Consolidation in the Henry County Public School System

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ABSTRACT

In the early 1970s, Henry County, Virginia experienced rapid growth but by the late 1970s the population began to decline. In 1982, talks of building a new high school to consolidate two smaller high schools began with the school to be built on the North Carolina boarder. Between 1993 and 2003 approximately 10,523 jobs were lost in Henry County. At this time Henry County operated 20 public schools. In 2000, Dr. Sharon Dodson became the superintendent of Henry County. She was hired to make schools more efficient by using the best available spaces and closing facilities in need of structural repair. In 2001 the school board voted to close three schools but the board of supervisors refused necessary funding for consolidation. During the 2003–04 school year, the school board had no other choice but to revisit the idea of consolidation. In the fall of 2004, reconfiguration occurred which eliminated four facilities with a fifth building closing in the spring of 2008. Today, Henry County operates 14 schools.

This study examined the politics associated with the consolidation process in Henry County and closure of five facilities. The literature associated with consolidation concerning divisions and schools within a division was reviewed to provide context and better understanding of the consolidation process. Historical case study methods where employed to conduct the study. Data were collected from primary sources and interviews were handled qualitatively. Triangulation verification techniques were used to describe and verify consolidation events in Henry County. The findings express the issues and challenges faced and met by Henry County during consolidation. The events that led to school closings and some course offerings and programs are described. The findings indicate that consolidation can be successful even when some stakeholders reject the idea and plan of consolidation. Continued research in the field of consolidation could possibly benefit educational and community leaders considering reconfiguration within a school division. Additional research comparing the cost of operating a division before and after consolidation of schools may provide insights that educational and community members should consider before embarking on consolidation.

Dedication

This body of work is dedicated to my family who allowed and encouraged me to achieve my dream of becoming a doctor. To my mother, Naomi, who instilled in me the belief that anything is possible with hard work and determination. Without her I would never have attempted this endeavor. To my son, Kristopher, who provided love, and laughter thorough out this doctoral adventure. For the support and encouragement I received from my brother Junior and sister Rachel, I will forever be indebted.

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Introduction

Statement of the Problem

As people move away to find jobs to support their families, local school systems often experience economic hardships. Oftentimes rural school systems must consolidate in order to save money, offer students a wider variety of courses, and expand extracurricular activities (Fox, 1981; Nelson, 1985; Walberg, 1992). Between 1940 and 1980 in America, over 100,000 school divisions consolidated increasing average student population per division from 216 to 2,646 (Strang, 1987).

With the current national unemployment rate hovering around 9%, many Americans are willing to relocate to find employment even if the pay is less than previous earnings (Levitz, 2009). Just as in the 20th century, people have to leave the areas where they were born and raised in order to financially support a family. An economic effect on the region's school system is often felt when an outmigration of residents in an area contributes to a decreased population. The percentage of senior citizens rises and the birth rate declines when young families relocate seeking better job opportunities. In addition, agriculture changes have contributed to a decline in rural population since there are fewer agricultural jobs available forcing people to move to cities in search of work (Schwartzbeck, 2003). As rural communities continue losing residents, the pressure to consolidate will increase for the community schools (Haas, 1990).

When reading the research literature about school consolidation and costs, it appears that the results vary greatly on cost savings for school divisions (Andrews, Duncombe & Yinger, 2002; Duncombe & Yinger, 2005; Jacques, Brorsen, & Richter, 2000). Potential savings in administration and instructional costs may occur when migrating from a small division of 500 or fewer students to a larger division between 2,000 and 4,000 pupils (Andrews et al., 2002; Duncombe & Yinger, 2005). However, when a division with an enrollment of more than 6,000 students is considered diseconomies of scale may start to occur indicating that the division has become so large that an increase in per pupil cost may appear (Andrews et al., 2002).

A History of School Consolidation in America

Consolidation is the process of disbanding and restructuring two or more schools or school divisions into a new entity (Killeen & Sipple, 2000). Consolidation has been in the news since the 1800s when one room-schools with a single teacher were built within walking distance of the students. Consolidation became a way to save money, offering students a greater variety of choices for academic classes and extra-curricular activities. With the invention of the automobile along with federal and state monies being spent to build highways and pave roads, transporting students to a different school was no longer a major obstacle (Howley & Smith, 2000). In addition, consolidation of public school divisions and schools were spurred by the rise of industry in urban areas. During the industrial revolution period, it was believed that education could contribute to an optimal social order by organizing and operating schools similar to the operation and organization of industry (Orr, 1992). Small rural schools were judged to be inadequate while large urban schools were seen as economical and efficient (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2006). Consolidation was sold to communities on the basis of lower cost and/or more education for the tax dollar (Tholkes & Sederberg, 1990).

