most of these issues and detailed how schools would create strategies to ensure that the new educational campuses were safe and academically sound for students. The next section of this chapter gives a general profile of each principal that participated in

this study and briefly summarizes the manner in which each school leader perceived some of the issues that they encountered in their newly consolidated buildings.

Principal Kam

Principal Kam was an African-American female in her first year as a principal of a K-8 school. Kam was in her late 30s, and began her career as a guidance counselor in an urban school system. Kam received a promotion from the guidance counselor position and spent four years as an assistant principal in one of the district's biggest middle schools. Like most of the system's middle schools, Kam's building had a history of poor student achievement and violence. Kam excelled as an assistant principal and established a reputation as a strong disciplinarian. Although the school had a male principal Kam was perceived by many to be the toughest and most respected administrator in her building. During her tenure as an assistant principal, Kam worked hard to improve student achievement rate and the overall climate of her school.

School / Community profile. After serving four years as an assistant principal, Kam received an appointment to the principalship of one of the newly consolidated K-8 schools. This consolidation was somewhat unique, because both of the consolidated schools were scheduled to close. During this consolidation an elementary school moved into a middle school facility. Unlike her previous administrative assignment, Kam's new building was located in a moderately affluent, very vibrant section of the city. The area had changed in recent years as low-income housing units were remodeled and turned into upscale apartments and condominiums. Young professional families with two incomes frequented the area surrounding Kam's school. It was no secret that the system wanted

the children of these young urbanites to attend the district's public schools. At the time of the study, however, most of the parents in Kam's school were poor and uninvolved.

Despite its great location, Kam's new school had the lowest enrollment of all of the recently consolidated buildings. The school did not have serious discipline issues but did suffer from poor student achievement like most of the middle schools in the district. Principal Kam was charged with increasing student enrollment and improving student achievement.

The students that attended Kam's school were mainly African Americans from impoverished backgrounds and many received free and reduced lunch. The staff at Kam's school was diverse with a mixture of White, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian teachers. The majority of Kam's staff was new and more than 90% of the teaching staff had less than three years of classroom experience.

Daily routine. Kam's daily school routine began before she even entered her building. She awoke early each morning and was on her blackberry with her assistant principals before 7:00 a.m. After entering her school, she checked emails, met with the office staff, and ensured that all staff members were in place so they could effectively interact with students when they arrived. Visibility was important to Kam, and she strategically placed herself in certain areas where she could be seen by staff. She stated, "I spend time in the hallways, so that students can see me. I try to spend the majority of my time during the day in classrooms, because that's where the learning takes place, and the instruction is going on." Part of Kam's daily routine involved having an open-door policy for parents, students, and teachers to reduce the number of school-wide conflicts and establish positive relationships with all of the stakeholders associated with her

building. She made an effort to stop whatever she was doing during the course of the day to communicate with stakeholders in need.

Because I have an open door policy most parents know my cell phone number I give it out to parents and students freely. It sometimes comes back to bite me. That's why I can't have a routine with children because if they are in a crisis they come to look for me specifically because we just have that rapport.

Some of the issues that Kam dealt with daily involved students and teachers. A few of the teachers on Kam's staff did not like the way she monitored the school's instructional program. Kam believed in walking into classrooms unannounced and checking lesson plans. Most of the staff was not use to this practice because Kam's predecessor had taken a different approach. Conflict also arose when Kam provided written and critical feedback to teachers regarding their instructional practices and the overall quality and manner in which they managed their classrooms. In many cases this constructive critique was the first time some of the staff member ever received negative feedback from a principal regarding their teaching practices. Some of the teachers in the building called the teacher's union in an effort to stop Kam from checking lesson plans.

Relationships with students. Student problems revolved around issues that were typical in most of the district's schools. Discipline took up a substantial amount of Principal Kam's time because she had to meet regularly with parents regarding the inappropriate behavior of their children. Student apathy toward learning was also a major issue. A substantial number of students did not come to school prepared to learn and in some cases they reported to school each day without basic supplies like books and pencils. This behavior was a major concern for Kam because her school's test scores were low and the district charged her with increasing student achievement levels immediately. If Kam failed to produce adequate growth in the district's yearly assessment

she faced termination. Kam had experienced the termination of a principal first hand. She was in the building when her previous principal was demoted by the school system.

Relationships with parents. In addition to the normal problems associated with running a school, Kam had to deal with some unique conflicts caused specifically by the merging of the two schools. One of the initial problems Kam faced was overcoming the negative perception the community mainly parents with children already in the school, had toward the incoming students. These parents feared violence and did not want their children in the same building with younger students. The parents with older children felt that the younger students would blame conflicts on them. The parents also did not want their middle school students sharing the same bathroom and cafeteria with younger elementary school pupils. Parents worried that their students could be falsely accused of sexual assault or other serious crimes.

Some of the incoming parents feared that the bigger middle school students might physically harm their younger children. Others were concerned that their younger children would adopt some of the negative habits of the older children in the building like using profanity and cutting class. Even though the middle school was receiving elementary-aged students some parents also feared potential gang violence. In some parents' minds, students from different neighborhoods would fight regardless of the age difference. A number of the business owners in the community feared the possible negative press that could result if violence erupted in the school.

Resources. The issues involving adults that resulting from the consolidation process were slight. Staff members did not have to bargain and negotiate over school-based resources because central office supplied so many. The school had double the

amount of material resources than most schools. “The school has too many resources,” Kam explained. The district enhanced the staffing model of the school so there were additional teachers in the building for the new school year. Students now had an additional resource class (music), and the teachers benefitted from two new instructional coaches.

Relationships with teachers/Decision making. Having so many brand new teachers in the building also eliminated many potential problems. The staff was so inexperienced that they did not really have the background knowledge to debate or object to any of the decisions made by the principal. They tended to go along with the principal’s desires related to daily school operations and procedures. Coalitions did form in the school but they were based more on commonalities like subjects taught, affiliations (e.g., Teach for America), form of commute, and race or age. Principal Kam also prevented staff conflicts by preaching collaboration and encouraging her staff to become actively involved in every aspect of the school. Kam did not make decisions in isolation and she ensured that everyone’s voice was heard.

Summary. In general, Kam’s experience with consolidation was positive. According to Kam, the consolidation process allowed two schools with low enrollments to remain open. “As it stands, I don’t think either one of those schools would have been in existence right now if not for consolidation.” Kam also believed that her experience and strong leadership eliminated any micropolitical issues early in the year. According to Kam, she strategically put things in place to reduce such issues in her building.

The groundwork was done before the students even got here. We met with the community and shared the school vision. We met with teacher groups from both schools. We met with parents and students. We made sure that we were visible.

In Kam's opinion, strong leadership and an ample supply of resources are the keys to success when merging two schools. "I think the success of co-located schools depends on the leader you have in the building. It's not a set cookie cutter process. One thing is not just going to make it work, because every situation and community is going to make the school merger different."

Principal Rick

Principal Rick was an African-American male in his early forties. Rick was serving in his eighth year as a school principal and had served as principal of a consolidated school for two years. Prior to becoming a principal in his current placement Rick served three years as a principal in another district elementary school and prior to that experience Rick served three years as a principal in the charter school system. Rick taught in an urban school district before he became an administrator. Rick was a native of the district and had a reputation throughout the system for his outgoing personality and strong ability to network.

School/Community profile. Rick was a principal of a consolidated K-8 school in one of the most respected moderately upscale African-American neighborhoods in the city. The neighborhood's proximity to the state line actually caused the area to resemble a typical suburban community. The area had a low birth rate and as a result many of the local schools had very low student enrollments.

In an effort to save money and increase student enrollment, the district closed the middle school and merged it with Principal Rick's elementary school. The school once housed more than 800 students but at the time of consolidation it served less than 150 students. The two combined schools still had fewer than 300 students.

Despite the relative affluence found in the neighborhood both schools (middle and elementary) suffered from a history of low test scores. Student scores in reading and math were no better than their school counterparts found in the poorer areas of the city despite the fact that a substantial number of the system's employees working on this side of the city were more seasoned than their counterparts across town. Although test scores were low schools in the area were stable, and teachers worked in their buildings until retirement age. Upon his appointment, Principal Rick was one of the first administrators younger than 50 ever assigned to work in this union-strong area.

During the 2008-2009 school year Rick had 298 students in his school. The majority of the students (210) were in the elementary grades with the remaining 80 in the middle school grades. The majority of Principal Rick's students (85%) qualified for free and reduced lunch even though the school neighborhood appeared to be more affluent than most of the other K-8 schools found in the district. About 80% of the students in Principal Rick's building were African American and the other 20% were Hispanic. The school had a relatively large (ESL) English Second Language population compared to other schools in the District. About 20% of the school's population spoke English as a second language.

According to Rick about 30% of his student body did not live in the identified zone for his school. These students used the districts out of boundary process to attend. The out of boundary process allows qualifying parents to send their students to the school of their choice. Any child attending a reconstituted school had the right to apply for an out of boundary placement.

Principal Rick had a very seasoned experienced staff. Most of the teachers in his building had at least 15 years experience. This level of experience among the teachers was unusual given the fact that most teachers in the district had less than five years experience. The situation was even more unique because a substantial number of his teachers had spent their entire careers in the same building. As Rick explained, “The majority of my staff has been teaching in this building between 7 and 40 years.”

Parental involvement and turnout for school events were similar to most of the other schools in the District. The school had not had a functioning parent-teacher organization for years, and support for the quarterly parent-teacher conference nights was lower than 15 Percent. Principal Rick admitted that parent involvement had waned under his leadership and commented that parents had run the school under the previous administration. According to Rick in the past parents had a say in all of the major decisions made in the building and perpetuated a lot of conflict and drama in the school. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) commonly pushed the agendas of certain parents and staff members. Principal Rick asserted, “I shut that nonsense down when I arrived. Parents do not come into the school now.”

Daily routine. Principal Rick was an early bird, and his daily school routine began around 7:00 a.m. each day. He arrived at work an hour before his scheduled time to catch up on paperwork and check emails. Rick made a habit of sitting in on all of his teachers’ collaborative planning and team meetings. He also liked to meet with his assistant principals and instructional coaches during the school day. He spent most of his day interacting with adults and delegated the majority of the student discipline issues to his assistant principal.

Resources. The school received an abundance of resources because of the merger and the enhanced staffing model. Staff members did not have to bargain and negotiate over school supplies or human capital.

Relationships with staff. A substantial amount of Rick's interaction between adults took place after the staff's regular school hours. He explained, "I like to stick around after school because that is the time I talk to my staff and exchange light conversation. That is also the time I like to deal with adverse actions." A substantial amount of Principal Rick's interaction with his staff involved him issuing adverse action or disciplinary measures to various members of his faculty. Teachers were involved in adverse actions for issues such as insubordination, failing to perform their professional duties, and attendance-related matters. Principal Rick constantly assigned discipline measures on his staff. He commented, "I have done more adverse action in this school than all of my other schools combined." Principal Rick admitted that the constant threat of disciplinary action played a role in the low staff morale found in his building. He had battled with his staff and the surrounding community from the onset of his appointment as the school's principal. "When I first came they were like we have to get him out of here," he stated.

According to Principal Rick, the seasoned staff in his building never bought into the merger of the elementary and middle schools. The elementary staff was weary of working with middle school students. None of the teachers from the middle school elected to come to the elementary school after the district closed the secondary facility. As Principal Rick explained, the central office downplayed the number of middle school students they were transferring to the building, and sent almost double the number of

middle school students initially scheduled to attend the school. The elementary teachers in the building were not prepared to deal with so many middle school students, and their extreme levels of inappropriate behavior. “It was pure chaos the first year,” Rick stated.

Since neither the central office nor the school was prepared for so many middle school students some classrooms in the building swelled. Several of the middle school teachers had more than 40 students in their classes. Student issues overall were not that bad however, and the principal did not have any student conflicts associated with gang activity or turf. Some of the older students did display behaviors typically associated with teenagers in the district. These issues included vandalism, possession of weapons and class cutting.

Conflict did erupt in the building due to staff members having major philosophical differences concerning appropriate instructional practices. Some of the members of the staff thought that the teachers should use elementary teaching strategies with the older students while a small fragment of the school staff wanted to teach the older students using traditional middle school practices. In Principal Rick’s opinion the underlying issue was consolidation and the fact that most members of the middle school staff missed the practices that were in place in earlier decades.

None of the staff from the closing middle school elected to come to the new school so teachers did not form coalitions based on original school assignment or previous schools worked. The coalitions that formed in Principal Rick’s school all had their origin in objection to the consolidation effort and the addition of middle school students to the building. .

Decision making. Principal Rick had such a negative opinion of his staff that he did not involve them in the decision-making process. In Principal Rick's opinion, the entire staff was apathetic and did not appear to have the best interests of the students at heart. As a result he made all decisions unilaterally and without their input. Based on Principal Rick's account staff members did not have to negotiate to make decisions because they really did not care about children or school matters. "I make decisions based on the nature of my staff because I'm not confident that they will make decisions based on what's best for children. They may make them based on what's best for adults."

Summary. According to Principal Rick, the overall effect of consolidation on his school and job as an administrator in the district was negative. Although the school received a wealth of resources the addition of middle school students to an elementary school building resulted in conflict, tension and deep-rooted resentment among staff and parents. The seasoned elementary school staff was reluctant and in some cases oppositional to working with older children. Principal Rick explained, "This has been by far my toughest administrative job." The fact that students could stay in his building from Pre-K through 8th grade was the one positive consequence of the consolidation effort. In Principal Rick's opinion, things would not improve in his school until he was able to fire all of the teachers in his building and begin anew with educators he felt were more devoted to the students they served.

Principal Max

Principal Max was an Asian-American female serving in her 6th year as a principal of an urban school. Before becoming a principal Max spent one year as an assistant principal and a short time as a teacher in an urban school system. Before the

consolidation Max served a few years as principal of an elementary school in a moderately affluent section of the city. Prior to Max's arrival the school was known for its popular principal and its history of student success. Principal Max openly admitted that it was difficult following in the footsteps of a principal with a legendary reputation, but she was successful in her first appointment as a principal and worked to follow the procedures and expectations that already were established by her predecessor.

School/Community profile. The district closed the elementary school that Max oversaw because of low enrollment and she had to merge with an existing K-8 grade center. Unlike Max's previous school her new appointment was in one of the district's poorest and most crime infested neighborhoods. The school had a reputation for violence, poor academic performance, unruly parents and unprofessional staff members.

Despite this negative reputé the school building was brand new and featured state of the art technology. The school had experienced a resurgence in recent years when the district hired a veteran male principal to open the new building and turn around the troubled school. The veteran principal had experience working in difficult schools and turned around another troubled school when he first started working for the system. The veteran principal was outgoing, boisterous and viewed by many of the parents as an insider. He held parties, hung out in the school community and often visited students' homes. He was extremely popular and loved by most school stakeholders. The district asked the popular principal to leave the school for another assignment after his second year in the building and Principal Max filled the vacant position.

Because of her race and unfamiliarity with the neighborhood members of the community viewed Principal Max as an outsider and she faced hostility from both new

parents and her school community during the initial planning stages of the consolidation. Some of the parents from her current school deemed her a sellout because she did not speak out against the school system during the initial plans to close and consolidate her school. Some of the parents assumed that she had no vested interest in the school and community and was just going along with the consolidation process because it would allow her to keep her job. In a sign of protest many of the parents from Principal Max's former school refused to send their children to the consolidated building.

Principal Max had approximately 400 students in her school the majority of whom were African American and most of the students were in the elementary grades. Only 75 of the 400 students were in the middle school. The school also had a substantial number of children in the special education program. Almost one fourth of the total population (90 students) received special education services. Most of the students that attended the school were zoned to attend the educational center prior to the consolidation as the majority of students from the sending school did not elect to attend other schools in the district.

Because of the high poverty rate in the area most of the students at the school qualified for free and reduced lunch. The school's enrollment was in constant flux due to the revitalization occurring in the area and efforts to eliminate all of the low-income housing developments found in the school's immediate vicinity.

Principal Max's school had a diverse staff with teachers from various ethnic backgrounds. The majority of the teaching staff worked in the receiving school prior to the merger. Although Principal Max was the principal of the sending school, like the parents and students very few of her staff members came with her to the new building.

Most of them elected to work in other schools and in some cases decided to leave the system altogether. The average classroom experience of the school's staff was between three and five years. Principal Max made a conscious decision to hire only one new teacher for the first year of consolidation as she felt that consolidation was too much for a new teacher to handle.

Although parental involvement had been historically low Principal Max was optimistic about the state of parental participation in her building. Based on her account 200 parents participated in Back to School Night. However, Principal Max admitted that the school did not have a formal parent organization.