Consolidation has reduced the number of public schools and school divisions in America during the past century (Killeen & Sipple, 2000). Over 125,000 school divisions existed in the United States at the turn of the last century, but by 1975 those numbers had been reduced to slightly more than 16,000 school divisions. The average consolidation rate of 13% per year between 1939 and 1973 represented the greatest decline in school divisions in America's history (Killeen & Sipple, 2000). Between 1940 and 1990, school populations increased by 70% even though there was a reduction of 60% in school buildings and an 87% decrease in the number of school divisions (Walberg & Walberg, 1994). Small and rural schools were often under the pressure to consolidate due to economic conditions and political leverage from state governments (Peshkin, 1982). Consolidation appeared to be a remedy for rural and small neighborhood schools that found it nearly impossible to provide sufficient funding for educational programs. Divisions are usually funded on a per pupil basis but the cost of operating a school does not decline as the number of students decrease because buildings must still be maintained and staff must still be employed (Schwartzbeck, 2003). Declining enrollment serves as another reason to support consolidation (Nelson, 1985).

As communities lost their schools, communities often lost their identities, educational heritage, and traditions. Before the consolidation age began, the local school "was typically the key neighborhood institution binding neighbors and linking them to the larger social and cultural world around them" (Reynolds, 1999, p. 61). Natchigal (1982) stated, "The function of a rural school goes far beyond that of educating children; it is not only a piece of the local social structure, it is often the hub that holds the community together" (p.11). Community schools are the social and cultural hubs of the community (Benton, 1992; Lyson, 2002). The school often serves as the local community center for the region. Public meetings, voter polling, household and baby showers, birthday parties, social gatherings, funerals, and other functions oftentimes occur in the school building. The school building, in many communities, is the only facility large enough to host social events.

Local residents of the community support local athletic teams by attending ball games at that school. If the school has a winning athletic team, the community often supports the students/athletes even though they may not have a child participating. According to Pierson, the hardest animal to kill in Illinois is a school mascot (Enrollment Decline, 2002). The community identifies with the school mascot and finds it difficult to let go of when consolidation occurs. Peshkin (1978) observed, "Viable villages generally contain schools; dying and dead ones either lack them or do not have them for long. The capacity to maintain a school is a continuing indicator of a community's well-being" (p. 161). The effects of consolidation on a community can and will be felt for many years.

The History of Consolidation in Henry County

Prior to 1970, school enrollment in Henry County was growing at a rapid rate. The need to educate the growing population of students compelled the division to build Laurel Park School in 1970 (Wade, 1970). The division's school enrollment continued increasing until 1975 when the county reached its highest level of enrollment. After 1975, the division began facing a declining enrollment rate that continues today. Table 1 reflects the pattern of enrollment in Henry County from 1971 until the present. In an effort to compensate for the loss of revenue due to decreasing enrollment, the school division was forced to consider options for funding schools.

Consolidation became a discussion among politicians from both the school board and board of supervisors in the early 1980's (Wooding, 1984). In the spring of 1982, the Board of

Supervisors approved a $2 million dollar bond sale for the construction of a new school facility in the Ridgeway community. By summer, the members of the board of supervisors were split on support of the construction of a new school versus renovations of the existing schools; therefore, the project stalled (Wooding, January 18, 1985).

Table 1

Fall Enrollment Figures in Henry County

School year	Henry County fall enrollment
1970 – 1971[a]	12,296
1974 – 1975[b]	13,676
1979 – 1980[b]	11,634
1984 – 1985[b]	10,075
1989 – 1990[b]	9,096
1994 – 1995[b]	9,167
1999 – 2000[b]	8,807
2004 – 2005[c]	7,815
2009 – 2010[c]	7,515

Note.
[a]From "Attendance Show Increase in Henry County," *Martinsville Bulletin.* (1970, September 9).
[b]Henry County Public Schools Fall Membership Reports 1975-2001, Actual; 2002-2006 Projected.
[c]Virginia Department of Education: Fall Membership Report, Retrieved October 18, 2009 from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/enrollment/fall_membership/index.shtml

In January 1985, the Henry County School Board discovered that the $2 million State Literary Fund Loan, which had been previously supported by the board of supervisors three years earlier, was now available to the division. The original State Literary Fund Loan application had been granted for the construction of a new school in the Ridgeway community. The money had to be spent on the project specified in the loan application (Wooding, January 18, 1985). In order to secure the State Literary Fund Loan, the Henry County Public School Division commissioned Dr. G. I. Earthman to conduct a facilities study of the existing schools and on the two proposed properties where a new school facility could be constructed. The study concluded that the construction of a new school on the Magna Vista property would be more cost efficient

and provide students with a building that could address the demands of the modern education system rather than the renovation of the existing out dated facilities (Earthman, 1985).

The school board and board of supervisors haggled back and forth over the issue of building the new Ridgeway community school or renovating the existing schools. Once the State Literary Fund Loan was made available the two boards argued over the location of the new facility. Finally in 1986, the boards agreed on the location of the new school and the contract was awarded (Wooding, April 4, 1986). In 1988, Magna Vista High School opened its doors almost a decade after the idea of construction had begun (Brumble, 1988).

Between 1998 and 2000, Henry County experienced an estimated loss of 6,844 manufacturing jobs with the loss of textile industries and downsizing of some remaining industries (Brown, 2002). In November, 2001, VF Imagewear announced the closing of the plant in Henry County resulting in the loss of approximately 2,300 jobs and 1.6 million dollars in revenue for Henry County. A total of 10,523 jobs were lost in Henry County between September 1993 and July 2003 (Wray, 2003). Dr. Sharon Dodson (personal communication October 20, 2009), former superintendent of Henry County Public School System, stated that the loss of population due to the lack of jobs, meant the two newest schools were operating at about 50% capacity. It became apparent that in order to operate a more efficient and effective school system, some old outdated schools needed to be closed while others needed to be renovated to provide the students with equal opportunities to learn. In 2001, the school board requested that the superintendent review the reorganization studies of the past five years and formulate a plan for reorganizing and restructuring the schools (Henry County School Board, November 21, 2001).

The school board viewed job losses as an indication that consolidation would need to occur among the 20 schools operated within the county school system (Hairston, November 16, 2001). The Henry County Board of Supervisors denied $789,000, an advance from the 2002-03 school board's budget, for renovations to Bassett and Magna Vista High Schools which prevented the school board's plans to begin consolidation (Tracey, February 27, 2002). The board of supervisors wrote a letter reminding the school board that the board of supervisors had the power to allocate money on a month-to-month basis. The letter also included a statement that informed the school board that capital outlay projects must be put in the previously submitted budget for funding to occur. Without the funds to begin the renovations, the school board chose not to go forward with the reorganization plan (Tracey, February 27, 2002). In 2003, the board of

supervisors and school board bickered over which board would submit consolidation plans because of a decrease in the school board budget (Tracey, January 16, 2003). In the fall of 2004, the school board closed four schools: one elementary school, one middle school, and two high schools with an additional elementary school being closed in the fall of 2008 (Hairston, July 28, 2004). The consolidation adventure that this study examines began in the fall of 2004 in Henry County, Virginia.

Significance of Study

While school division consolidation in Virginia is rare, the consolidation of school facilities within a school division is becoming more frequent as localities experience a loss of population and finances. Data are needed to assist leaders in determining if consolidation of schools within the division is a viable means of improving education in the Commonwealth. The study conducted may provide information that will possibly help divisions in clarifying the potential political influences and outcomes before embarking on the consolidation journey and will augment the research on consolidation of school facilities within a division.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study conducted was to describe the events that lead to the merging of five schools and related issues pertaining to consolidation in Henry County during the past decade. The factors that led to the closing of schools in Henry County were identified and the effect politics played in the consolidation process were examined. Understanding these issues is important because the consolidation of schools will most likely continue to be a means school divisions will use to alleviate the effect of decreasing student enrollment and financing while maintaining a quality educational experience. Other divisions may gain insight into the consolidation of schools within a division process by reading the study.

The Research Question

The literature review speaks to the topic of consolidation. The research question that was addressed in the study conducted was: What factors influenced the decision to consolidate schools in Henry County, Virginia?

Definitions of Terms

1. Consolidation (often referred to as reorganization) is a term used when schools or school divisions are unified, reorganized, or merged (Bard et al., 2006). For the purpose of the study conducted consolidation was defined as the closing of schools within a single school division.
2. Per Pupil Cost is defined as the total expenditures (minus equipment, facilities acquisition and construction services costs, and debt service costs) divided by total student enrollment (Alexander & Salmon, 1995, p. 86).

Limitation

A limitation of this study is that by using a case study method the results may not be generalized to other school consolidation cases. A second limitation included the absence of information from some of the key players during the various stages of consolidation in Henry County. Some had passed away, one had moved away from the area, and several refused to participate in the study.

Delimitation

A delimitation of the study is that only one school division in the Commonwealth of Virginia was examined for data concerning consolidation of schools.

Organization of the Study

The study of the consolidation of Henry County Public Schools has been organized into four chapters with Chapter 1 being an introduction to the concept of consolidation. Chapter 2 contains a literature review of consolidation related research. The methodology of the study is discussed in Chapter 3. The fourth chapter includes the issues and facts surrounding consolidation in Henry County, the manner of disposal of closed buildings, summarization of the ongoing merger discussions between the Henry County School Board and the Martinsville City School Board, the conclusions drawn, and the suggestions for future research.

Summary

Consolidation is often viewed as a way to save money within a school division by closing school facilities (Fox, 1981; Nelson, 1985; Tholkes & Sederberg, 1990; Walberg, 1992). As people continue to move away from small rural areas, school budgets are affected which often leads to the topic of school consolidation (Haas, 1990). Some literature indicates smaller schools are educationally more productive than larger schools especially for poverty stricken and minority students (Cotton, 1996; Howley & Howley, 2006; Howley & Bickel, 2000). Consolidation began in the 1800s in America and continues today even though the student population has increased (Walberg & Walberg, 1994). Communities suffered when their schools were closed due to consolidation (Benton, 1992; Lyson, 2002; Natchigal, 1982; Peshkin, 1978; Reynolds, 1999).

Henry County faced consolidation in the 1980s due to declining enrollment and outdated school facilities (Brumble, 1988; Wooding, 1984; Wooding, April 4, 1986). Henry County began consolidation discussions again when plants and factories closed in the late 1990s (Brown, 2002; Wray, 2003). The school division commissioned studies to determine the best use of existing schools and to decide which buildings should be closed (Henry County School Board, November 21, 2001). In 2004, the first phase of consolidation began in Henry County with the final phase being completed in 2008–09 under Dodson (Hairston, July 28, 2004; Barto, 2008). Henry County is continuing to close school buildings during the 2010–11 school year (Henry County School Board, March 4, 2010; Winston, 2010).