Daily routine. Principal Max's daily routine involved most of the normal duties associated with being a principal. She monitored the cafeteria during breakfast, visited the collaborative planning meeting for teachers and then met with her assistant principals. Max delegated most of the responsibilities dealing with students to her assistant principals. She assigned one assistant principal to the middle school while the other one focused on elementary school matters.

Relationships with parents and students. Principal Max was very open about the extremely high level of conflict and tension caused by consolidating the two schools. Max faced hostility from the very first meeting scheduled to discuss the possible consolidation. Parents from both schools were outraged and did not want to share the same building.

Parents from the sending school did not want their children traveling to a school they perceived as "rough" and "low performing." The community from the receiving school viewed the merger as another component of the perceived gentrification that was

taking place in their neighborhood. Both groups of parents seemed to agree that they did not want Max to be the principal of the new combined school. Max commented, “There were parents like, ‘Who is this woman? We don’t want her here.’” Principal Max was prepared to deal with disgruntled parents but she did not expect such a negative reaction from the students. She shared that from the day she stepped into the building, students shouted obscenities at her, yelled, screamed and blamed her for perceived injustices associated with the consolidation effort. For example, the school system stopped serving chocolate milk to all district students during lunch but the students blamed the change on Principal Max. When they saw her in the hallway they would scream in a disrespectful manner, “Why did you change our milk?”

The student’s behavior was so bad during the initial months that many members of the community and even the Max herself had to admit that the school was out of control. Students ran the hallways, disrespected adults, and fought constantly. Students from both the elementary and middle school grades had difficulty controlling their behavior. Dealing with this intensive level of discipline was new to Principal Max. Max would only have to deal with one or two minor discipline issues a day in her previous school. The climate had become so violent in the building after the merger that Principal Max decided to make improving the school’s climate her new focus. Her goal to provide quality instruction moved temporarily to the back burner. She explained, “This year, it’s all about climate. We did not let the instructional piece go, but that year was about structure and climate and setting the expectations for kids and doing that all of the time.”

Although it was not originally part of the school’s budget, the district provided additional resources to help with maintaining a positive climate in the building.

According to Principal Max the controversy involving the school merger during the initial stages spurred the central office to make concessions for the disgruntled parents. To help keep peace in the building district leaders allowed the receiving school to keep the former assistant principal and a few other staff members that they had written out of the budget.

Parents made direct requests to the superintendent voicing their concerns about student safety and indirectly questioning the new principal's ability to maintain order in the building. Central office granted the parents request and enabled certain staff members to remain in the building. Max stated, "I don't know what the original plan was but they definitely listened to the community and when they heard that the families were concerned about safety...this community was upset about the former principal leaving so they must have given us some money to keep on two assistant principals." According to Principal Max, the controversy surrounding the school merger was so great that the central office was willing to do anything to quiet it down and keep it away from the local media.

Despite all of the conflict revolving around discipline principal Max still remained positive and displayed a true love for her students. She made the following statement during the interview, "We really have great kids and now they ask me if I'm coming back. I knew that once they got to know me that they would think that I'm ok."

Resources. As with the other consolidated schools the central office provided a substantial amount of supplies for students and teachers. As mentioned above the school also benefited from the controversy surrounding the merger and received additional staff to appease parents. The abundance of resources and school staff eliminated the need for

teachers to compete over school-based resources. The school experienced few power struggles between adults in the building, because most of the staff seemed to be unified in their efforts to maintain order in the school.

Decision making. In Principal Max's building most of the decision making dealt with minor everyday issues like deciding on a grade level trip or activity. The mandates identified in the school's consolidation plan set the stage for how she was to run the school. As a result school staff did not have to provide input on any major decisions in the school. The staff was able to work collaboratively to solve the minor issues that needed to be addressed during the course of the school year.

Summary. Overall, merging the two schools had some very negative effects on the general climate of the school. Parents and students initially experienced significant outrage about the merger and openly voiced their opinions to the new principal. The issues involving the school climate became so serious that the administration had to make instruction secondary to address disciplinary issues.

According to Principal Max, the two schools ultimately did benefit from consolidating because the members of the faculty and student body received additional resources and many of the pupils benefitted from additional staff members like the instructional coach and added assistant principal. Max concluded that she would recommend the consolidation process to other school systems dealing with low enrollment.

Principal MJ

MJ was an African-American male in his 7th year as a principal in an urban school district. Prior to becoming a principal MJ spent one year as an assistant principal in one of the city's most challenging elementary schools.

As an assistant principal of an elementary school MJ excelled in the area of organization and discipline. He played such a vital role in turning the troubled elementary school around that the school Chancellor personally asked him to head one of the poorest performing middle schools in the district.

School/Community profile. MJ's first year as a principal took place in a middle school that had risen to prominence in the late 1990s. Unlike most of the district's other secondary schools in the 1970s the middle school had a diverse student population and students fared well on the yearly reading and math assessments. The school was located very close to some of the city's most upscale businesses and government buildings. Many of the city's most prominent political figures lived and worked within two miles of the school.

The school changed dramatically in the 1980s as poverty and drug infestation seeped into the neighborhood and sent most of the affluent families fleeing to the district's private schools. A carousel of leadership moved in and out of the building and led to significant instability. The school quickly became one of the district's worst. MJ received his appointment to the middle school in the early 2000s and he quickly began to stabilize the school. Under his leadership the school saw a significant increase in the rate of student achievement and a decrease in student discipline issues. Despite this

improvement district leaders slated the school for closure and consolidated it with an area elementary school.

The district fully remodeled the middle school building to accommodate the elementary school's student population. The school received new hardwood floors, elevators, windows and doors to ease some of the concerns of the very vocal school community. Although there was a great deal of outrage and concern regarding the school consolidation the majority of it did not come from parents. Most of the issues involving the consolidation effort stemmed from local business owners that wanted the facility to close for good. Closing the school would substantially reduce the number of minority children found in the area during the day. During MJ's first year in the consolidated school he had to deal with his school based constituents as well as the local business community. Principal MJ had a reputation across the system for his ability to interact politically and collaborate with all types of people. He was also known for his ability to place a positive spin on any negative issues or events that took place in his building.

Principal MJ had approximately 290 African-American students in his school that lived in various parts of the city. Although the school was located on the periphery of one of the city's most upscale affluent neighborhoods most of the students that attended the school qualified for free and reduced lunch. The students that attended the school had developed a positive reputation for their excellent behavior and improved scores on reading and math standardized tests.

The school staff working in MJ's school was diverse and relatively young. A substantial number of the teachers in the building were new and most staff members had

less than three years of classroom experience. MJ liked to hire staff from outside the area so many of his teachers were new to the city.

Daily routine. MJ's daily routine involved constant monitoring and informal meetings with his staff. Each morning MJ would enter his building unannounced so that he could ensure that his custodians had completed their assigned tasks the previous night. A self-proclaimed "neat freak" MJ's building was consistently immaculate. The floors in the hallways were always shining and the bathrooms were sparkling clean. MJ maintained such a spotless physical plant by constantly pressuring his custodians and relentlessly checking their work. He explained, "I slide through the back door checking the walkways to see if the custodians have actually taken their mops and brooms through the hallways. I then check the bathrooms to see if the bath towels, hand towels, etc are clean."

From the second the students arrived in the morning to the time they left for dismissal Principal MJ was in constant motion. He talked to students, monitored classrooms, sat in on team meetings and had conferences with parents. MJ claimed that he performed at least three teacher observations a day which was atypical of most principals. He stated, "I go into classrooms and do observations. I do about two or three observations a day and give feedback to teachers." Principal MJ made a practice of talking to teachers and constantly working with them to improve the overall quality of instruction in the building.

Principal MJ also conducted lunch duty and facilitated orderly student transitions from class to class. In the midst of all of these duties he conducted academic conferences with students and provided them with praise and encouragement to do their best. He

explained, “I meet with students that are failing to inform them that they may be at risk. I say hey you need to get on top of your game.” Principal MJ also played a primary role with the school’s dismissal, and escorted all of the students out of the building each day.

Relationships with students. Principal MJ acknowledged that like most school principals he had to deal with typical discipline problems. Students often were disruptive in class and frequently disrespected staff. Principal MJ and his team effectively dealt with those issues and they normally never culminated into anything serious. During the initial consolidation period some student related issues did erupt into events that were more serious. Students from the different neighborhoods attempted to “claim” the school and various turf conflicts and fights erupted. The administration was effective in resolving these issues and the school was relatively calm by the second month of classes.

Relationships with teachers. The staff conflicts that Principal MJ had to deal with during the first year of consolidation were not the result of the merger and took the form of normal staffing issues found in a school. “I had a couple of conflicts with staff members, I mean, not reporting to work, being insubordinate about turning in documentation, reporting late...you know, the basic things.” Principal MJ took pride in the fact that he was able to handle all of his staff conflicts without the intervention of his assistant superintendent or the central office. He also was able to discipline teachers without enforcing any official mandates or adverse actions.

The consolidation of the two schools allowed Principal MJ to hire a brand new staff to work in his building. Central office required every member of the receiving and sending schools to re-apply for their jobs. As a result, MJ was able to hand pick the staff he wanted to work in the newly-merged school. He commented, “The great thing about

consolidating schools is you're able to reconstitute your staff. You are able to interview every staff member and hire them if you deem them a part of the team that you want to assemble." Principal MJ only hired five former teachers from the sending and receiving schools. The majority of staff members in the consolidated building were new hires.

Given the dynamic of his staff, Principal MJ did not observe any power struggles or coalitions based on school origin or differing philosophies in his building. From his observation his staff association patterns were based more on race and age and had nothing to do with job-related issues. He explained, "It appears to me that the Caucasian teachers will gravitate more toward the Caucasian teachers and the African-American teachers will associate with the other African-American teachers."

Decision making. Principal MJ's belief in collaboration also seemed to reduce the possibility of staff power struggles and coalitional actions. He gave staff members the power to implement their own instructional practices and teaching strategies in their rooms. He also encouraged teachers to develop effective strategies and to discard those that were not successful.

Principal MJ also employed this collaborative philosophy when making school-based decisions. He gave teachers the opportunity to provide input on all school-wide decisions although he ultimately had the final say. As he stated, "I try to include all stakeholders. I try to lead with a collaborative, compassionate philosophy. I tend to think that no man is an island." Principal MJ could not recall any school-related decisions that resulted in conflict, bargaining, or negotiation among his staff.

Resources. The distribution of school resources was another area that failed to induce any staff-related issues in Principal MJ's school. He received an overwhelming

amount of supplies and material resources to run the school. MJ's close relationship with the Chancellor allowed him to maintain direct communication with the central office and the individuals responsible for the distribution of supplies. Most of the staff was new so they truly appreciated receiving the new materials and did not have a reason to become disgruntled. MJ explained, "The Chancellor made sure we had teachers, textbooks, computers, air conditions, white boards, smart boards. Whatever we needed was there for us. The resources given out during consolidation were plentiful."

Summary. It was no secret to his staff and the members of central office that Principal MJ was extremely pleased with the outcome of the school merger. According to MJ the consolidation of the two buildings had an extremely positive effect on the school. By consolidating the school we were able to provide more resources and an improved instructional program to the students. The consolidation also allowed the school system to save money, which indirectly allowed other schools to remain open. The merger also allowed students from rival communities to come together and interact positively in a safe nurturing environment.

On a personal level the consolidation effort reduced the daily stress that Principal MJ had to experience. He explained, "When I was at the other school it was like *Lean on Me*...It was like Eastside High. I did not believe that I could make it there another year."

Principal MJ attributed his positive experience with consolidation to the support given by central office and the Chancellor. He also believed that his strong leadership and experience working through difficult situations helped him succeed. MJ concluded that he would recommend the consolidation process to other school systems facing low enrollment and underutilized facilities.

Principal Angela

Principal Angela was an African female serving in her third year as a principal in an urban K-8th grade school. Principal Angela was in her early thirties and began her career as a teacher in an urban school system. Angela taught for a few years and eventually left the classroom to assume a position as an instructional coach. As an instructional coach Angela's duties included working with new teachers and providing staff development for the school. Angela subsequently served one year as an assistant principal in one of the system's most violent and low-performing middle schools before she became a principal.

School/Community profile. Angela's middle school was located in one of the poorest and most crime-infested parts of the city. Most of her students came from low-income families and lived in public housing. The school had suffered from poor academic performance and had failed to meet adequate yearly progress standards (AYP) for the last 6 years. The school was in its second year of reconstitution. The school had a history of severe discipline problems and typically had one of the highest suspension and truancy rates of all secondary schools.

The school facility was extremely old and damage to the heating and cooling system resulted in constant flooding that disrupted the learning process. Parental involvement was also very low and the majority of parents did not attend school-wide events. Communication and parent contact with the school was usually for discipline or other negative aspects of education. After Angela's first year as principal the climate in the building did improve slightly and the school experienced some minor improvement in test scores.

Prior to the merger the district had scheduled both the co-located elementary and middle school for closure because of low enrollment. The elementary school also had a poor school climate and low student achievement rates. The school had experienced an extremely high turnover in leadership, with four principals in 6 years.

The student body at Principal Angela's school consisted of 250 students. One hundred percent of the students were African American, and the majority of the pupils were eligible to receive free and reduced lunch. Most of the students lived in public housing units found in that particular section of the city. A substantial number of students had to use public transportation in the morning because in some cases the school was not in walking distance from their homes. The district had created the school zone in a manner that it included all of the housing projects in the area. As a result students from the public housing developments had to travel past two or three other area schools to attend Principal Angela's facility.

A substantial number of the students came from foster homes or lived with their grandparents or other extended members of their families. Substance abuse and incarceration has had a lasting effect on many of the families in the area. Many of the students experienced the negative effects of drug abuse in their home environments and acted out inappropriately in school. Almost half of the students received special education services.

Parental involvement was low for school events but most of the parents came into the school at least once a year to discuss discipline-related issues with an administrator. A substantial number of the parents attended the same facility when they were in school so most had a sentimental connection to the building.

Angela had a relatively large, diverse staff and the teachers had a range of experience. The school seemed to have almost an equal amount of seasoned staff, faculty members with a few years experience and brand new teachers. A substantial number of her teaching staff at least 25 percent were members of the Teach for America organization. Both schools had very vocal staff members and teachers known for creating conflict. The school was almost a 50% split of staff members from the sending and receiving schools.

Daily routine. Principal Angela started her daily routine by ensuring that all of the school stakeholders were in place to greet students during entry. Because of the violent nature of some of her students transitions were very important so she attempted to remain visible throughout the school day. Principal Angela had an open door policy and did not require parents to make an appointment to see her. Parents normally came in unannounced and Angela adjusted her schedule to meet with them. During the course of the day Angela also met with teachers, her assistant principals and instructional coaches.

Relationships with students. Although student behavior in the school had improved her staff still had to spend a substantial amount of time dealing with student discipline issues. Some of her students were extremely violent and fights occurred regularly.

When the district initially consolidated the schools serious turf wars occurred amongst the students in Angela's building. Gang fights took place both inside and outside of the school. Boys and girls from the different housing projects fought daily to establish their neighborhood's dominance and their informal power structures within the building. The local police eventually arrested the lead gang members from each group and the

district subsequently expelled them so the school calmed down by the second month of classes.

Relationships with staff. Unlike some of the other principals Angela was unable to select her own staff during the consolidation process. This particular school merger was also unique because an even split of school staff came from both the receiving and sending schools.

Conflicts between the two groups erupted immediately when the schools combined. The staff from the receiving school resented the staff from the sending school. The receiving school staff had just experienced a year under “needs improvement” status. Their students test scores had improved over the course of the year and the school had made major gains as it related to school climate. In contrast the sending school had one of the worst reputations of any school in the district. The school had extremely low test scores and had received negative media attention for a series of extreme disruptive acts conducted by students. In one case the students assaulted a powerful figure from central office during a visit to the school. The receiving school staff did not want the sending school to negate all of the progress they had made during the previous year.

From the first day the new staff arrived in the building faculty members argued over classrooms and other basic school supplies. Although supplies were plentiful, teachers from the sending school felt slighted and assumed they had received the worst classrooms and students. As a result they debated over class lists and the number of students assigned to each class. Staff members from the sending school felt mistreated and scrutinized every decision the principal made.

Principal Angela attempted to use data to support all of her decisions and to show teachers that she was treating everyone fairly. Various members of the sending school staff refused to work with Angela and conflicts among staff persisted throughout the school year. Angela explained, “One of our challenges here was the original school staff was very comfortable because they had been together for a long time and they had a very positive relationship. When the other school came they had some struggles and conflicts. So they brought a lot of their struggles and conflicts to a school that was basically stable.”

Decision making. Given the major philosophical differences between the staff from the sending and receiving schools they found it difficult to agree on most issues. Principal Angela’s philosophy seemed align more with that of the staff from the receiving school so some of the members from the sending school called the Teacher’s Union and eventually the press when they could not dictate policy. The situation eventually calmed down when Angela started to recommend termination and suspensions for staff members that refused to cooperate.

Summary. Principal Angela’s experience working in a consolidated school was her most challenging administrative position to date. Given the major challenges that she experienced in her school, Angela concluded that she would not recommend school mergers to other systems considering it as an option to counter low enrollment.

Principal Frank

Principal Frank was an African-American male principal in his early 40s. Frank was serving his third year as a principal of a consolidated K-8th grade school. He began his career as a teacher in an urban system and eventually received a promotion to an

assistant principal. Frank served his first three years as an administrator in the school system's most challenging elementary school. The school was the lowest performing K-5th grade school in the system and had the highest suspension rate of all elementary schools. The school served 300 students and had the highest number of elementary students receiving free and reduced lunch. The student population consisted primarily of African Americans and a small percentage of Hispanics. Principal Frank had a reputation for being a gentleman and fair with staff members. The school was located in the heart of one of the district's most notorious housing developments.

During Frank's last year as an assistant principal the district closed the neighborhood middle school which consolidated with his elementary school. The decision to close the middle school was a last-minute decision and the elementary school was not prepared to handle the middle school students. Tensions ran high in the building and the staff from the middle school openly protested the decision to close their school. The situation was so severe that the local media provided coverage and some teachers agreed to participate in interviews. Despite staff objection the consolidation moved forward and the two schools were forced to share the same building.

Principal Frank's experience with consolidated schools was different than the other school leaders participating in the study. Frank was the assistant principal of a consolidated school before his assignment to become a K-8 principal. Because of Frank's experience with consolidated schools district leaders asked him to lead a new consolidated K-8 center the next school year.

School/Community profile. Unlike his first experience as an assistant principal Frank's new school after he was appointed to the principalship was located in a

prominent section of the city. His school was in an area speckled with major corporations and high-class retail stores and hotels. The majority of the students attending Principal Frank's school were out of boundary meaning they did not live in the original zone to attend the facility.

The school was predominately Black and most of the students were in the lower grades. The school also had a program for emotionally disturbed middle school students. Although a substantial number of his students (75%) received free and reduced lunch, most were very successful in school and had histories of excellent academic performance. Many of their parents selected Principal Frank's school over the public schools found in their neighborhoods because of its stellar reputation.

Prior to the consolidation Frank's new building was a middle school known for academic success. The school had a reputation for high levels of parental involvement and the PTA had one of the highest enrollments in the city. Many of the middle school parents elected to send their kids to charter and private schools after the system decided to consolidate with a lower performing elementary school.

Frank's experience as the assistant principal of a consolidated school was for the most part negative. A dysfunctional middle school was forced to merge with a dysfunctional elementary school at the very last minute approximately two weeks before the beginning of the school year. The initial plan involved the elementary school staff moving into the middle school. At the very last minute central office changed the plan and the middle school had to merge with the elementary school.

According to Principal Frank the merger was a disaster at every level. Central offices' decision to consolidate the two schools at the very last minute left very little time

for the system to make the appropriate accommodations. Central office did not have time to adjust the classrooms and other parts of the building to accommodate middle school students. Students in the 7th and 8th grades had to squeeze into elementary school desks. The school did not have a gym so the middle school students did not have a way to involve themselves in any type of physical activity during the day.

The middle school students were upset because they had to return to their former elementary school and the transition was made even more difficult because the older middle school students were housed on the third floor and were not permitted anywhere else in the building. It was a difficult adjustment for most of the older students who were used to having their own building. Some students that were well-behaved prior to the consolidation began acting out after the merger.

The district terminated the principal of the middle school and the elementary school principal took on the task of leading both schools. The principal was openly against the move and did not welcome the middle school staff. Power struggles erupted between the middle and elementary school staffs over basic school functions. The middle school staff felt slighted by room assignments the distribution of supplies and access to the resource classes (e.g., gym and music).

Principal Frank was not in the position to make decisions during his first experience with consolidation. He blamed the majority of the problems that resulted from the school merger on poor leadership from the principal and rushed planning from central office.

The student body in Frank's most recent school was 80% African American and 20% Hispanic. About 70% of the student body was eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Because the school was located in a non-residential business district about 90% of the students were out of boundary. Frank's school enrolled approximately 247 students. Most of the students in the building were in the middle school grades or the Pre-K-kindergarten program. There was only one teacher for each grade 2nd – 5th.

The staff at Frank's school was relatively young. The average teacher in the building had about three years of classroom experience. The staff was an even mixture of new hires and teachers from the sending and receiving schools.

Daily routine. Frank's normal routine involved responding to emails and monitoring instruction in the building. Discipline was not a major issue and the school normally averaged just one disciplinary incident a day. Parent complaints normally involved instruction and grading issues. The school day was so calm that Principal Frank made a point of leaving the school for an hour each day to eat lunch. He admitted that it was impossible for him to leave the school during the course of the day when he was an assistant principal.

Frank's major issue with the consolidation process revolved around the schools new configuration. In his opinion it was a major hardship to plan instruction for an academic program that incorporates grades Pre-K through eight. Creating a schedule to meet the needs of students in such varying grade levels had been difficult. He felt that the students in the younger grades had been slighted in the assignment of resource classes. Middle school students had to take certain classes for at least an hour a day and he had to prioritize them over the younger students to accommodate the scheduling mandates.

Relationships with parents. Parental support in Frank's current school was very low. Normal attendance at the PTA meetings was under 5%. Parental support was

stronger for the younger students but parents rarely came into the school once their kids passed into the 5th grade.

Relationships with staff. Principal Frank believed his calm demeanor and the positive climate found in his school had resulted in few conflicts among his staff. The members of his faculty all seemed to get along and the staff did not perceive a slant toward any particular group. As he explained, “The fortunate thing was that I was not associated with either school. I came in indifferent to the whole situation.”

Resources. Issues related to school-based resources were non-existent because the central office overloaded the school with supplies. The staff even viewed the addition of new staff like instructional coaches as an added bonus.

Summary. Principal Frank had mixed feelings about consolidation based on his contrasting experiences with the process. In one instance he viewed consolidation as a positive process because it allowed schools to remain open and provided additional resources and staff to improve current programs. In another instance he felt that consolidation could be disruptive to the learning environment and bad for children if there is no buy in from the school leader and when the system is only doing it to eliminate square footage. He felt that the success of consolidation weighed heavily on the school leader. According to Frank strong leadership and effective planning are necessary to make consolidation work. Frank also believed that some parents will opt out of sending their children to a consolidated school regardless of the strength of the principal. In his experience many prospective parents opted to send their children to area charter and private schools instead of enrolling them in a consolidated facility.

Principal Renee

Renee was an African-American female serving in her second year as the principal of a consolidated school. Renee was in her early forties and had served as a principal in another system for two years before she moved into her current position. Prior to becoming a principal Renee worked as a teacher in a large urban school system. Renee's administrative experience prior to her appointment took place in a charter school. Renee had the opportunity to open a brand new charter middle school and in doing so she was able to select and hire teachers and design curriculum. She also had the ability to fire staff members that did not share her vision.

School/Community profile. At the time of this study Renee was the leader of one of the larger K-8 schools in the city. Before consolidation both the merging elementary and middle school had more than 300 students. Compared to other K-8 schools student achievement and climate was about average. The school was housed in an area with average crime and poverty rates. The facility was close to several charter elementary and middle schools. Principal Renee had to compete with the surrounding charter schools for students. The school had a long-standing male principal prior to Renee's arrival. The consolidation of Principal Renee's school did not cause the same public outrage and concern that characterized some of the other K-8 mergers.

The student body at Principal Renee's school was predominately African American and students ranged in age from age 3 to 15. The school had almost 450 students, with an even split of elementary and middle school pupils. The school also had a *Head Start* class specifically designed for 3-year-old students.

The school staff consisted of more than 60 faculty members with an even mix of veteran and seasoned teachers. The average teacher in the building had been on staff between five and seven years.

Parental support was low but a small group of parents was extremely involved. Parents from this small group volunteered daily and assisted with daily school functions. The turnout for PTA meetings was under 20 percent.

Daily routine. Principal Renee attempted to spend at least an hour each day in classrooms. She also spent time on the 8th grade floor because that group was the most problematic. She spent the majority of her time meeting with teachers, parents and other stakeholders in the building.

During a normal school day Principal Renee had to deal with various problems. These problems included getting buy-in from her staff, dealing with special education issues, the district's new assessment instrument, and student behavior. The biggest problem Renee faced was supporting the instructional program of a comprehensive school model with eleven different grades. As she explained, "You always have to think about what my elementary school students need, what my middle school students need, what my early childhood students need and making sure that everyone feels supported."

Relationships with staff. Outside of the configuration issues, Principal Renee did not attribute any of her school's problems to the recent consolidation. She admitted that her staff members quarreled because of philosophical differences but she ascribed that conflict to individual differences and not previous school experiences.

Decision making. Renee put various structures and processes in place to eliminate any staff-related friction regarding school-based decision making. She utilized

her LSRT , instructional leadership, administrative and school leadership teams to share in the decision-making process. Groups and coalitions did form based on school origin but they seemed based more on social interaction and familiarity. Teachers also formed groups based on affiliations (Teach for America), age, race, and gender.

Summary. Overall, Principal Renee felt that the consolidation effort only had one major impact on her school. The major issue that stemmed from the consolidation had to do with the merger of an elementary and middle school and the challenges of planning and monitoring 11 different grades. She stated, “It has been hard planning for 11 different grades. Yes it has definitely been hard.”

Principal Renee would ultimately recommend the consolidation process to other school Districts considering the option as a remedy to low enrollment. She stated that she would encourage school systems to refrain from merging elementary and middle schools and recommend that they only merge schools that have the same grade configurations. Managing multiple grades was just too difficult, in Principal Renee’s opinion.

Chapter Summary

Each of the principals interviewed for this study shared common perceptions on many of the issues related to consolidation and contrasting views on other elements of merging two public schools. In the next chapter I present findings that resulted from the principals’ varied responses and the multiple queries I conducted across cases. The next section identifies how the principals perceived the micropolitical issues related to conflict, power, change, decision making, enduring differences and the allocation of resources in the consolidated schools they led.

Chapter 5: Micropolitics – Cross Comparative Analysis

Tensions, resentments, competing interests, and power imbalances that influence everyday transitions in institutions often carry with them a micropolitical subtext (Morley, 2000). A variety of variables influenced the perceptions of school principals about the micropolitics of consolidating public schools in a city in the Mid-Atlantic region. The principals' comments indicated that they were either consciously or subconsciously aware of the micropolitical subtexts evident in the behaviors of school stakeholders after the school combinations took place. Stakeholder behaviors that involved issues of conflict, power, resources, philosophical differences, change and decision making impacted the manner in which each principal perceived the micropolitics of school consolidation. The principals past experiences and unique leadership styles shaped their perspectives and influenced their actions as they navigated the landscape of their consolidated schools.

Multiple factors drove the principal's perceptions of the micropolitics associated with consolidation in this study. Most of the factors related to the behaviors of the school and community stakeholders they interacted with daily as they worked in their schools. Each respondent led a consolidated school but some of the variables involved in the consolidation process were unique to each school site. The schools varied in the composition of their staff and the level of support they received from the central office. The table below provides a breakdown of how these two variables affected operations at each principal's school.

Table 3. Nature of Merging Staffs and General Support from Central Office

Principal's Name	Nature of Merging Staff	Support from Central Office
Kam	Most of the staff was new to the building and new to the profession. Majority of staff members from the previous schools did not work in the consolidated building. Most of the staff did not have any affiliation with previous schools	Central office very supportive with resources. School supplies and other related resources were abundant. School received additional resources that took the form of teachers, instructional interventions and increased technology School was renovated to accommodate Pre-K-8 th grade students
Rick	Most of the staff was seasoned with more than 5 years in the profession. Majority of staff was affiliated with the receiving school (elementary)	Central office very supportive. School supplies and other related resources were abundant. School received additional resources that took the form of teachers, instructional interventions and increased technology School was not renovated to accommodate Pre-K-8 th grade students.
Angela	Composition of staff was mixed. Seasoned and new teachers. The faculty was comprised of a substantial amount of teachers from both the sending and receiving schools.	Central office did not supply school with an abundance of resources. The receiving school had to provide a substantial amount of resources. The school did receive additional staff and instructional interventions. School was renovated to adjust to new population
MJ	Majority of staff members were new teachers new to the profession. Very few staff members from the sending and receiving schools. Staff did not have any real affiliation with sending and receiving schools.	Central office was very supportive. School was given abundance of resources an additional staff. The principal was able to select each staff member hired to work in the building. School was renovated to adjust to new population
Renee	The staff was a mixture of new and seasoned teachers. A small segment of the staff had strong affiliations to	Central office was very supportive. School was given abundance of resources. School received additional staff and instructional resources. School was renovated to accommodate new group of students.

	either the sending or receiving schools.	
Frank	The majority of staff was new to the building and new to the profession. Staff did not have any affiliation with sending or receiving schools.	School received abundance of resources. Additional staff are instructional interventions were also supplied. School was not fully renovated to accommodate new students.
Max	The majority of staff was seasoned more than 3 years. Most of the staff was affiliated with the receiving school.	Central office supplied school with an abundance of resources. School received additional staff members which took the form of teachers, assistant principals and instructional coaches. School was renovated to accommodate new students.

Identifying the dynamics that affected each particular school makes it easier to gain a clearer understanding of how each principal perceived his or her school environment and the activities taking place each day in the building. In every school the principals' daily routines, and how they interacted with students and staff reflected their leadership styles which directly influenced their perception of micropolitics.

Daily Routines

The respondents in this study had daily routines that were indicative of how they interacted with the primary stakeholders in their buildings. Some routines demonstrated that the principals' were hands-on leaders that believed in constantly being visible as they interacted with students and adults. Some of principals in this study displayed behaviors that were more typical of micromanagers who focused more on keeping a tight reign of control and maintaining order in their buildings.

Principal Kam's daily routine stressed constant visibility as she purposely moved through her building in a quest to establish positive relationships with her students and staff to reduce possible conflicts. Kam designed her daily routine to accommodate the

needs of her constituents even if their actions or behaviors created additional problems for the school and administration. Kam described the accommodations she implemented to meet the needs of the school's stakeholders:

Yes, by the second week, I want to know every child's name. I know most of their parents names also. I have an open door policy. Most parents know my cell phone number. That I give out freely to a lot of parents and a lot of students. I mean, sometimes it comes back to bite me. That's why I can't have a routine with children because if they are in a crisis sometimes they look for me specifically because we just have that rapport.

Principal's Angela, Max, Renee and Frank had similar daily routines that focused on visibility and building positive relationships with students and staff. Most of the principals' routines involved greeting students during entry, monitoring pupils as they transitioned in the halls, supervising the cafeteria and monitoring dismissal. The principals' daily routines also involved interacting with the adults in the building through informal observations as they walked in or by classrooms. Most principals used their daily routines to build positive relationships with school stakeholders and to prevent possible conflicts. Principal Angela described her daily interaction with teachers:

I interact with staff a lot. I try to make myself available to any staff members that may need me. I spend a lot of time giving guidance to teachers. I make myself available to parents or anyone that wants to speak to me. I try to keep teachers happy and avoid problems.

Two of the principals had daily routines that focused more on monitoring and supervision and less on building positive relationships. Principals MJ and Rick remained constantly visible in their buildings but their main goal seemed to focus less on building positive relationships and more on monitoring their staff member's adherence to their assigned professional responsibilities. Principal MJ described his morning routine which involved monitoring his custodians work and meeting with his assistant principals (APs):

My normal routine is to slide through the back door to check out the walkway to see if the custodians have actually taken their mops and brooms through the hallways. Once I reach my office, I do a walkthrough and check the bath towels, hand towels, and ensure that the bathrooms are clean. All classrooms have to be clean and all trash must be dumped. I then do emails and debrief with my assistant principals. We meet every morning from 7:50 – 8:15.

Principal MJ's morning routine displays the manner in which he maintains power and control over his staff by consistently monitoring their duties and constantly providing them with direction and guidance. By meeting with his assistant principals every day MJ kept track of everything that occurred in his building and effectively controlled their actions and daily routines.

Parental Support and Involvement

The level of parental support and involvement in a building affects teachers, principals and the overall quality of instruction in a school. When parents are positively involved in their children's school they normally ensure that school leaders implement policies and procedures in a manner that serves the best interest of the entire student body. Extremely low parent involvement is normally associated with minority groups and students from impoverished backgrounds. Knowing the degree of parent involvement in each of the schools was important because it directly influenced the manner in which each principal had to deal with micropolitical issues associated with parents, students, and community stakeholders.