Chapter 2
Review of Literature

Introduction

The literature review that follows provides background for the study of consolidation in Henry County through an examination of literature regarding consolidation of public schools and divisions. The review of literature begins with an examination of past school consolidation research. The second section explores school size followed by the effects of consolidation on student test scores. The fourth section reviews the cost effectiveness of consolidation on student achievement and potential financial gains or losses due to consolidation of public schools and/or school divisions. The fifth section reviews the cost of consolidation while the final section examines the economic effects on a community with the closing of a neighborhood school. It should be noted that some of the literature cited is biased because some sponsors and researchers support small rural schools and publish findings in journals that support those ideas.

Identifying the Relevant Information

The information reviewed came from various sources. The primary source was information found on the internet though the library at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and through Google. The terms consolidation of public schools, school consolidation, economies of scale, economies of size, consolidation cost, and student achievement were used in a variety of search engines to find resources on the World Wide Web. Another primary source was printed materials in the form of books, magazine and newspaper articles, school board meeting minutes, legal documents, reports and studies, and operational plans.

Examining Theoretical and Commentary Literature

Consolidation

Consolidation continues to be a topic of interest for politicians, school administrators, and rural communities when enrollment decreases and funding becomes questionable. Many rural school divisions across the United States are facing division consolidation or school closures due to financial constraints (Denison, 2011; McCown, 2011; School Consolidation Bill, 2011; Silk, 2011; Welker, 2011). Bard et al. (2006) found political forces and administrators of school

systems reporting that consolidation provided specialized teachers with more academic courses offered at an economic savings. When a community faces consolidation, the school board must not only consider the financial ramifications but also the consequences of consolidation on student achievement, participation in extracurricular activities, dropout rates, and on the community itself (Bard et al.). Nelson (1985) stated proponents of consolidation believe that curricular and financial advantages outweigh the negatives of school closings. For many years research was not conducted to determine the negative aspects of consolidation. The literature supported the notion that bigger schools provide a more quality education (Bailey, 2000; Bard et al.).

As more and more studies were conducted on school consolidation, the outcomes continued to be controversial (Benton, 1992; Cotton, 1996; Flanning, 1995; Monk & Haller, 1993; Self, 2001; Sell, Leistritz & Thompson, 1996). With the rise of educational accountability, many community and educational leaders have revisited the consolidation issue as a means of improving educational offerings, employing more qualified teachers, increasing student achievement, and enhancing the school economy (Chance & Cummins, 1998; Nelson, 1985). Some published studies question the economical savings that are supposed to occur due to consolidation (Walberg & Fowler, 1986; Young, 1994). The Rural School and Community Trust concluded:

> School consolidation produces less fiscal benefit and greater fiscal cost than it promises. While some costs, particularly administrative costs may decline in the short run, they are replaced by other expenditures, especially transportation and more specialized staff. The loss of a school also negatively affects the tax base and fiscal capacity of the division. These costs are often borne disproportionately by low-income and minority communities. (Bard et al., 2006, p. 40)

Bard et al. concluded any school division considering consolidation should conduct an investigation to gather all relevant data, such as enrollment projections, funding difficulties, community support, and specific student gains before embarking upon the consolidation process.

Oklahoma passed House Bill (H.B.) 1017 which provided encouragement and financial rewards for school divisions that incorporated consolidation as a reform strategy (Chance & Cummins, 1998). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight superintendents to identify successful strategies used by the rural superintendents whose

divisions went through voluntary consolidation as a result of H. B. 1017. In total there were nine superintendents; all but one participated in the study (Chance & Cummins). The methodology compared and contrasted the data that were collected from interviews of the superintendents involved in consolidation, newspaper articles, school board meeting minutes, consolidation plans, and feasibility studies conducted by the Oklahoma Department of Education. A pilot study, using a superintendent not included in the final study but who had gone through consolidation after the passage of H.B. 1017, was conducted to validate the interview questions (Chance & Cummins). The questions were also validated by higher education professors and practitioners who analyzed them for clarity and suitability based on the objectives of the study. Inter-and intra-rater reliability was established through repeated data analysis (Chance & Cummins).

Chance and Cummins's (1998) findings indicated seven successful and three unproductive strategies related to consolidation of rural public schools for administrators, teachers, support staff, students, board members, parents and communities. For administrators, teachers, and support staff, job security was the number one concern. When the consolidation of school divisions occurred, one of the superintendents retired or agreed to a different supervisory role in most cases. If there was no alternate administrative position agreed upon or available, the individual was offered an 80% compensation package (Chance & Cummins). The administrators were given contracts and job assignments early in the consolidation process so the administrators could focus on leading successful consolidation plans. In five of the divisions all of the teachers were rehired while in three divisions some teachers lost jobs but were provided 80% of a teacher's salary for one year even if employment was gained elsewhere. The superintendents interviewed stated that communication and just listening to teachers was extremely important in decreasing anxiety and stress related to consolidation. All support staff that were affected by the consolidation process were able to retain jobs (Chance & Cummins).