All respondents except Max indicated that they had extremely low levels of parent involvement in their schools. When questioned about the level of parent participation in PTA events every principal except Max indicated that parent attendance rates were lower than 20 percent. Principals like Angela and Kam stated that most of their interaction with parents involved student discipline issues. Many of the principals including Frank and

Renee stated that parent involvement declined dramatically once the students reached the third grade. Principal Angela's description of parental involvement was indicative of most of the schools:

Getting parents to come in and be part of the school family has been one of our biggest challenges. A lot of our parents have work schedules that conflict with the school day, so it's hard to get parents to come in. We are working on trying to come up with more ways to get parents involved, but it has been difficult.

Principal Max was the only school leader that responded positively about parental involvement. Max stated that her school had an extremely large number of parents attend the *Back to School* and parent teacher conference nights. This level of attendance was unusual because parents did not normally frequent these events in large numbers. This level of parent participation was also surprising because Max faced more resistance from her school community than any of the other principals. The negative press associated with the school merger could have resulted in higher attendance rates from parents eager to meet the new principal. Sometimes negative press sparks parental interest.

Even though parental involvement was low all of the principals except Rick seemed to maintain positive relationships with their parents and community partners. Rick was the only principal interviewed that seemed to have a negative relationship with his parents. Rick stated that prior to his arrival the community was very involved in the school. He perceived the community's previous involvement as negative and undermining. Principal Rick described his perception of parental involvement in his school:

Parents turn out more for school events than PTA meetings. We don't have a high-functioning or even low-functioning PTA. Our current PTA probably lacks the skills to organize and move us where we need to be. Right now, our PTA is basically non-functioning. Parents come in...some come to be nosey not to be

involved. In many cases they do come in a positive way. When I first came they were like, "We have to get him out of here."

Dealing with parents is just one of the daily duties that most principals engaged in each day. Issues revolving around discipline and teacher concerns normally constitute a school leaders daily routine.

Daily Issues and Conflicts

During the course of a given school day each principal had to deal with multiple issues and conflicts that typically involved students, teachers and parents. Principal Max's daily conflicts mainly concerned student discipline and parent-related issues. When the school's first consolidated inappropriate student behavior created a chaotic building climate. Students cut class, ran halls, cursed out teachers and fought every day. Principal Max described some of the problems she had with student discipline in her building:

We have hall walkers. Getting them to stay in class is difficult. Our fifth graders need a lot of work. It's the first and second graders...we have some with some serious emotional issues. The older ones they do all kinds of cursing but the little ones will throw chairs. Those are the ones that you have to like carry out of the room.

Student discipline was a problem for five of the principals interviewed in this study. MJ and Angela for example seemed to have the most issues with violence and neighborhood-related conflicts. Angela shared some of the issues she faced with student behavior:

Most of our problems come from neighborhood beefs that we have. Our children live in the neighborhood so a lot of students bring problems in from home. Our interaction with the local police department is very important. They help us monitor the building during entry and dismissal. Those are some of the problems we have.

Staff conflicts also presented daily problems for some of the principals. Staff conflicts in schools normally take the form of insubordination or other issues related to negative interactions with the administration. Parent conflicts with teachers also created daily concerns for some of the principals.

Principal MJ's challenges with some of his staff members seemed typical and related primarily to their failure to perform the professional duties directly related to their jobs. In the district teachers' professional responsibilities included coming to work on time, submitting school-related documents in a timely manner and following school district policies and procedures. MJ talked about the issues he had with some of the members of his staff:

I had a couple of conflicts with staff members...I mean not reporting to work, being insubordinate about turning in documentation, reporting late you know the basic things. I follow the basic protocols and procedures. I mean their commitment to school responsibilities...Those are some of the challenges that I have, but for the most part there has not been a lot of challenges involving staff.

One of Principal Renee's biggest faculty-related issues dealt with the fact that a substantial number of individuals on her staff did not buy into her vision of how the school should be run. As a former charter school principal Renee was used to having more influence over her staff. Charter school teachers were not allowed to join traditional unions so they basically worked at the pleasure of the principal. Charter school teachers could be fired at will so they normally had to buy into whatever vision the principal had for the school. Public school teachers in D.C. had a strong teacher's union so they could openly defy a principal's directives or general plans for their school. Principal Renee discussed the problem she had with some of the members of her staff:

My biggest problem is making sure that everyone is on my page in terms of my vision for student achievement and school culture. We lost several staff members last year that were not trying to buy in to my program.

Principal Kam also experienced problems with staff related to her instructional vision. In an effort to improve student achievement and improve test scores, Kam believed in monitoring teacher's daily instruction. She visited classrooms regularly, observed teachers and checked lesson plans. Most teachers were not used to intensified monitoring and resisted Kam's approach. Kam's predecessor had a laid-back leadership style and did not make a habit of visiting teacher's classroom. Some of the members of Kam's staff saw her classroom visits as an intrusion and violation of their privacy and personal space. Kam described the challenge of monitoring instruction in her school:

The first issue I dealt with in this school is the fact that I believe in reviewing teacher's lesson plans and holding teachers accountable for planning because I feel like that's a precursor to good instruction. Teachers felt like it was not something they were required to do so I could not require them to do it. It was also just a change I think. You sometimes get that response from adults when change is proposed. Sometimes it is resisted acquiescence and then after some time they go along with it. I knew that it was just natural but it was the first hurdle that I faced.

As the only principal with experience in more than one consolidated school, Frank's perspective on staff-related issues was somewhat different than the other respondents. Frank was the assistant principal in a consolidated school where the staff members of the two schools did not get along. Essentially, the staff from the two merging schools declared war on each other so most of Frank's interaction with staff involved trying to make peace. Frank blamed the ongoing conflict and staff-related issues at his former school on poor leadership from the principal and a lack of planning from central office. Frank described how the principal's treatment of the incoming staff created ongoing conflict in his former building:

It was issues caused by adults in the school that led to most of the drama. The best way to put it was that it was not necessarily set up to be a cohesive group environment. It was sort of like, “You’re coming here. This is our building.” What was really messed up was how they were treated when they walked in the door and it was from the top down.

Most of the problems or complaints that Frank experienced as the new principal of a consolidated school came from parents. For the most part the parents in Frank’s new school were concerned and interested in their children’s education. As a result his daily conflicts typically did not involve staff-related issues but primarily revolved around parent complaints involving teachers and the overall quality of instruction in the building. The majority of Frank’s students were out-of-boundary so most of his parents made a conscious decision to send their children to Frank’s school. As a result, most of the parents had a sense of entitlement and felt as if the school should be better than the public schools found in their neighborhoods. The parents demanded excellence and were very vocal with principal.

Conflicts Caused by Consolidation

Although all schools and organizations experience some type of conflict some of the micropolitical issues and problems faced by the principals in this study were a direct result of consolidation. Some of the principals attributed the increased level of problems in their buildings to their school’s recent mergers while others felt as if the consolidation effort had only a minor impact on their buildings.

Principal Renee was open about the challenges she faced in her building, but was adamant that consolidation was not the catalyst for her issues. She was the only principal in the study that did not attribute any of her school’s problems to consolidation. She expressed the following concerning the challenges she faced in her building:

One of my biggest challenges is planning for a comprehensive preschool through 8th grade program. You always have to think about what my elementary school students need, what my middle school students need and what my early childhood students need. I need to make sure that everyone feels supported. I think that the fact that we have students coming from three different schools or communities has nothing special or unique with the problems we have.

Renee's experience working in multiple schools most likely played a role in the way she took ownership of the problems she encountered in her building. She seemed to view school problems as inevitable and did not want to embrace the fact that consolidation had negatively affected her building.

Principals Kam and MJ attributed some of the problems they initially faced to consolidation but noted that issues from the merger did not persist in their buildings because of strong leadership and the strategies they implemented during the initial stages of the process. Kam and MJ both experienced some issues with neighborhood rivalries, parental concerns and general fears from all connected stake holders regarding the merger. Kam also dealt with some of her staff members' reluctance to accept the new employees arriving in the building. Kam and MJ quickly alleviated most of the negative issues caused by consolidation by implementing various team-building strategies and techniques designed to encourage unity. Kam described the methods she used to bring her parents and students together:

The problems did not last long because we created a lot of opportunities for staff and students to bond together during the school day and after the school day. We were strategic in changing the school mascot and having the staff and students participate in that process. We were sure to buy staff shirts so there was pride about the new school. We did a staff scavenger hunt and we paired teachers up from different schools so they could get to know each other. We gave students assigned seats in the cafeteria so everyone was mixed up. We were strategic so the student issues lasted at most the first month of school.

Kam and MJ both seemed to believe that they could overcome any problems in their buildings; especially the ones caused by the merger. MJ implemented strategies similar to those Kam adopted. He noted that he eliminated all merger-related problems in the first few months of the consolidation.

Angela, Max and Rick experienced major conflicts that stemmed from the consolidation of their schools. Unlike Kam and MJ, these principals experienced serious issues that lasted throughout the school year.

Consolidation-related problems were probably the most severe in Max's school. She experienced the most significant level of community outrage about the consolidation effort. In Max's community the merger represented more than two schools coming together to form one entity it symbolized change and in the minds of some of the school's stakeholders it represented the government's effort to take over their neighborhood and eradicate them from the area. The fact that a virtually unknown Asian-American female was taking the place of a popular African-American male principal also added fuel to the fire. Many community members questioned why central office was sending a non-Black principal to their school.

A number of the parents from Max's former school refused to send their students to the newly consolidated building. These parents believed that Max had failed to fight to save their former school from closing and questioned her competency to lead such a troubled building. In protest many of these parents chose to send their students to an alternate school.

Parents and students were openly hostile toward Principal Max during the first months of school after the consolidation. Max discussed the treatment she received when she first arrived in the building:

There were multiple meetings last year dealing with consolidation that became contentious and some of that did carry over into this year. Parents were like, “Who is this lady?” I mean, they were very angry. They were like, “Who is this woman? We don’t want her here! We want the same principal. Why did he have to leave?” The thing I didn’t expect was the kids telling me, “I hate you! Go back to your old school!” At first, it was very, very difficult for me.

The arrival of middle school students into a former elementary school caused major problems in principal Rick’s building. Central office made a mistake concerning the number of middle school students that would attend the school. The school ended up having more than double the number of middle school students originally projected to attend the school. Having older students in the building became a major issue for the principal and the staff. Older students bring unique problems and discipline issues and the school did not have the staff to accommodate the increased numbers. The school facility was also inadequate to address the needs of the middle school pupils. Overcrowding and increased discipline issues caused by the consolidation led to low staff morale in the building. Rick described the effect merging the two buildings had on his school:

They said that “you will probably get 20 students from over there.” We ended up with 45, and we were unprepared for the numbers that returned. It was pure chaos! I’m not against K-8s. I went to a K-8 myself, but the building itself...the facility... is not conducive for middle school students, but we made do. We were not prepared, and we hired on a certain projection of students, and we got double. So for a short period we had teachers that had 38-40 students in their classroom and you know that was a problem. Than some of the middle school behaviors...the vandalism, the fights, the profanity...that was something that the staff never dealt with before.

The school consolidation seemed to overwhelm Principal Angela. Issues that stemmed from combining two different student bodies, two different faculties and two

different budgets created an overwhelming load of responsibility for the novice principal.

She discussed the struggles she had after the two schools merged:

It was a struggle because it was my first year as a principal at the school and the first year of the merger. I'm really thinking that the merger of two schools created a whole different kind of conflict...conflict that I would not have experienced if I was the principal of a stand alone school...Like two cultures merging with each other...the philosophical differences...dealing with two different budgets...having to be representative of two different schools is a very big challenge. So I guess to answer your question most of the challenges I had may have stemmed from the two schools merging together compounded with the fact that it was my first time as a principal of two merged schools.

Angela had previous experience working in traditional schools so she was able to compare and contrast what she was experiencing in the consolidated building with the problems and issues she had dealt with in the past in a more traditional setting. Her previous experiences influenced her perception of the micropolitical issues she faced as the leader of a consolidated faculty. Her previous experiences allowed her to measure good versus bad, right versus wrong, and easy versus difficult. The previous experiences of all of the respondents affected their perspective of the micropolitical issues they faced as leaders of consolidated schools.

Consolidated Experience versus Previous Experiences

All of the principals interviewed in this study had experience working in other school settings prior to becoming principals of consolidated schools. MJ was the former principal of a traditional middle school. Max and Rick were former principals of elementary schools. Angela, Frank, and Kam all served as assistant principals in the district prior to leading their own schools. Renee was formerly a principal of a charter middle school but taught in a regular public school prior to that experience. All respondents' previous experience influenced their approach to leading a consolidated

school. In every case, the respondents' previous experiences influenced their perceptions of the micropolitical issues in the schools they led.

Max's daily routine changed dramatically when she became the principal of a consolidated school. Providing quality instruction was the primary focus at her previous elementary school while discipline and climate-related concerns dominated her day as the principal of the consolidated facility. Max went from dealing with one discipline issue a day at her previous school to dealing with nonstop disciplinary matters daily in her new position. Max explained how the focus in her previous school was different from her current environment:

Working at a preschool thru fourth grade campus was really different. On average there were only one or two discipline issues a day. The job was really familiar to me. I knew the routines. I mean it was smooth sailing. We did a lot with instruction. This year it's all about climate. We have not let the instructional piece go but it's all about structure and climate and setting expectations for the kids. That's how it's different. It feels like a year one.

Rick had similar experiences when he acquired the consolidated school. He had more staff and student related issues and spent a substantial amount of his time resolving conflicts. Rick had to enforce more disciplinary actions toward his staff in the consolidated school than he had to implement in all of his previous faculties combined.

Max and Rick's situations were unique in comparison with the other principals in the study. Max went from leading a high-performing elementary school to leading a dysfunctional Pre-K-8 center. Rick went from running a stable elementary program to leading an unstable Pre-K-8 campus. In every other case, the principals' situation regarding the quality of the schools they ran improved with the merger or remained the same.

Renee was the principal of a charter middle school before she became the leader of the consolidated facility. She had to deal with the same type of issues regarding behavior, student achievement and the facility in her charter school. The biggest difference between the two schools was the level of buy in from the staff. Renee's perception was that her staff bought into her vision at the previous school.

Kam and MJ both worked in very challenging schools prior to the merger. Kam was the assistant principal in a very violent, low-performing middle school. She loved working in the school and serving as an advocate for her students but she disagreed with the way the principal ran the building. She attributed the school's problems to poor leadership and the fact that the school was located in an extremely impoverished area.

Kam described the differences at her previous school:

It's a lot different mainly because I'm the principal and because the negative experiences I had at my other school. I found the need to create structures here that were nonexistent in my other school. I was caught off guard about information or things that were going on during the day and that made me uncomfortable and made me feel like I was not able to deal with things to the best of my ability. So now I try to create systems and structures so that people kind of know what to expect. The differences had a lot to do with the demographics of the school. There were a lot of children that just came to school with a lot more issues. The school that I worked in did not have all of the supports in place for students with emotional and behavioral challenges. It had a lot to do with where the school was located, the background of the families, the higher special education population and the lack of resources compared to what my current school has.

Principal MJ's background was similar to Kam's. He worked in a difficult middle school that had more problems and issues than his consolidated school. Student behavior was a major issue in his former building and the school was out of control. Although MJ brought stability to the school he was happy to leave his former building and take

advantage of the opportunity to lead the newly consolidated facility. MJ described his experience at his former school:

When I was at the other school, it was like *Lean on Me* my first year. It was like Eastside High my first year. There were many challenges at the school and I don't think I would have been able to make it through the year. I went into the school in November, and the school was in total chaos. It was out of control but we were able to bring control and substance to the building after the first year. With the support of the Chancellor...when she came in she really put some systems in place and resources that helped us through the process. That's why I'm still a principal.

MJ's experience in his former school was so difficult that he contemplated leaving the profession. The challenges he faced in the consolidated building paled when compared to his former school placement.

In principal Kam's case her former school experiences affected the way she made decisions as the leader of the consolidated school. Kam made sure that she created routines, structures and procedures to ensure order and to keep the entire staff informed.

One of the most important aspects of a principal's job is making decisions. Most schools have established procedures regarding the manner in which principals must make decisions about academics and climate. In some organizations individuals have to bargain, compete and negotiate to make decisions. The principals in this study took varied approaches to involving their staffs in the decision making process. The chart below illustrates how each of the seven principals handled the decision-making process.