Students influenced the consolidation process in a positive manner by communicating to the community a sense of potential success due to a wider variety of academic opportunities and extra-curricular activities (Chance & Cummins, 1998). The superintendents involved students from the different divisions and provided the students an opportunity to get together through a huge array of activities and a voice in choosing the names of the schools, mascots, and other things.

The separate boards came together prior to introducing consolidation to agree upon the formation of the new board, seek input from persons previously involved in consolidation, and construct consolidation plans (Chance & Cummins, 1998). Chance and Cummins determined positive communication from the school board members lead to successful consolidation for all divisions involved in the voluntary consolidation process.

In order for parent and community stakeholders to be kept informed about the progress of consolidation, information was provided to them throughout the entire process (Chance & Cummins, 1998). The stakeholders were given factual and accurate information in a timely fashion which influenced feelings of wanting the very best for the students. The strategies that proved unproductive were: the feasibility studies by the Oklahoma Department of Education, some community meetings that were not well planned, and the indication of school sites that would be closed.

Chance and Cummins's (1998) study identified strategies that can lead to successful consolidation if implemented correctly. The goals of consolidation are to expand the academic offerings, extra-curricular activities, save monies, and provide schools that are more efficient in both finances and education supplied to the students. In making the decision to consolidate, the children should be the main focus.

In a related study using interactive key informant style interviews, Alsbury and Shaw (2005) examined the superintendent's point of view regarding the effects of division consolidation on the stakeholders which included staff, students, and the community based on interviews and surveys of superintendents where division consolidation had occurred. The purpose of the research was to gain insight regarding the effects of consolidation on the staff, students and community from the superintendents' perspectives, using their own words and perceptions of what had taken place. Alsbury and Shaw employed an interview guide with initial open-ended questions, follow-up questions, and a response checklist to facilitate interaction and to ensure each interview explored the same content area for each superintendent interviewed.

Alsbury and Shaw (2005) began by gathering information nationally from all public K–12 school divisions that consolidated, in states where records were kept, between 1994 and 2003. The key factor in the study was that the superintendent had to still be employed by the consolidated school division. Fourteen superintendents that were identified where contacted by phone and invited to participate in the study. Only nine superintendents from seven states

accepted the invitation to be interviewed regarding their perspectives of the effect of consolidation. A one hour interview with each superintendent was recorded and then transcribed. Two researchers analyzed and compared the themes to provide an assessment of interrater reliability. The limitation of the study is that the only view given is how the superintendent perceived the effect of consolidation on staff, students, and the community. Alsbury and Shaw reported that from the standpoint of the superintendent, the outcomes of consolidation were positive for the students, most staff, and the division, but negative for the communities that lost their schools. A summary of the superintendents' comments is provided in Table 2. The superintendents indicated that two or three years after consolidation the majority of the stakeholders viewed it as positive process which was beneficial for all students due to the increase in academics, extra-curricular activities, social opportunities, specialized teachers, and enhanced economics for the division.

Table 2

Superintendent Survey Consolidation Results

Positive results of consolidation	Negative results of consolidation
Positive impact on curriculum	A lack of representation when school boards were dissolved or change
Increased participation within academics and extra-curricular activities	Businesses and residents migrating from the area where a school was closed
A large variety of socioeconomic and racial diversity among students	A loss of administrative positions
A greater understanding of other students viewpoints	Superintendent turnover
Better services for special needs and gifted students	A fear from the parents their community values and identity would be marginalized
More support and counseling services for at risk students	A fear from the parents that their community values will become invisible, and loss of personal attention
Improved funding	
An increase in teachers who specialize in difficult academic subjects	
Flexible schedules	
School board reorganizing from two to one	
A higher quality of education for all students	

Expanding those stakeholders interviewed, Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel (2008) interviewed 25 people from a population of students, teachers, and administrators who participated in consolidation in four Arkansas school divisions. Two research questions were investigated: (a) How does school consolidation affect students, teachers, and administrators who move to a new school as a result of consolidation? (b) How does consolidation affect students, teachers, and administrators after consolidation has occurred? Act 60, which was enacted by Arkansas state legislation, required school divisions with 350 or less pupils to consolidate or merge with larger divisions (Nitta et al.). As a result of Act 60, 57 public school divisions in Arkansas were consolidated or merged. School divisions from all parts of Arkansas were sought to participate in the study but only four divisions agreed to take part. In order for a division to be included in the study: (a) students interviewed were students from a high school that had been closed, (b) there had to be a large number of students, teachers, and administrators who were part of the consolidation process, (c) the participants came from different geographic locations, and (d) participants represented racial and income diversity. Interview questions for students, teachers, and administrators were developed based on the existing literature that supported and opposed consolidation. Each interview was conducted on site in the four participating divisions during the spring of 2007. The findings of the Nitta et al. study cannot be applied to other regions of Arkansas where consolidation has occurred or will occur due to the limitations created by lack of participation by some school divisions and lack of randomization of the schools that took part in the study.