Table 4: Principal's Perception of the Decision Making Process

Principal's Name	Do staff members bargain, negotiate or compete or order to make decisions?
Angela	<p>Staff members had philosophical differences and initially argued and fought to make basic decisions.</p> <p>The principal removed a few troubled staff members. Other staff</p>

	members begin to work well with principal. Most decisions were made based on committee.
Frank	Most teachers new to the building. Teachers are happy to work together to make basic decisions. Abundance of school based resources created an environment where teachers did not have to compete for resources.
Kam	The entire staff involved in making decisions. Principal created a culture that cultivated staff input. Abundance of school based resources eliminated need for teachers to bargain, compete and negotiate as it related to decision making.
Max	The school has an informal method of making decisions. The elementary and middle school teams meet and provide input to make minor decisions. Principal still has final say in all decisions. Abundance of resources eliminated the need for teachers to bargain, compete and negotiate for school supplies.
Renee	The school has multiple decision making bodies (instructional leadership team, administrative team and the LSRT team). The principal plays a leadership role on all 3 teams. Different organizations are in place and teachers attend meetings. Principal still makes all of the decisions Teachers did not have to bargain negotiate or compete for any resources or to make decisions
Rick	The principal does not believe that his staff is competent enough to make school based decisions. Teachers have no input in the school decision process. Teachers did not bargain, compete or negotiate to make decisions because they were not involved in the process
MJ	The school uses the traditional LSRT process to make all decisions. According to the principal his school stakeholders are involved in all school based decisions. Teachers did not have to bargain, compete or negotiate to make decisions.

As illustrated in Table 4 most of the principals demonstrated a collaborative spirit when it came to involving their staffs in the decision-making process. Principal's Kam, MJ, Angela, Frank and Max all embraced involving their staffs in making decisions.

Max, Angela, and Frank's decision to include their staffs in the decision-making process seemed to occur more serendipitously. In most cases the principals found it easier to create a culture of shared decision making because most of the schools had a substantial number of new staff members.

Teachers did not have to bargain, debate or negotiate to make decisions in any of the schools. The fact that most of the schools had young staffs and that most of the people working in the building were relatively new to the profession helped ease the tension regarding the decision-making process. The faculty in Angela and Rick's schools were not young but seemed either too angry or too apathetic to participate in the decision-making process. Resources also seemed to be plentiful in each school so supplies and human capital never became contested issues in most of the buildings.

MJ and Kam seemed to have strong philosophical beliefs about how principals should make decisions in a school. MJ shared his philosophy about how he handled the decision-making process in his building:

I try to include all of the stakeholders. I try to lead with a collaborative, compassionate philosophy. I tend to think that no man is an island but when I bring folks in to collaborate and run it by them of course I have the ultimate say. I like to bounce things off the LSRT team to see what they're thinking and move from there. My goal is to include them in the process. I think the more information staff members have the more they feel like part of a team.

In contrast, Renee and Rick did not openly involve their staffs in the decision-making process. Both schools had decision-making structures in place but the principals' distrust and resentment toward their staffs prompted them to make all of the decisions autonomously. Renee had multiple decision-making bodies in her school. She had the traditional LSRT team, the administrative team and the instructional leadership team in place but she still made most of the decisions with very little input from her staff.

Principal Rick's relationship with his staff resulted in a school climate where he did not trust and apparently did not like most of his teachers. He boldly eliminated them from the decision-making process and ran his school like a dictator. Principal Rick shared his philosophy on why he had to make all of the decisions in his building:

I make decisions based on the nature of my staff because I'm not confident that some, not all, will make decisions that are best for children. They may make them based on what's best for adults. I don't think they take the initiative to do anything. We don't have anyone clamoring to have a new and fresh program so I need new fresh people and ideas. I don't have anyone that says, "Hey, Mr. Rick, I'm really excited! I want to do this I want to do that."

Most of the principals seemed to have a positive opinion of the decision making process. In some of the schools the teachers may not share the principal's positive perspective.

Philosophical Differences

When the consolidation process took place, some of the merging schools had staffs with different philosophies. When people in an organization have different mindsets micropolitical issues may result.

When the consolidation process took place Angela was the only principal that had an even mixture of teachers and students from both the sending and receiving schools. During the consolidation a substantial number of teachers from the troubled elementary school merged with an almost complete staff from the improving middle school. From the start problems erupted between the two staffs. The teachers from the middle school believed the elementary school teachers were lazy and apathetic. They based their perceptions on the media attention the elementary school had received because of reported incidents of violence and extremely low test scores.

The middle school staff feared that the elementary school teachers would bring the school down and reverse the recent success the school had experienced. The elementary school staff viewed the middle school teachers as arrogant and untrustworthy. The elementary staff did not feel welcomed in the new building and assumed that the middle school staff took advantage of them as it related to room assignments and the distribution of students. Principal Angela described how the philosophical differences between the staffs resulted in power struggles and conflict in her building:

When the school's first came together you had a group of teachers from the original school that did things a certain way and a culture that they had in place that was kind of disrupted by the other school coming in disrupting things. So the merger itself was difficult for both groups. So you basically had two cultures coming together. So one challenge was that the original staff was very comfortable because they had been together for a long time and had a very positive relationship. When the other school came they had been having some struggles and conflicts. They brought a lot of conflict to a school that was basically stable.

The basis for the philosophical issues in Rick's school was a little different from those that Angela experienced. Rick did not receive any of the staff members from the middle school that merged into the elementary school. The conflict between faculty members on Rick's staff resulted from their differing philosophies on the Pre-K through eighth grade education model and how middle school students should be taught.

Most of the teachers in Rick's school were seasoned educators. Some of them had been teaching for more than 30 years and most had been in the same elementary school for their entire careers. A substantial number of the staff did not embrace the Pre-K-8 concept. Many of the teachers believed that middle school students should not share a building with elementary school children. These concerns manifested in the teaching approaches some teachers adopted with the older students. Because most of the staff did

not have any training in teaching middle school pupils many of the teachers used traditional elementary methods to deliver instruction to the older pupils. The principal and a few other staff members fought with the teachers over this issue and demanded that the teachers change their instructional practices to meet the needs of the older students. The clashes and arguments surrounding this issue led to ongoing conflict in the building.

Principal MJ acknowledged some initial problems related to philosophical differences among his staff but claimed to eliminate the issues by being strategic. MJ explained that he encouraged his teachers to be unique in their approach to instructional issues. MJ described how he quelled problems related to philosophical differences in his building:

Now of course you are going to have different philosophies on how teachers should do things. Now what we try to do is no one has the exact answer or one size fits all. We try to give each teacher the opportunity to institute their own practice; and if it works adopt it and if it does not work discard the practice until we find out what is really working and successful. We give everybody a chance to see if their approach really works.

Principal Renee also acknowledged some struggles in her building related to the differing philosophies among her staff. Unlike Principal MJ, Renee did not implement any unique strategies to eliminate the differences. Principal Renee believed that staff differences are an inevitable part of running a school. She did not attribute any of her staff's philosophical differences to the consolidation process.

In Principal's Rick and Angela's schools some teachers organized and formed coalitions based on shared philosophies and opinions. It is common for coalitions to form in organizations where people have different backgrounds, experiences and opinions.

Coalitions

Despite the dynamics of most of the schools coalitions based on conflict and enduring differences did not materialize. The consolidation process enabled many of the principals to hire new teachers to constitute their buildings. This helped create school climates that were free of coalitional conflict. In some schools staff members naturally formed groups but most developed along lines of age, race, experiences and background. In most schools, White teachers associated with other White teachers and Black staff members associated with other Black staff members. Teachers also formed groups based on commuter routes and the area of the city in which they lived. Principal MJ described how staff members formed groups in his school:

What I have witnessed over the last three years is we have a group of Caucasian teachers and a group of African-American teachers. It appears to me that the Caucasian teachers will gravitate toward the Caucasian teachers and the African-American teachers with the African-American teachers. So, when it's time for a luncheon the White teachers will sit together and then all of the African-American teachers will sit together. It's not by design it just happens.

Conflict-based enduring differences did cause teachers to form coalitions in Principal Angela's school. Angela's school was different than the other sites because she had a substantial number of seasoned staff members and an almost even mixture of teachers from both the sending and receiving schools. Coalitions developed based on school origin and the divisions seemed physical as well as philosophical. In Angela's school the teachers formed groups to increase their influence, power and protection. The teachers from the elementary school felt like outsiders in the middle school building and assumed that the middle staff members had the perceived support of the principal. They felt like Angela gave them the worst room assignments, the most difficult students and the worst class schedules. The staff associated with the middle school viewed the

elementary school teachers as lazy and argumentative. Angela described the nature of the coalitions that developed in her school:

The teachers from the other school cliqued together and the teachers from our base school kind of had their clique. You could see the division not just socially, but even in meetings where the one school's groups of teachers would kind of sit together and the other schools' teachers would sit together. It wasn't just socially but physically they separated.

Angela dealt with the ongoing discord created by the coalitions and eventually eliminated the problem by using adverse action to remove staff members that created ongoing conflict. By removing disgruntled staff members who were seasoned teachers Principal Angela replicated the conditions that existed in most of the other consolidated schools. Conflict and staff-related drama decreased after she started hiring teachers new to the profession. Angela talked about the way she initiated change by removing disgruntled employees and troublemakers from her school:

We had teachers that came from the other school and they were not happy with the way some of the teachers did things and the way the administration did things. We had a teacher that pretended to have an injury to remove the focus from issues he was having in his classroom. When he did not like the response from the administration he called the union. I'm pleased to say that anyone that wanted to work toward helping children do well are still here and the people that seemed to want to satisfy their own needs are no longer with us. We have been able to alleviate the difficulties we had when we first started by changing some of the staff that we did not hand pick.

In Principal Angela's school the allocation of school-based resources also created some friction. The allocation of resources which in Angela's school took the form of room assignments, schedules and the distribution of students resulted in resentment and tension between the two merging staffs. The manner in which principals and even officials from central office allocate resources can be a catalyst for micropolitical issues.

Allocation of Resources

Central office provided each consolidated school with additional resources to ease community concerns and to ensure a smooth consolidation process. Every school involved in the consolidation process received additional school supplies, new technology and staffing allocations to meet the academic needs of all the students involved in the merger. Some of the consolidated schools received even more resources by acquiring additional supplies and technology from the closing school site.

The principals in all but one of the schools had an overwhelming surplus of basic supplies. Most of the schools also benefitted from having additional staff members. Instructional support staff and administrators added to their budgets to ensure the academic and social viability of each program.

In some cases, the principals had the opportunity to hand pick the staff they hired to work in the newly consolidated schools. This option was very rare in the district, and most principals reveled in the fact that they had the option to utilize this unique opportunity.

Principal Kam was not able to hand pick her staff but she did hire a lot of new teachers when staff members from both the sending and receiving school opted to work in traditional school settings. Resources were plentiful in Kam's building, because she acquired a substantial number of supplies from the school that closed and merged with her facility. Principal Kam talked about the resources she had in her building:

We had too many resources, to be honest with you. I mean both human and physical resources. Instructional materials and supplies that's not something we are lacking. We have human resources because of the model we were under. We get additional supports as far as mental health clinicians, professional developers and well just some other staff that provide a holistic approach to education. So, I would say that we definitely have the resources we need.

All of the consolidated schools received additional staff. Principal Max had even more support than the other consolidated schools because of the politics surrounding the consolidation effort in her building. As stated previously, the outrage surrounding the consolidation of the two schools in Max's case was at a far greater level than any of the other buildings. The community was upset because the central office wanted to remove the popular African-American principal and replace him with Max an Asian-American female. Stakeholders from the high-performing sending school had major concerns and did not want their kids to attend the low-performing Pre-K through 8th grade center known for high incidents of violence. The school community was angry with the district government, because under the new revitalization effort, many of their homes would be demolished and replaced with condominiums. Half of the homes in the housing development had already been razed to make room for the new buildings.

In an effort to accommodate all of the stakeholders involved in the consolidation process central office made special concessions for Max's school. The school received additional staff members that were not included in the original plan or budget. To accommodate concerns of stakeholder from the closing elementary school and quell parent concerns about safety the district provided additional teachers and two assistant principals. Students from the closing school also received a special bus to take them to and from school each day so they would not have to walk across any busy streets. The school also received an art and music teacher so they would not feel slighted in the process. The central office also threw in two additional instructional coaches to help parents from the sending school feel better about the consolidated school's academic

program. Principal Max described how the district gave her additional assistant principals in response to parental concerns:

I don't know what the original plan was but they definitely listened to the community. When they heard that the families were concerned about safety and the former principal leaving, they gave us some money to keep on two assistant principals. I don't know if that was initially what the District thought would happen but that's what they ended up doing for us.

Principal MJ also received special treatment in the allocation of resources from the central office. Because of his positive record of accomplishment and close relationship with his superiors he had the opportunity to hand pick his entire staff. Some principals were able to hand pick and select specific staff members for certain positions but MJ was the only principal allowed to select his entire staff. He had the unique option of reconstituting his former school which in essence, meant all of his former employees had to reapply for their jobs. MJ described his perception of this process:

The great thing about consolidating schools is that you are able to reconstitute your staff. You are able to interview every staff member and hire them if you deem them part of the team that you want to assemble. So, I brought along one teacher from the receiving school and four teachers from my previous school everyone else was newly hired.

Angela was the only principal that seemed unsatisfied with the allocation of resources her school received during the allocation process. Part of the problem was that the sending school did not bring any supplies or technology into the building when they arrived. Poor budgeting by the sending school's principal and major thefts committed by students during the school year depleted the school's surplus of supplies and technology. As a result, Angela's school did not receive as many extra material resources as the other schools. When the two schools consolidated very few teachers from both staffs opted to transfer to other schools or retire. This created a situation where Angela initially could

not hire any new staff members. Angela actually had more staff than required by her actual student enrollment count. As a result, Angela eventually had to lose some of her teachers. Angela described the distribution of resources in her building:

In terms of fiscal resources or even physical materials we didn't get anything from the previous school. I mean the school that moved into our building... We had to share everything we had with the school that entered our building so that was a challenge. In terms of bodies, we had to make sure that there were enough teachers for each classroom. Over time as enrollment dropped we had to move people around, and some people could not stay here any longer. That did cause some issues for us.

The vast amount of resources supplied to the school by the central office eliminated the need for staff members to bargain, compete, or negotiate for any supplies or positions. Every respondent with the exception of one received the resources necessary to educate their students. In two cases principals received additional resources or hiring options to placate the community or because they held special favor with central office. Overall the principals interviewed for this study had positive feelings regarding the manner in which central office allocated resources to the consolidated schools.

Positive Aspects of the Consolidation Process

Although some of the respondents experienced increased levels of resentment, tension and general conflict as a result of the consolidation process many of the principals had very positive experiences with the school mergers. In many ways the consolidation effort allowed under-enrolled schools to remain open and in some cases enabled academic and extracurricular programs to remain intact.

In most cases the consolidated schools provided more academic and extracurricular opportunities for students than the individual schools. Many of the schools did not offer music, gym, art or computer classes prior to the mergers. Some of the

schools did not have any form of instructional support for low-performing and advanced students. The additional human and material resources given to the consolidated facilities enabled most of the principals to enrich their schools' overall instructional programs.

Some of the principals felt that the Pre-K through 8th grade instructional model gave students an opportunity to stay in a school facility for an extended period of time which could result in stronger relationships between students and teachers. A few of the principals even believed that the consolidation effort strengthened school communities by forcing adjacent neighborhoods to attend the same school which resulted in less violence and stronger bonds between children. Two of the principals mentioned that the consolidation effort helped maintain the district's student population and kept students from enrolling in the competing charter schools. Competing charter schools were the primary reason that most of the consolidated schools lost their previous populations. For example the middle school component of Angela's school had a student population of almost 900 before competing charter schools opened in the area.

Principals MJ and Kam had the most positive feelings toward the consolidation process. Principal Kam expressed how the consolidation effort allowed her school to remain open while improving the overall quality of her academic program. Kam described her positive feeling about the consolidation process:

I definitely think that the end result was positive. I mean both of the schools were under-enrolled and over-staffed. It was a smarter use of resources so it saved a lot of money for the school system. As it stands right now I don't think that either one of those schools would still have been in existence with a lot of children going over to the charter system. If we just pool our resources from the separate schools we can create a better environment.

Principals Frank and MJ also expressed how the consolidation of schools helped them professionally. MJ shared how the consolidation effort helped him to move to a

better school and improve his health by working in a less stressful environment. Frank shared how the consolidation process allowed him to work with older students. Frank always worked in elementary school settings and would have never volunteered to work with middle school students. During his interview Frank stated that he preferred to work with the older children.

Based on their unique experiences the principals had varied perceptions of the positive and negative elements of leading a consolidated school. Because of their background, school-based experiences and leadership styles each principal gained different opinions of how the micropolitical elements of consolidation impacted their schools.