As a result of the literature review and study conducted, Nitta et al. (2008) identified three general themes: (a) those students moving to schools and those in receiving schools have different experiences, with those moving being much more affected; (b) adults and children are affected differently, with children being much more adaptable; and (c) some promising consolidation strategies to help alleviate problems of consolidation have begun to emerge. In particular, Nitta et al. found that students, teachers, and administrators who moved had a far more powerful experience than did students, teachers, and administrators at the receiving schools. Specifically, these students, teachers, and administrators felt more stress and anxiety in finding their place in the new school. It was clear from the interview results, that children were better able to cope with the transition from old to new and adapt than were the adults.

Three strategies were determined that could possibly lead to a more successful consolidation process (Nitta et al., 2008): (a) communicate in the form of newspaper articles, radio ads, and television to all stakeholders in both schools and divisions involved, (b) preserve the history of the school that is closing before the doors shut the final time, and (c) create a new identity which includes the name, mascot, and school colors for the receiving school. Nitta et al. concluded that both supporting and opposing factors of consolidation found in literature still held true in Arkansas.

School Size

Over 25 years ago, Butler and Monk (1985) reported that smaller schools were more efficient than larger schools for three reasons: (a) a small number of administrators are needed and teachers are more productive in rural divisions due to the population being more homogeneous than urban regions, (b) people tend to stay in rural areas making them more stable while the mobility rate for urban communities is greater creating less stability, and (c) there are fewer activities to interfere with education in the rural divisions than in the urban divisions. Some 10 years later, Cotton (1996) conducted a quantitative study on consolidation and found that smaller schools had greater advantages over larger schools in the following areas: achievement, attitudes toward school, social behavior problems, extracurricular participation, and feelings of belongingness, interpersonal relations, attendance, dropout rate, self-concept, and success in college among others. In a related study conducted earlier, Nachtigal (1982) reported that small schools were necessary due to location and had "strengths of smallness." Small schools allowed higher numbers of students to participate in extra-curricular activities and higher numbers of students to be enrolled in academic courses with more teacher attention due to a lower student/teacher ratio and closer student relationships to the local community. A more contemporary review of the school size literature conducted by Bard et al. (2006) concluded that eliminating small school divisions does not reduce cost, improve education, or provide equal opportunities for students from rural areas while students from high poverty areas tend to have greater academic achievement in small schools.

Another factor related to school size is that the rural school is typically the social and economical hub of the community (Langdon, 2000; Lawrence, Bingler, Diamond, Hill, Hoffman, Howley, Mitchell, Rudloph, & Washor, 2002; Lyson, 2002). Many social events are held at the

local school and often the school is the largest employer in a rural area (Langdon; Lawrence et al.; Lyson). However, the research findings have not been conclusive regarding the number of students that a public school division or school should have. Based on per pupil cost to operate a school system, the numbers range from a maximum of 4,000 to 5,000 students to a minimum enrollment of 750 pupils in a public school division (Imerman & Otto, 2003; Lawrence et al.). Economic studies of consolidation of smaller divisions into larger divisions do not indicate that a reduction of fiscal expenditures per pupil occurs with consolidation (Eyre & Finn, 2002; Hirsch, 1960; Jewell, 1989; Kennedy, Gentry, & Coyle, 1989; Reeves, 2004; Sher & Tompkins, 1977; Valencia, 1984). It has been reported that politicians feel that smaller schools cause larger schools to lose financial resources and often refer to small schools as inefficient (Bailey, 2000; Duncombe, Miner, & Ruggiero, 1994; Howley & Howley, 2006; Lawrence et al.).

When considering small schools, Lawrence et al., (2002) recommended that the total population of a school not be considered to determine smallness but use of enrollment per grade level. A school that contains kindergarten through third grade with 500 students would be larger at166 students per grade level than a K–5 school with 500 students at 83 students per grade level (Lawrence et al.).

In a review of literature by Bailey (2000) compared small and large schools using a series of research articles from the Center on Rural Affairs which indicated small schools were the safest, best, and most efficient way to educate America's youth. Part of the evidence considered by Bailey included the 1996-97 Report of the United States Department of Education Violence and Discipline Problems in U. S. Public Schools were statistics that compared small schools with less than 300 students and large schools with 1,000 or more students revealed that big schools have:

- 825% more violent crimes
- 270% more vandalism
- 378% more theft and larceny
- 394% more physical fights or attacks
- 3,200% more robberies
- 1,000% more weapons incidents (Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97, 1999)

Violent acts were found by Bailey (2000) to me more prevalent in larger schools than in smaller rural schools. Only 14% of larger schools were able to report minor or no discipline problems while 52% of small schools reported none or only minor discipline problems. Bailey concluded that small schools had fewer problems than larger schools with respect to tardiness, absenteeism, violence, student alcohol abuse, drug use, and tobacco violations because many discipline problems were detected and resolved before they occurred. The reasons for fewer problems reside with the fact that students who attended small schools felt connected and bonded to their community because everyone associated with the school including the principal knew their names. Bailey reported that the principal at Columbine High School which had an enrollment of 2,000 students did not know the two shooters names or anything about them prior to the shooting. In addition, Bailey discovered that smaller schools had higher graduation rates and more graduates entering post-secondary schools with a lower percentage of student dropouts than did larger schools which tended to have a lower quality school climate–a finding consistent with Cotton's (1996) conclusion that students feel a sense of belonging when attending a small school where most everyone knows their name and the faculty can identify and deter potential dropouts. Furthermore, Bailey indicated that small schools supported more parental and community involvement in the education of students.

In 23 different research studies examined by Bailey (2000), extracurricular activities were found to be more varied with greater participation in smaller schools. Academic success was often influenced by student participation in extracurricular activities. Students who took part in extracurricular activities tended to be stronger in academic areas, had better attendance, and lower dropout rates than those students who do not participate in extracurricular activities.

Many educational entities in large cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles are relying on research when determining to build new buildings that states smaller schools: (a) are safer; (b) have higher achievement scores; and (c) have more participation in extracurricular activities (Bailey, 2000). When building a new school is not an option, educational administrators in these large cities are creating schools within schools as a way of reducing school size and allowing more success for students. Bailey found no difference in academic achievement between larger and smaller schools in 14 of the 22 studies reviewed while 8 of the studies examined concluded that greater academic achievement was gained in smaller schools.

Bailey concluded that educators should understand that bigger is not necessarily better and that smaller schools provide more success opportunities than do larger schools.

A study on a small school division was conducted by Howley and Howley (2006). The school division consisted of three small schools that served an extremely poor and highly mobile student body. The study examined the human aspect affecting student achievement, curriculum, dropout rates, and participation in extra-curricular activities. Despite the fact that students moved in and out of the division constantly and most received free or reduced priced lunches, all of the schools in the division were academically successful. Howley and Howley reported that the three schools and the division were threatened with consolidation on two different occasions.

In reviewing the research literature, Howley and Howley (2006) found five claims for small schools: (a) students qualifying for free and reduced lunch have higher student achievement levels in smaller schools, (b) the link between poverty and achievement is weakened when students attend small schools, (c) lower dropout rates exist in smaller schools, (d) students have a higher percentage rate of participation in extra-curricular activities in small schools than in larger schools, and (e) smaller schools can offer an appropriate curriculum.

Since all small schools are not successful, Howley and Howley (2006) conducted a study of a small school division to attempt to identify what makes some small schools successful. In the school division studied by Howley and Howley, the district was funded at $8,700 per pupil compared to the state average of $8,400 per pupil in 2003–04. The administration supported professional development and the purchasing of instructional materials to support all students. The average teacher salary in the division was approximately $10,000 less than the state average but the teachers remained committed to creating a teaching and learning culture in each of the three small schools in the division. The division administrators had not asked for money to construct new schools even though the buildings in the division were old and outdated. Twice in recent years, the subject of consolidation had arisen. Both times the stakeholders in the area expressed resistance to the concept. The community feared a loss of identity if schools were to consolidate and closed. Many people worried that a point in time would come when the school system no longer could resist consolidation. The survival of the division depended on the enrollment numbers in the three schools. The schools received about 33% of finances by allowing students outside the region to attend and pay tuition through open enrollment. Many resident students tended to be mobile moving from one low rent apartment complex to another in

the area due to the high poverty rate in the region. Teachers found it a challenge to motivate and educate students who moved in and out frequently but continued to set the same standards for transient students as students who remained steadfast throughout their school years.

During the 2003–04 school year, a total of 420 students were enrolled in the three schools in the school division studied by Howley and Howley (2006). One school was an elementary school with 130 pre-kindergarten through third grade students, while the intermediate school contained 96 students in grades four through six, and 194 seventh through twelfth grade students were enrolled at the high school (Howley & Howley). The pupil-teacher ratio was 12.8 to 1 and the percentage of students who received free and reduced lunch in the division was 65%. Eighteen point one percent of the students received special education services while the transient rate was 19%. The median household income was around $25,000 which was about half the average income for the state. The student body had a 94% attendance rate with 96% of all students graduating from high school compared to the state graduation rate average of 84%. The division met AYP and 14 of the 18 state accountability indicators for a state rating of effective during the 2003–04 school year (Howley & Howley).

Employing four researchers, Howley and Howley (2006) interviewed different stakeholders in the school division and reviewed publications and available archives. Secretaries from the three schools in the division assisted the researchers in identifying stakeholders to interview. As a result, interviews were conducted with three administrators (including the former superintendent), 11 teachers (which represented 1/3 of the teaching staff), 10 parents and community citizens, two school board members, and anyone else who came to the school and wanted to speak with the research team. All interviews except one were conducted on school grounds and lasted from 45 minutes up to 2 hours. The interviews were audio taped then transcribed to identify emergent themes through coding and recoding of the data. Three themes emerged that were related to small school success were: (a) smallness, (b) frugality and resourcefulness, and (c) dynamics of consolidation.

Howley and Howley (2006) reported that every person interviewed made reference to the small, intimate, and unique character of the division and its schools. The interviewees discussed relationships between teachers, students, and parents as being of the utmost importance in the success of the schools. Teachers and administrators indicated that they knew students by name and were able to prevent discipline problems while intervening on academic problems before the

problems became serious. Further, teachers and administrators related that students were always given individual attention by caring teachers and staff which created a family like atmosphere. Teachers reported they set high expectations for all students regardless of backgrounds while compiling challenging activities for lessons that allowed students' progress to be monitored. The educators in the schools reported that they expected students to have successful academic performances while exhibiting good behavior. The interviews also indicated that the educators held one another responsible for successfully educating all students in the division. The focus of the division was clear and articulated through the actions of teachers and staffs and the smallness allowed teachers to share discussions about students, methods of instruction, and curriculum on a daily basis. Students were always treated with respect and generosity by everyone involved with the school division because teachers and staff viewed the students as the future. The superintendent was visible in all three schools on a regular basis.