Overall Impression of Consolidation

Each principal was able to gain a general impression of the consolidation process based on their unique experiences leading a merged school. Issues related to conflict, enduring differences, resentment, the allocation of resources, decision making, politics, and dealing with the actions of stakeholders resulted in each principal forging a general impression of the consolidation of public schools.

I gauged the principals' perceptions of the micropolitics associated with the consolidation process by how they responded when asked if they would recommend merging schools to districts facing low enrollments and the underutilization of school facilities. MJ was the only principal that recommended consolidation without any reservations as a remedy for school districts facing low enrollment and underutilized facilities. In MJ's opinion consolidation provided schools with a mechanism for increasing the number of students in their buildings and improving the overall quality of

instruction. Principal MJ described why he would recommend consolidation for ailing school systems:

Well I would definitely recommend consolidation if they're trying to save money and put resources back into the schools. I would say co-locate or consolidate the schools. When the numbers are low the school may not have the resources it needs so it really works. So I do say that consolidation is an option for these school districts. It's a positive option.

MJ credited the success of the consolidation effort in his school on his strong staff and the overwhelming support he received from the central office specifically the Chancellor. Principal MJ felt supported during every phase of the process and guaranteed that other principals could be successful with consolidation if they had a positive outlook and supportive superintendent.

Renee, Kam, Frank, Max, and Rick all recommended the consolidation process but with varying degrees of reservation. Kam praised the positive results of consolidation in her building, but stated that it could only be successful under certain conditions. Kam believed that the number one factor for successful consolidation was strong leadership. Kam also identified school demographics and the overall severity and degree of school needs as the determining factors in gauging if consolidation would be a viable option for a school system. Kam explained the components needed to make consolidation successful:

I think the success of co-located schools will depend on the leader you have in the buildings because it's not going to be a set cookie cutter situation. One thing is not going to work because every situation, from community to community is going to make the school merger different. You need to look at the demographics of the school and the needs of the school and just make sure that you provide human and financial resources to put the programs and systems in place.

Frank also recommended consolidation but had major concerns about the true purpose of its implementation and the types of schools that needed to be merged. When

Frank was an assistant principal his school was consolidated as a measure to save money and reduce square footage in the District. Poor leadership and planning from the central office and the school's principal resulted in total chaos when the two schools combined. As a result, Frank did not recommend consolidation for school systems that simply wanted to save money and reduce space in underutilized schools.

Principal Frank's other issue with school consolidation focused on the manner in which the districts configured the schools. The instructional responsibility of managing eleven different grades was just too much for one principal to handle. Frank described the vast responsibility:

It's rough, because the spectrum of needs and issues is so great; but at the same time you may have less children but you still have all of those grades. You have all of these grades and you have space issues that you have to worry about. You still have elementary people that don't want their kids within eye sight of fourteen and fifteen year olds. It's just a lot of other small things that go along with just trying to keep the ship balanced.

Frank also stated that school officials needed to consider the fact that many parents will opt to leave the school system before they send their kids to a consolidated school. Frank contributes the exodus of many of his former students to the forced school merger.

Renee's views were very similar to Frank's and she only had one real issue with consolidation. She also stated that it was virtually impossible to successfully plan for eleven grades, and commented that students were being "short changed" in the process. Renee was firm in her belief that schools with different configurations should not merge. During the course of the study Renee was the most adamant in her belief that the consolidation effort did not significantly negatively impact her school. Renee attributed all of the issues in her building to typical school challenges.

Max recommended consolidation but only as a last measure. Despite the many issues she encountered Max believed that consolidation is necessary when school systems have schools with low enrollments. Max shared her feeling about consolidation:

I would say that you probably have to do it because ultimately we have to offer quality programs to children and if you only have 100 students you just can't do it. Some schools will have to close and no it won't be easy. You have to have some balls and just do it. You will have some very angry constituents and they will be angry no matter what. You will have to listen to them and if they are real concerned for their families you must give them some support.

Despite the various problems Rick experienced he still recommended consolidation for school systems suffering from low enrollments. Rick blamed the problems he faced with the consolidation effort on incompetent teachers and support staff. In Rick's opinion, consolidation could only be effective if principals had the option to hand pick their staff. Forcing individuals adamantly against consolidation to work in a school is a formula for failure.

Angela was the only principal that did not recommend consolidation. Because of the dynamics associated with the consolidation of her building Angela experienced the negative effects of the process in every area. She had difficulty with students and staff and in her mind central office was not initially supportive. She also perceived that she did not have as many resources as the other consolidated schools. Principal Angela shared her strong opinion about consolidation:

I do believe in the power of small schools as it relates to minority populations so I would not recommend consolidation and I would just keep schools separated. [Consolidation] is just too much to think about when you're trying to run a school effectively.

As evidenced by the principal's responses, the majority of school leaders interviewed during this study recommended the process of consolidation to school

systems facing enrollment and space issues. Principals like Max and Rick who experienced negative repercussions from school consolidation still recommended the process.

The vast majority of principals interviewed during the study agreed that the positive outcomes of consolidation which included keeping schools open and improving the overall quality of instruction for children outweighed the possible negative challenges administrators faced when they merged schools. These negative outcomes included increased levels of conflict and overall disruption in their buildings.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Findings

Overview

The perception of urban principals regarding the micropolitics of merging two schools into one facility is the focus of this chapter. Twenty-three schools in the Mid Atlantic School District closed during the 2008-2009 school year which resulted in the consolidation of several school facilities. This study explored a multi-case account of how seven principals perceived the micropolitics of school consolidation. The data revealed how school leaders perceived micropolitical issues in their schools that in some cases resulted in tension, conflict, power struggles and chaos. The preceding narrative report provided a basis for identifying themes and patterns regarding the possible stimuli behind the micropolitical issues that occurred in some of these schools. Chapter 6 explores multiple conclusions regarding the data and delves into how the findings related to this study can impact future research, policy, and school-based practices.

Research Problem, Purpose, and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of seven principals regarding the consolidation of public schools in the Mid-Atlantic School District. My research study sought to answer the question: How do school leaders specifically principals perceive the micropolitical issues that arise when two or more public schools merge and have to share the same facility?

The importance of this topic was revealed in the fact that a substantial number of school systems across the country had closed schools due to low and decreasing enrollments. Many school systems including Baltimore, Cincinnati, Philadelphia and San Francisco closed schools between 2000 and 2010. School systems dealing with declining

enrollments are faced with the problem of how to meet the academic and facility related needs of students and teachers who attended schools that closed. This study looked at one option school systems embraced consolidating two or more schools into one facility.

During the time of this study there was no literature that specifically examined the perception of school principals regarding micropolitics in consolidated schools. The lack of literature in this area highlights the problem and points to the importance of further research on this topic.

The findings from this research are especially important given the fact that in 2012 several school systems including Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York and Washington D.C were considering closing more of its public schools as a result of low enrollment. The findings are also significant because the Mid Atlantic School District often is seen as a trendsetter for establishing best practices in urban education.

Conceptual Framework

Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame provided the conceptual framework for this study. The political frame characterizes organizations as living, screaming political arenas that host a complex web of individual and group interests. Five propositions summarize the perspective:

1. Organizations are coalitions of diverse individuals and interests groups.
2. There are enduring differences among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
3. Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources – who gets what.
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences make conflict central to organizational dynamics and underline power as the most important asset.

5. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders.

According to Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame issues revolving around scarce resources and enduring differences result in conflict and power struggles in organizations that ultimately have the potential to magnify and produce micropolitical activity.

Research Methods

My findings are based on data I obtained from conducting a multi –case study that focused on seven public school principals in an urban city in a Mid-Atlantic region. I was able to collect data primarily from interviewing the principals and obtaining their responses to questions related to the micropolitical issues that may or may not have occurred in their schools. The methodology for analyzing the collected data utilized two strategies: (a) a within – case analysis of each principals perception of the micropolitical issues in his/her school, and (b) a cross case analysis of the .perception of the micropolitical issues that all of the principals experienced.

Setting of the Study

In 2007 the Mid-Atlantic School District operated 147 school buildings. A dramatic decline in student enrollment between 2000 and 2007 forced the school district to close 23 schools at the end of the 2007 – 2008 school year. Sixteen of the closed schools were combined in 2008 to create Pre-K–8th grade centers. The closing of multiple schools outraged parents, teachers and politicians. Some of the parents and community leaders viewed the closings as an attempt by the cities elite and increasing number of White residents to take over the city and force African Americans out.

Tensions were already high in the District during the period of school closings and consolidation because the new superintendent had fired hundreds of employees including central office staff, teachers and principals. The consolidated schools varied in student populations, demographics, location and the composition of the staffs.

Summary of Findings

Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame was used to establish the conceptual framework for this study. The political frame assumes that in organizations conflict, resentment, tension and other attributes associated with micropolitics will result from enduring differences among coalitions and power struggles over scarce resources. Each of the five propositions associated with Bolman and Deal's political frame were present throughout the data. I will present a summary of findings as they relate to the micropolitical issues that stemmed from the five areas presented in Bolman and Deal's political frame.

Enduring differences and coalitions. Five of the principals interviewed in this study perceived some form of micropolitical issue associated with the fact that the consolidation effort resulted in the merger of diverse groups or coalitions into the same building. In most cases micropolitical issues arose when students from different neighborhoods with conflicting views and enduring differences had to share the same building. The student coalitions fought over power, turf and who would establish the standards or student value systems within the school. Micropolitical issues revolving around conflict and power arose in some form in all of the consolidated schools that received students from feuding neighborhoods.

Only two principals in this study perceived micropolitical issues that occurred because of coalitional activity involving teachers with different values and enduring differences. In both cases the teachers formed coalitions based on their shared belief systems. In one school the teachers shared beliefs stemmed from the fact that they did not want middle school students in their building. The teachers philosophically did not believe that elementary school students should be in the same building with older middle school pupils. The teachers did not want to work with the older students and refused to adjust the manner in which they delivered instruction to meet the needs of young teens. This resulted in conflicts between other teachers that supported the Pre-K- 8th grade model and the principal.

In the other case teachers from schools with dramatically different cultures had to merge to form one unit. One school was in the process of improving while the other school was viewed by many as the worst elementary campus in the system. The two staffs formed coalitions based on original school site. Teachers from the failing school stuck together while teachers from the improving school formed their own groups. The fact that both groups were evenly distributed in the building resulted in ongoing fights, tension and conflict for the duration of the school year. Both groups resented the presence of the other group in the building. The failing school group felt like they were mistreated as it related to the distribution of resources and their treatment from the principal. The improving school coalition felt like the staff from the failing school would negate their progress.

The principals from schools that did not have feuding student bodies and faculties that were not composed of teachers with diverse philosophies and school goals did not

perceive or experience any micropolitical issues related to coalitional differences. In most of these cases the consolidated schools were mainly comprised of students from one building or they had merging student bodies that did not have feuding histories. The experience and leadership styles of a few of the principals prevented micropolitical issues that resulted from coalitional activity from becoming a long-term problem. Two of the principals were very effective at implementing team-building strategies that united the students and staffs. Micropolitical issues stemming from coalitional activities only existed in two of the seven schools for the entire school year. Most of the principals were able to eliminate coalitional conflicts quickly.

As evidenced above conflicts erupted in schools that had coalitions with enduring differences. Schools that did not have coalitions with enduring differences did not experience any conflicts. Table 5 below compares the effects of enduring differences and coalitions in two of the principal’s schools interviewed for this study.

Table 5: Effects of Enduring Differences / Coalitions in Frank and Angela’s Schools

Table?	Coalitions	Enduring Differences	Conflict
Principal Frank			
Students	No	No	No
Staff	No	No	No
Principal Angela			
Students	Yes	Yes	Yes
Staff	Yes	Yes	Yes

As seen in Table 5, coalitional activity combined with enduring differences resulted in conflict. When staffs did not have enduring differences or form coalitions a more positive climate resulted in those buildings.

Coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups. One of the general premises informing this study was that conflict and micropolitical issues would arise when two school staffs and student bodies merged to become one. The assumption was that when two schools merged the staff and students would inherently have enduring differences also varying interests and that conflicts would automatically occur. I assumed that when the schools merged there would be an even mixture of students and staff from both schools which would be a catalyst for micropolitical activity.

In three of the studied schools the composition of the faculty and student body did not reflect a true fifty percent merger. In three of the schools the consolidation effort resulted in staffs that consisted primarily of brand new teachers. Principals' Kam, MJ and Frank opened their consolidated schools with brand new staffs. Although each member of the staff was unique individually they shared the same common goals as teachers. In most cases the new teachers spent their first year adjusting to their new schools, becoming more acclimated with their role as teachers and getting use to the students in their classes. In the schools that had staffs that were composed of majority new teachers, adults formed groups based on age, race, shared backgrounds and grade and subjects taught. Based on the perception of these three principals conflict, tension and some of the other attributes associated with micropolitics did not occur because as new teachers the staff did not focus on issues involving decision making or the allocation of resources. The new

teachers were also more apt to adhere to the principal's philosophy and vision and did not question any of the decisions made by the administration.

In stark contrast, two of the consolidated schools were comprised of seasoned teachers with strong opinions and educational philosophies on how a school should function and be run. This resulted in enduring differences among staff members that erupted into micropolitical issues. These two schools also had very seasoned staffs or faculties that were composed of an almost even share of teachers from the both the sending and receiving schools. Schools that had all new teachers or staffs that were comprised mainly of either the sending or receiving schools experienced less conflict and drama.

The data above suggests that fewer micropolitical issues revolving around coalitions and diverse groups occurred in the consolidated schools that were comprised of new teachers. New teachers are primarily focused on adjusting to their professions and had yet to acquire an educational philosophy that would result in internal school conflicts. The two principals that perceived negative micropolitical activity because of having seasoned staffs had to remove or voiced their desire to terminate some of the more experienced members of their faculties in order to improve the overall climate in their buildings.

Allocation of scarce resources. Bolman and Deal's (2003) framework suggested that the manner in which scarce resources are allocated in organizations is the focal point of most decision making and the catalyst for most conflicts. Only one principal interviewed for this study attributed any micropolitical activity related to the allocation of scarce resources. Six of the principals interviewed stated that they received so many

resources from central office that supplies and materials never became issues in their buildings. In most cases teachers had all of the academic resources that they needed so conflict revolving around the distribution of resources never occurred. School based resources were abundant and not scarce so the issues discussed in Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame never evolved.

In one case, conflicts did erupt over the allocation of human resources specifically the deployment of certain staff members to one particular school. Parental outrage and concerns regarding the consolidation process at Principal Max's school led to conflicts, bargaining, negotiation and debate. In an effort to appease parents central office staff changed their initial budgetary allocations and sent additional staff to principal Max's school to quell concerns from parents regarding safety and the overall quality of instruction. In this case central office staff decided to send scarce resources (school personnel) to Principal Max's school even though it resulted in a shortage of staff at other schools in the system. Several schools in the district opened with teaching vacancies for the 2008-2009 school year.

The findings above suggest that micropolitical issues related to the allocation of scarce resources did not occur in six of the seven schools studied because according to the principals interviewed the schools had an abundance of material resources. Central office supplied all of the schools with substantial resources which virtually eliminated any tension between teachers regarding supplies. Principals were also able to eliminate the normal issues associated with distributing scarce school resources to staff. The consolidation process allowed the teachers to have all of the supplies that they needed.

Principal Angela was the only school leader who described having micropolitical issues related to the allocation of scarce resources. In Principal Angela's building, the sending school staff felt unwanted and mistreated. The staff from the sending school alleged that the principal allocated the best classrooms, student schedules and supplies to the teachers from the receiving school. In this case classroom space and student schedules were the scarce resource and teachers from the sending school felt slighted. The teachers from the receiving school had worked in the building before the consolidation and had a better relationship with the principal. Tensions related to the allocation of resources disrupted Angela's building for the entire school year. Although all of the merged schools received more resources than other schools in the system that were not part of the consolidation the perception of the principal and members of the staff in Angela's building was that the school was slighted by central office as it related to the allocation of resources.

This finding indicates that central office was able to eliminate the conflict and other micropolitical issues associated with the allocation of scarce resources by providing an overwhelming amount of human and material resources to the schools. By creating an environment where resources were not scarce conflict and tension normally associated with the distribution of materials were virtually eliminated in the schools. During the interviews all of the principals except Angela stated that they had more than enough supplies. Angela was the only principal that voiced concerns regarding the allocation of resources in her building.

Conflict and power. Conflict and power are central features of Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame. According to Bolman and Deal, most conflicts in

organizations stem from issues revolving around enduring differences and the scarcity of resources. Although a few of the principals experienced conflict and power struggles related to enduring differences and the allocation of scarce resources, most of the principals identified other variables when describing their biggest problems associated with micropolitical challenges.

All seven of the principals interviewed in this study perceived student discipline to be a challenge at some point during the consolidation process. Although, in some cases the problems associated with discipline were minor every principal stated that discipline was a challenge they had to deal with. Five of the seven principal's interviewed attributed the problems they faced with discipline as a direct result of the school mergers. In most cases the principals stated that student quarrels and power struggles over turf and hierarchy erupted during the first few weeks of school. Student tensions that resulted over turf and hierarchy issues were eliminated quickly in all of the schools except Angela's. Turf battles occurred in Angela's building for most of the year due to the almost even mixture of students from feuding neighborhoods in her building.

In Max's case student discipline issues were the source of a substantial amount of conflict in her building. The school was so out of control Max had to make improving the climate the primary goal of the school during the first year of consolidation. Parents, students and staff initially opposed Max's appointment as the principal of the school so conflict erupted from the first day she walked into the building. Max perceived the discipline issues in her school to be related directly to the consolidation process.

Rick attributed the increased level of discipline related issues in his building to the merger of his elementary complex with a middle school. The staff members from the

elementary school had never worked with older students and had never witnessed such extreme acts of violence and vandalism. The middle school students cut class, cursed at teachers, and fought daily. Based on Rick's perception the acquisition of middle school students caused total chaos in his building. The fact that the majority of the staff were elementary school teachers with no experience with middle school students enhanced their negative perceptions

Conflict related to discipline and student behavior seemed to be the most prevalent micropolitical challenge that occurred in each of the principal's schools. Each one of the principals interviewed stated that conflict related to discipline occurred in their buildings at some point. Five of the principals interviewed stated that some of the discipline issues in their building were a direct result of the consolidation process. Two of the principals interviewed stated that the discipline issues in their buildings were typical and that the consolidation effort was not a contributing factor. The two principals that did not blame their discipline issues on the consolidation effort had the most experience with middle school students and had both worked with extremely disruptive older students when they were assistant principals.

Three of the principals interviewed perceived power struggles and issues related to the implementation of their instructional vision as a major source of contention and conflict in their buildings. Principals Kam, Rick, and Renee perceived internal tension and resentment from their staffs related to the implementation of their instructional visions. Some of the members of Kam's staff opposed her classroom visits and her monitoring of lesson plans. Rick stated that some members of his staff lacked initiative, and a few teachers on his faculty refused to adopt the teaching practices he recommended

for use with the older students in the school. One of Renee's biggest problems was her perception that some of the members of her staff did not share her instructional vision. All three of the principals attributed their issues with some of the members of their staff to normal factors associated with running a school. None of the principals attributed their staff-related issues to the consolidation process.

Two of the principals experienced major problems and conflicts related to the configuration of the consolidated schools. Principals Renee and Frank had serious issues with the Pre-K-8th grade configurations found in their buildings. Both principals believed that the Pre-K-8th grade configuration negatively impacted the quality of their instructional programs. Both principals believed that it was virtually impossible to provide effective instructional leadership in a school with so many different grade levels. The challenges and conflicts associated with providing instructional leadership to a Pre-K-8th grade facility was the only problem that Principal Renee attributed directly to the consolidation process.

In sum, contrary to Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame enduring differences and power struggles related to scarce resources did not produce the biggest challenges to the principals of the consolidated schools. Issues revolving around student discipline were the most prevalent of all of the micropolitical issues identified by the principals. Every principal represented in the study faced some degree of conflict or micropolitical activity related to student discipline. In addition staff related resistance and tension related to principal instructional practices produced conflicts in some of the schools. Some of the principals reported staff resistance to the implementation of their school visions especially some of their instructional monitoring practices. Finally, one of

the most surprising findings was the negative feelings some of the principals had regarding the Pre-K-8th grade instructional model. Two of the principals reported that having so many grades in one school was counterproductive to quality instruction. One principal stated that the issues surrounding the Pre-K-8th grade configuration was the most difficult aspect of the consolidation process.

Decision-making process. One of the assumptions identified in Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame is that decisions and goals in organizations stem from bargaining, negotiation and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders. None of the principals interviewed during this study reported having to bargain, negotiate, or jockey to make decisions.

Four of the principals stated that the decision-making process in their buildings consisted of collaboration between staff members and school leadership. Using the collaboration process the principals solicited input from the school's stakeholders when decisions needed to be made. All four of the principals that utilized the collaborative decision-making process had staffs comprised mainly of new teachers.

Two of the principals seemed to have very distrusting natures and made a conscious decision not to involve their staffs in the decision-making process. Principal Renee had the decision-making bodies in place in her building but elected to make most decisions in isolation. Principal Rick had a very adversarial relationship with his staff and viewed most of the adults in his building as incompetent. Rick made all of the decisions in his building and did not involve the input of any staff members.

Although Angela stated that decision making in her building was a collaborative process, she acknowledged that most of the staff from the sending school did not trust

her. No one bargained or negotiated during the decision-making process but some of her decisions were met with silent resistance.

The only example given during the data collecting process of a decision being influenced by bargaining, negotiating, and jockeying occurred in Principal Max's school. The community including parents complained, negotiated and jockeyed for position to ensure that decisions were made in their favor. Central office appeased the parents and allocated additional resources to Max's school.

Some of the principals attributed the lack of conflict revolving around the decision making process to the presence of so many new staff members in their schools. New teachers were not as concerned about school policies and procedures because they were still trying to become acclimated to the teaching profession. Two of the principals attributed the lack of teacher passion toward the decision making process as a reflection of teacher apathy and lack of concern. Four of the principals suggested that the overwhelming number of resources in their buildings eliminated staff related tensions and stress surrounding the decision making process. A few of the principals attributed the lack of negotiation and bargaining surrounding the decision making process to central offices involvement in daily school activities. Central office played a major role in how the consolidated schools would be run so most of the decisions were made before school even opened for teachers. Most of the decisions made in the schools were at the most basic levels. These included basic decisions over field trips and other normal school activities.

In sum, principals were able to avoid bargaining, negotiating and jockeying surrounding the decision making process as a result of having so many new teachers in

their schools. The abundance of school resources and central offices involvement in daily school affairs also played a role in the lack of tension surrounding the decision-making process. A few of the principals attributed the lack of any need to engage in bargaining, negotiating and jockeying during the decision-making process to the apathetic behavior of their staffs.

Conclusions

I drew five primary conclusions from the data revealed in this study. I outline these conclusions below.

Conclusion 1: *Micropolitical activity related to coalitions did not develop in most of the schools as a result of enduring differences and interests among staff members.*

With the notable exceptions of Principal Angela and Principal Rick's schools a substantial number of the consolidated schools were composed of new teachers or staff member not affiliated with the sending or receiving schools. As a result coalitions stemming around enduring differences never developed in most of the consolidated buildings. New teachers had more idealistic philosophies toward education and focused more on becoming acclimated to their new professions. New teachers and staff members not affiliated with either the sending or receiving schools were less likely to form coalitions based on past experiences or conflicts.

Conclusion 2: *The allocation of scarce resources did not produce major conflicts in most of the school buildings.*

With the notable exception of Principal Angela's school, central office provided an overwhelming amount of resources to the consolidated schools. The vast amount of resources eliminated tension and conflict related to the distribution of resources. The fact

that most of the schools were comprised of a substantial number of new teachers the faculty had no real reference point to compare and contrast the number of resources they received. Central office created an environment in most of the schools where resources were not scarce.

Conclusion 3: *Student discipline was the most prevalent issue or challenge faced by the principals leading consolidated schools.*

The most prevalent challenges the principals interviewed during this study faced were associated with student discipline. All of the principals interviewed during this study faced some degree of challenge related to student discipline. The serious discipline-related issues dealt with student conflicts stemming from neighborhood feuds and power conflicts within the schools. One principal dealt with discipline issues regarding her appointment as the principal of the consolidated school. Another principal with elementary school experience was shocked by the behavior of the middle school students new to his building. Half of the principals attributed the discipline issues to the consolidation process, while the other half attributed the discipline issues as a typical part of life in an urban school. Only one principal expressed having discipline issues related to the consolidation effort for the duration of the school year.

The principals' perceptions of disciplinary-related issues in their buildings were most likely related to their personal biography, years of experience in the position and experience working with middle school students. The principals in the study with more experience easily resolved their initial consolidation-related discipline issues and did not attribute the other behavior problems experienced in their schools to the consolidation effort. Principals who were new to the profession, or new to working with middle school

students had more problems related to discipline. The female principals involved in the study and the participant that was not African-American voiced more concerns over discipline than their male and Black counterparts.

Conclusion 4: *The decision making process did not produce power struggles and conflicts resulting from staff members bargaining, negotiating and jockeying for position.*

A substantial number of principals involved in the study practiced a collaborative style of leadership as it related to decision making. The district requires each school to have a decision making body in each school that forces the principal to involve members of the staff in all major decisions. Most of the principals adhered to the district standard and willingly involved their staffs in the decision making process. Two of the principals openly defied district policy and made unilateral decisions in their building. One principal gave the illusion of involving her staff in the decision making process while the other principal boldly ran his school like a dictator. Both principals seemed to view their staffs with distrust and contempt.

The inclusive decision-making style adopted by most of the principals eliminated the need for negotiation, bargaining and jockeying among school stakeholders. The two principals that elected to make all of the decisions in their schools avoided bargaining, negotiating and jockeying regarding school-based decisions by eliminating everyone from the process.

A few of the principals attributed teacher apathy toward daily school matters and the abundance of school based resources as another contributing factor to the disappearance of stress and conflict related to the decision making process in their

schools. New teachers focused more on their classrooms and did not really care about issues outside of their immediate classroom environment.

The allocation of scarce resources usually creates conflict and tension in a school. Central office provided the schools with an abundance of resources and virtually eliminated any conflict related to supplies and materials. The fact that central office made most of the major decisions regarding how the consolidated schools would function also most likely eliminated power struggles related to the decision making process. Teachers are not as passionate when decisions surround basic school issues like student schedules and activities.

Conclusion 5: *The Pre-K-8th grade model was a source of major conflict for two of the principals interviewed during the study.*

One of the most surprising and unforeseen findings in this study were the micropolitical issues three of the principals attributed to the Pre-K-8th grade configuration found in the newly consolidated schools. Two of the principals stated that the Pre-K-8th grade configurations found in their building made it nearly impossible to provide quality instruction for the vast span of ages and grade levels served in their buildings. Two principals also cited planning and monitoring instruction for so many different grade levels as a major hardship. One principal who was adamant that the majority of problems in her school could not be attributed to the consolidation effort stated that the Pre-K-8th grade model was the biggest challenge she experienced with the merger.

One other principal stated that the Pre-K-8th grade model caused discipline issues and staff conflicts in his building. Having more than 10 grades in a building created a situation where monitoring instruction and planning effective academic activities could

become very difficult. All three of the principals that had problems with the Pre-K-8th grade model had previous leadership experience that focused on either elementary or secondary education.

Discussion of Findings in Light of Existing Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of school principals regarding the micropolitical issues associated with consolidating public schools in a city in the Mid-Atlantic region. Researchers have defined micropolitics in many different ways. Morley (2000) defined micropolitics as a subtext of organizational life in which conflicts, tensions, resentments, competing interests, and power imbalances influence everyday transactions in institutions. Iannaccone (1975) defined micropolitics as the interaction and political ideologies of social systems of teachers, administrators and pupils within school buildings. Smeed, Kimber, Millwater, Ehrich (2009) added that understanding micropolitics has become an important part of comprehending leadership and power relations within organizations schools in particular.

The findings in this study revealed the pervasiveness of micropolitical issues in schools. The principals interviewed during this study perceived conflict, tension, resentment and power struggles through the lens of authority and power as they led their students and staff members through the consolidation process. Each principal's perception of the micropolitical issues that happened in their schools was based on their unique background, years of experience and leadership style (Ghaleei & Mhajeran, 2008). The principals' perception of the micropolitical issues they faced daily also likely were influenced by the fact that all of the consolidated schools were located in urban areas. The job of the principal is more complex and difficult in urban settings (Murphy &

Datnow, 2003). One distinct difference between urban and suburban schools is the level and degree of disciplinary issues administrators have to deal with each day. Urban school principals often have to deal with problems and chaotic situations (Akbala, 1999).

Chaos related to student discipline issues presented all respondents with some degree of challenge. In alignment with Bowman and Deal's (2003) political frame students with enduring differences formed coalitions which resulted in major conflicts in the consolidated schools. From the perspective of a few principals in the study enduring differences also caused major conflicts with adults in the consolidated schools.

In the most notable case, teachers from two distinct staffs with opposite conflicting cultures merged to share one Pre-K-8th grade campus. One school was viewed as failing while the other school was seen as being in a state of improvement. Conflict and resentment arose from the start when teachers felt unwelcomed by the receiving staff and slighted by the principal regarding the allocation of resources. Similar outcomes occurred in a study conducted in the state of Washington where a high performing secondary school had to consolidate with a high school that was low performing (McBride, 2002). In that study teachers from the low performing school taunted the incoming staff and made it perfectly clear that they were not welcome.

The lack of conflict revolving around the allocation of resources was another major finding in this study. None of the principals perceived any major conflicts or micropolitical issues related to the manner in which resources were distributed in their buildings. This indirectly supports Bolman and Deals proposition that scarce resources result in power struggles and inevitably conflict. Generally the perennially scarce resources of schools situated in communities that have even scarcer resources for their

children provide the nutrients for micropolitics (Ball, 1997). In every case central office provided each school with an overwhelming amount of supplies and material resources which eliminated conflict and tension surrounding scarcity. The abundance of school-based resources eliminated a substantial amount of conflict, tension, and resentment that is sometimes associated with the decision making process.

The principals surveyed in this study seemed to utilize two distinct styles when they made decisions in their schools. Most of the principals employed a collaborative, inclusive decision-making style characterized by total involvement from school stakeholders. Two of the principals practiced a dictatorial unilateral decision-making style where decisions were made in isolation. Both styles seemed to be effective in preventing negative micropolitical consequences. None of the principals experienced situations where stakeholders had to bargain, negotiate or jockey to make or influence decisions.

Multiple researchers have explored the manner in which principals make decisions and influence their staffs (Blau, 1973; Cyert & March, 1963; Greenfield, 1984; Henig, 1999, Mangham, 1979; Mayes & Allen, 1977). Greenfield (1991) discovered that effective leadership by both the school principal and teachers relied heavily on moral sources of influence and a commitment to serve children dramatically affected the development of cooperative political relationships between the principal and teachers. Principals MJ and Kam attempted to run their building using a moralistic approach and as a result did not experience push back from teachers during the decision making process.

Another indirect finding that emerged in this study was the correlation between new teachers and the degree of micropolitical activity that occurred in the consolidated

schools. A few of the respondents had the opportunity to hand select their staffs for the consolidated schools. All of the principals that had the opportunity to utilize that option hired brand new teachers to staff their buildings. According to this study new teachers were more apt to agree with the principal's decisions and less likely to create school-based conflicts. This finding was similar to the outcomes found in a study on secondary principals conducted by Martin (2002). In that study, principals used micropolitical techniques to influence planning committees by the selection and recruitment of members. The study found that principals often hired new teachers to ensure the success of mandated reform models.

Recommendations for Further Research

With the growing number of charter schools and the exodus of many urban families with school-aged children into the suburbs discussions surrounding low enrollment and closing schools will continue. At the time of this study very little research existed on the consequences of decreased student enrollment in many of the countries urban areas and the underutilization of many public school buildings. At the time this dissertation was completed, I was unable to find any empirical research that focused specifically on the perspective of school principals regarding the micropolitics of merging two public schools into one facility. Because of the lack of research surrounding this topic the possibilities for future studies are endless. Future research can be conducted on the effect merging schools has on student achievement. Studies could be conducted on the effect various grade configurations have on instructional outcomes. The perception of the micropolitics of consolidating public schools could be gauged through the lens of teachers, students, parents, central office staff members and community stakeholders.

Future research should investigate the consolidation of public and charter schools. This area is a growing trend and popular in some urban regions. Studies should also explore shared facilities found in suburban and rural systems. This inquiry focused on the micropolitical perceptions of seven urban principals that led Pre-K – 8th grade campuses. The findings from this study were derived specifically from the principals' perception of various micropolitical issues that occurred in their buildings and did not focus on any other areas. The study did not gauge the overall effectiveness of the principals' leadership as it related to improving student achievement or managing their buildings. The study also did not explore the micropolitical issues that occur when high schools have to share the same building (McBride, 2002).

This research also could be furthered to better understand how a principal's micropolitical perceptions could influence leadership behaviors. Does the manner in which a principal perceives micropolitical events influence her/his style of leadership? Future studies could provide useful data regarding this topic.

Implications for Policy and Practice

A substantial number of recommendations regarding policy and practice can be garnered from this study. At the most basic level, several questions regarding the consequences of merging two public schools can be answered given the results of this study. For example, one question that has importance for policy is: Does consolidation constitute a successful remedy to address the issue of low enrollment in an urban school system? Given the fact that most of the principals interviewed in this study would hypothetically recommend school consolidation to districts facing low enrollment the answer to that question would be yes.

Several of the findings from this study reveal best practices that a school system could implement to ensure the success of consolidating schools.

- (1) ***Allow principals to hand pick their own staffs.*** Allowing principals to select their own teachers will most likely eliminate the possibility of having a substantial number of staff members from the sending and receiving schools. Based on the study schools composed with a substantial number of new teachers did not experience the negative micropolitical issues associated with schools with more seasoned staff members. New teachers do not bring baggage, negative past experiences, extensive educational philosophies into the school. Seasoned teachers are more likely to engage in coalitional negative behaviors.
- (2) ***Provide the consolidated schools with substantial human and material resources.*** As Bolman and Deal's (2003) theory proved, scarce resources result in conflict and power struggles. Supply the newly consolidated schools with an abundance of resources and you will prevent a substantial amount of problems
- (3) ***Create systems and processes that force principals to employ collaborative decision-making practices.*** When staff members are equally involved in the decision making process they are less likely to bargain, negotiate or jockey to make decisions. Conflict is less likely to occur when principals welcome staff input.
- (4) ***Consolidate schools that are the same type (two elementary schools, two middle schools, etc).*** The principals in the study who experienced the fewest

micropolitical issues still had concerns regarding this area. It is extremely difficult to provide quality instruction in a school with a large range of grade levels.

(5) ***Encourage principals to implement strategies that stimulate team building, consensus and unity.***

Encourage students to participate on sports teams, constantly remain visible, attempt to know students as individuals.

Implementing these practices will dramatically decrease the level of student related discipline issues that could possibly occur because of neighborhood feuds.

(6) ***Research the history of neighborhood rivalries and disagreements when making decisions about which schools to consolidate.***

Student discipline issues and violence related to neighborhood rivalries presented micropolitical challenges for all of the principals involved in the study. School leaders should consider this when decisions regarding consolidation are made. Only strong principals with experience working with violent, disruptive students should be appointed to work in consolidated schools with the potential of violence stemming from feuding pupils.

Given the nature of school leadership, some issues and problems experienced in the consolidated schools have to be remedied by strong leadership. Student discipline, positive teacher relationships, strong parental involvement all are predicated by the action of the principal and the other staff members in the building. Principals in the study that perceived the least amount of negative micropolitical issues took ownership for the climate and general events that occurred in their buildings.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on the perspective of seven principals in an urban school setting. The sample group represented a variety in gender but did not capture a vast difference in race. Only one principal was not African American. The school sites were also limited to Pre-K– 8th grade centers. This was positive because it allowed me to interview principals that worked with students between the ages of three and fifteen. It was a limitation because the study did not capture the unique micropolitical events that may occur in high schools.

This study was conducted using principals employed by a Mid-Atlantic school district. As a result the dynamics associated with urban school systems may be magnified or possibly decreased. More than 40% of students in the Mid-Atlantic school district attended charter schools at the time of this study. This level of enrollment resulted in the proliferation of schools in a relatively small area. The abundance of charter schools is also a cause of the low enrollment rates associated with many of the public schools in the Mid-Atlantic school district.

The district is also known for its very high turnover rate for principals when compared to other school districts. This frankly makes it easier to obtain employment as a principal in this Mid-Atlantic school district. Some of the principals interviewed in this study had less than 2 years of leadership experience before they were hired as principals. Some school systems require applicants to spend at least five years in the assistant principal position before they can apply for the principalship. The Mid Atlantic school district does not mandate that from its principal applicants.

The time spent conducting this study also presented a viable limitation. The leadership process never ends and the questions posed to the principals for the most part captured one year in their role as the leader of the particular schools. Some of the principals' micropolitical challenges may have been prevented if they had more experience or skill dealing with adverse situations. The interview results may have been different if some of the principals had more experience.

In some cases principals are also trained to present themselves and the school's they serve in the most positive light. Some of the principals may have responded in a manner that ensured that the school was viewed in a positive manner. It's easier to believe negative information presented during an interview from a principal because in most cases administrators do not benefit from sharing negativity.

As an employee of the district, and a principal of a consolidated school, my participation in this study provided limitations and positive results for the study. The limitations included my personal bias toward the topic, which I addressed in detail in chapter three. My lack of extensive experience as a researcher also posed possible limitations to the study. My insider status helped the study because it was easier for me to access the principals and they may have been more open and honest with me because we shared the same profession.

Researcher's Personal Voice – Micropolitics of Consolidation

Having personally led five different variations of merged schools I have a unique perspective on the micropolitics of consolidation and specifically the findings that evolved from this study. I will provide my personal insight on all five of the conclusions derived from this study.

Conclusion 1: *Micropolitical activity related to coalitions did not develop in most of the schools as a result of enduring differences and interests among staff members.*

In my past experiences with consolidation some degree of micropolitical issues did develop between staff members from the merging schools during the initial stages of the union. In most cases you had disgruntled employees that did not want to leave their former schools to work in a new building and work for a new administration. The problem seemed to be magnified when the sending school staff came from a low performing school with a history of poor leadership.

In the most memorable case my middle school consolidated with another area middle school that was probably the school system's most disruptive, chaotic and low performing school during the previous school year. The school was so out of control that a team of retired principals had to be sent in during the month of March to finish out the school year for the current administration. The administration was not released in March the powers that be just did not feel confident in the current administration's ability to finish the year without any major issues. The principal remained in the building while the group of retired administrators ran the building for him until the end of the school year.

The school had several major issues during the course of the year and received some negative media attention. I'm assuming that central office did not want to have any more negative news stories stemming from the school.

Similar to Principal Angela's situation the staff from the other middle school was disgruntled and was forced to merge with a relatively stable staff. The two sides quarreled initially because the staff from the sending school felt mistreated by the teachers and the principal. The sending school staff basically felt like they lost their

identity and was forced to assume the culture and practices of the receiving school. Things subsided after the first few months as the sending school staff became more familiar with the receiving school's culture. By the mid-point of the school year the enduring differences between the two staffs were not as visible to the administration. I'm sure they still existed for some time but staff members are sometimes extremely effective at keeping teacher issues away from the principal. I do know that disgruntled employees from the sending school started to associate with the disgruntled employees from the receiving school and the staff began to operate and function as one. Enduring differences continued but they were not major and not a direct result of the consolidation effort. I have worked in multiple schools during my career and all of them have had some form of micropolitical coalitional activity. This type of activity in a school is not always negative.

As I gained more experience I recognized the role I played in the initial micropolitical issues I experienced with the consolidation process as it related coalitions and enduring differences. During the consolidation effort described above I did not effectively create a situation where the two schools initially viewed themselves as one body. I initially addressed the staff and sending school students as "the students /staff from school A." By doing so I basically created division from the start which may have permeated down to the teaching staff. My future consolidation experiences were handled in a more effective manner as I ensured that I started the school year by addressing all of the school stakeholders as one and creating structures and processes that did not alienate the new group coming into the building.

In this study I think that the principal's did not perceive as many micropolitical issues associated with staff differences due to the number of new teachers and the

relatively low number of staff members. Most of the studied schools had fewer than 30 teachers. Staff issues are always more difficult to deal with when you have more teachers on the staff. From my experience brand new teachers do not create as many conflicts and other micropolitical issues in a school. Most micropolitical teacher issues normally begin with a disgruntled seasoned employee or an over zealous union representative eager to initiate conflict in a building to take the focus off of instructional related matters.

Conclusion 2: *The allocation of scarce resources did not produce major conflicts in most of the schools.*

From my experience the allocation of scarce resources has never been a major source of micropolitical issues in the schools I have led. I have worked in two urban systems and in both cases it's just a general assumption among the staff and administration that school based resources are limited. School stake holders normally do not have conflicts around resources because resources are for the most part scarce. There is no need to argue and debate over something you do not have and in most cases won't receive. The allocation of scarce resources has never been a major source of micropolitical issues in any of the consolidated schools I worked in.

In this study central offices decision to supply the consolidated schools with extra resources did prevent a lot of conflict. Teachers felt good about working in a school with extra resources. In most cases parents were happy to send their kids to schools with additional staff members. In general people associated with the consolidated schools felt like they had more than what the other public schools in the city had. I think that it was a great form of symbolic leadership from the Chancellor to give the consolidated schools

an overwhelming amount of resources. As a result of the abundance of resources staff morale was probably higher in the consolidated schools.

Conclusion 3: *Student discipline was the most prevalent issue or challenge faced by the principals leading consolidated schools.*

Most teachers and principals in urban schools would say that student discipline or inappropriate behavior is the most difficult challenge they face. I think that the consolidated school principals in this study were just reflecting part of the inner city school experience. From my experience effectively dealing with discipline is a skill that a substantial number of principals do not possess. When I became an assistant principal one of the primary requirements for the position was the applicant's ability to effectively handle discipline. When I was interviewed to become an assistant principal more than 50% of the questions I had to respond to dealt with disciplinary issues. Times have changed and despite the need for strong leadership in the area of discipline principals are geared more toward instructional leadership. Instructional leadership is important but principals in rough urban schools need to also have strong disciplinary skills if they expect to keep their jobs. I have witnessed many principals in the Mid Atlantic school district lose their positions as a direct result of their inability to effectively handle discipline. One of the reasons that I lasted so long in this district as a principal is my ability to effectively deal with disruptive students. In this study I would attribute a substantial amount of the problems the principals faced with inappropriate behavior to ineffective school wide disciplinary practices and poor leadership in this area from the principals.

From my past experience as a principal I have observed that the students that attended the schools that I have led had the potential to become extremely disruptive when given the opportunity. Given that situation principals that work in urban schools in high poverty, high crime areas have to be experts in the area of handling discipline. Some of the principals in this study had no experience working in schools with histories of severe discipline problems. Their lack of experience resulted in some of the micropolitical issues they faced in their effort to lead a consolidated school.

To be effective principals have to establish the tone for how discipline will be handled in their schools. Consequences for inappropriate behavior must be consistent and students must know that the adults are in charge. Visibility is key and students must know that you care about them but in the same instance understand that you won't tolerate outrageous behavior. Principals must also model some form of strength and support teachers as it relates to student and teacher issues. Hiring principals and teachers that are not equipped to deal with discipline is a catalyst for potential serious micropolitical issues.

One year my school consolidated with the 9th grade component of a high school that was being re-built. During the previous year the high school had major gang fights and more than 30 cases of arson. When the 9th grade (300 students) consolidated with my middle school (400 students) I was forced to re-hire most of the returning 9th grade staff. A substantial number of the teachers in the building had major problems with classroom management. Students would behave fine in the general areas but some could not resist disrupting a class run by an extremely weak teacher. In an effort to correct the situation I conducted classroom observations and implemented the initial procedures to have the

extremely weak teachers removed. By doing so the weak teachers formed a coalition and called the local newspaper with fabricated information in an effort to save their jobs. The teacher's actions resulted in major tension and conflict in the building. I actually assumed that I might be terminated because the school was portrayed in a negative light by the press. It's a known fact among principals in the Mid Atlantic school district to keep your school's business away from the grip of the media. Principals with negative media coverage have been fired.

Things eventually settled down and I was successful in my quest to have certain staff members from the sending school removed. Things ran smoothly for the most part during the next 3 years because I was able to remove those ineffective staff members from the building.

The consolidation effort produced disciplinary situations in the Prek-8th grade schools that were traditionally more common in the middle and high schools. Most urban secondary school principals are use to dealing with issues like students from feuding neighborhoods and increased acts of vandalism. School leaders considering consolidation should make sure that they hire strong disciplinarians if they merge schools in high poverty, high crime neighborhoods.

Conclusion 4: *The decision making process did not produce power struggles and conflicts resulting from staff members bargaining, negotiating and jockeying for position.*

Based on my experience with consolidated schools the consolidation process did not normally produce situations where staff members had to bargain, negotiate or jockey to make school based decisions. Like most school systems the district has effectively created structures and processes that each school is mandated to follow to ensure that

teachers and other school based stakeholders are involved in some degree with the majority of school based decisions. In most cases the principal makes the final decision but the information has to be shared with the staff.

Realistically most of the schools are so small in the Mid Atlantic school district that school based decisions can be discussed and resolved during general staff meetings. Certain structures like the LSRT (Local School Restructuring Team) are more useful in large schools with 1,000 or more students. It would be difficult to involve 100 or more teachers in every major decision made in a school. In my case I have less than 30 teachers and only 3 or 4 of them really care about the decision making processes in the school. I normally invite the entire staff to (LSRT) type meetings. Normally only 3 or 4 people show up and we take it from there. I ensure that I give the entire staff the opportunity to be involved in almost every aspect of running the school. I agree with Principal MJ its best to have an inclusive spirit when running a school.

Sometimes principals avoid involving school stakeholders in the decision making process when they know that they implement unfair policies and practices. When the majority of the staff dislikes the principal that normally means that the principal has major room for self improvement. Blaming teachers, parents and students for all of a school's problems is normally a technique used by ineffective principals to take the focus away from their own personal short comings.

Conclusion 5: *The Pre-K – 8th grade model was a source of major conflict for two of the principals interviewed during this study.*

I spent four years as the principal of a prek – 8th grade school in the Mid Atlantic school district. I'm in full agreement with some of the principals in this study. Running a

school with 10 grades is extremely difficult especially if you're truly trying to provide quality instruction in your building. In this study two of the more instructionally focused principals had a major issue with the preK – 8th grade model. In one case the principal is totally against having elementary and middle school students in the same building. What stands out most to me in this finding is the fact that school leaders need to be more adept at selecting principals to run schools that they agree with philosophically. Every aspect of the school should be discussed with the principal before they are offered the position. Principals that have a pre disposition against working in a certain type of school should not be forced to work in a building.

Based on my vast experience working in consolidated schools I would have to personally recommend the option to school leaders charged with finding a remedy to declining enrollments. Although the consolidation process is problematic it's no different than any of the other serious issues urban educators often have to face. These include budget cuts, major facility issues and the instructional accountability mandates associated with NCLB. In all of my experiences with consolidation things improved daily after the initial merger. In every case consolidation was no longer an issue after the first year.

Closing Remarks

Many urban districts are considering consolidating schools as a remedy to address low enrollment and underutilized school buildings. This study was one of the first attempts by a researcher to capture the micropolitical activities that occurred in school buildings when facilities had to combine to become one.

The methodology associated with this study allowed me to gain insight into the micropolitical issues that occurred in seven public schools in the Mid Atlantic School

District. Each school leader interviewed worked in a unique school setting that resulted in a different set of micropolitical circumstances for each facility. Combining two distinct physical plants caused chaos in a few of the schools studied. In contrast, some of the principals did not report any unique negative repercussions related to the consolidation effort and loved their new school leadership experiences.

The schools that flourished after being consolidated were run by strong leaders who supported their teachers, loved their students and took ownership of both the positive and negative events that occurred in their schools. If nothing more these findings can provide a possible blue print for school systems considering closing and consolidating schools. Much can be learned from the brave principals that participated in this study who opened the doors to their buildings and the way in which they perceived the micropolitics of consolidation.

I offer my deepest thanks and appreciation for all of the principals that allowed me to enter their schools to conduct my research.

Appendices
Appendix A: Interview Questions

Introductory Questions

- 1) How long have you been a principal?
- 2) What position did you hold prior to becoming a principal?
- 3) How long have you been the principal of this school?
 - a. Have you ever been a assistant principal or principal in another school district?
 - b. Have you ever been the principal of a standalone elementary or middle school?
 - c. Have you ever been the principal of a co-located school or two schools sharing the same building?
 - d. Were you the principal of one of the co-located schools before the two schools merged?

Guiding Questions

1. How would you describe the context of your school?
 - a. Staff
 - b. Students
 - c. Parents
 - d. Resources
2. Take me through a typical day as the principal of your school.
 - a. Principals' normal routine
 - b. Issues experienced during a typical day

- c. Typical interaction with school staff/students/parents
3. How does your typical day at this school compare to your other school experiences?
 4. Describe the problems, conflicts, etc. that you have experienced as the principal of this school?
 5. Have you had any problems related to the allocations of school-based resources
 6. Did you have any power struggles in your building that stemmed from staff members' philosophical differences?
 7. How did teachers form groups or coalitions in your school? Did teachers form groups based on school origin or previous school assignment?
 8. What is the decision-making process in your building? How do staff members bargain, compete, and negotiate with other colleagues to get things done?
 9. Did the consolidation process produce any conflicts in your building?
 10. Has the degree of conflict, power struggles, etc. changed in response to the consolidation process?
 11. How has consolidation positively affected your building?
 12. Would you recommend consolidation for other school systems considering the process?

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