Howley and Bickel (2000) used data from four states (i.e., Georgia, Montana, Ohio, and Texas) to study the effects of school and division size and poverty in a community on student achievement as measured by average student scores on mandated state standardized test. The same method was used to measure school performances compared to the poverty level in the community and the enrollment in the school and division. School and division sizes were compared as larger and smaller after the median size was determined just as poverty was evaluated at greater or lesser levels. All schools in all states were used unless the school did not contain a grade level that was administered the state's standardized test. This amounted to approximately 13,600 schools in 2,290 divisions in rural, urban, and suburban settings within the four states. According to Howley and Bickel's findings the majority of school and division sizes found in the United States were represented within the four states.

Howley and Bickel (2000) reported that in all the states involved in the study except Montana, when attending a smaller school the students in the less affluent neighborhoods out performed students who attended a larger school on state mandated standardized test. Student achievement for smaller schools in Montana was evident but not as strong as the other states studied. In communities with lower income, student achievement was promoted greatly by smaller schools. Large schools in communities with lower income had less of a gain in student achievement. In Georgia, 27 of 29 test scores fell as school size increased in the poorer neighborhoods (Howley & Bickel). In the less affluent communities in Ohio, student

achievement was greater for students in smaller schools and divisions than for students in larger schools and divisions. Student achievement scores were better for students living in rural and small towns as compared to students residing in urban areas in Ohio with larger schools and higher rates of poverty. In Texas, 8 of 10 test scores fell as school size increased in poorer neighborhoods. In Montana, student achievement showed little effect based on school size but was related to income level of the community; however, smaller schools out performed larger ones despite the poverty level. Based on Howley and Bickel's research, when schools were consolidated into larger schools, student achievement in poorer communities suffered. Howley and Bickel concluded that those responsible should examine ways to keep the schools small in less affluent neighborhoods if a gain in student achievement was the goal.

Student Achievement

Berry and West (2008) used data from the Public-Use Micro-Sample of the 1980 U. S. census to determine student outcomes in the labor market during the highest rate of consolidation in public schools (i.e., from the 1920s to the end of the 1940s) as related to school and division size. Specifically, the researchers were interested in the relationship between education and earnings which included school and division size, the state share of funding, and additional years of schooling. Berry and West identified the state of birth specific component, which included the weekly earnings for an individual born in a state and working in a specific region of the state which influenced the returns to education in the first stage. The second stage considered the returns to education based on the characteristics of each state's public schools in the specific state of birth.

In looking for an association between increased earning through additional years of education, Berry and West (2008) controlled for: (a) disparities across labor markets in the mean level of earnings via the state of residence dummies; (b) discrepancies in the average wages of persons born in different states via state of birth dummies; and (c) regional variation in the return to education via relationships between areas of residence dummies and years of education. By using stage one (the state of birth specific component) and stage two (returns to education) models, Berry and West were able to check the robustness of any detected relationships between the returns to education and school quality. The disadvantage these two stages were the

omissions of other factors of consolidation that may have played a part in the labor market forces.

Using data obtained from the Public-Use Micro-Sample of the 1980 U. S. census, Berry and West (2008) divided white men born between 1920 and 1949 into three ten year birth cohorts for the mainland of the U.S. and for the Division of Columbia. In stage one of the analysis, a regression for every mainland state and D. C. was conducted to obtain the rate of returns to education for each male birth cohort. Throughout the time span being studied, D. C. was an outlier due to the size of the division; therefore, it was omitted from the stage two analyses. As a result, Berry and West used 48 states containing three cohorts each totaling 144 estimated rates of returns to education (completed more years of schooling) which represented the dependent variable in the second stage of the regression analysis. Average daily attendance per school and per division and the amount of state funding received for public education were variables of interest in stage two, also. The control variables were teacher/pupil ratio, length of school term, and teacher wages. A Spearman rank correlation revealed that division and school size were correlated with teacher/pupil ratio (i.e., Spearman rho = 0.595 for size of school between 1920 and 1929), and teacher salaries (i.e., Spearman rho = 0.342 for district size between 1920 and 1929) (Berry & West). The state share of funding was found to be positively and significantly correlated with division and school size but more so with teacher/pupil ratio indicating that states were playing a larger role in funding of public education for large divisions and larger schools which had increased class sizes.

In the second stage regression analyses, Berry and West (2008) determined the dependent variable was the cohort-specific interaction between years of education and state of birth. Regression models were used to introduce school and division size as well as the state share of funding for public education into the formula, which also included fixed effects for each birth cohort and state. The analyses revealed a significant relationship between increased school size and a decrease in the rate of returns to education while increased division size was related to a higher rate of returns to education. With an increase of school size by one standard deviation, a decrease of 1.23 standard deviation occurred in the returns to education. They also found that one standard deviation increase in division size was associated with an increase of 1.02 standard deviation in the rate of returns to education. A 9% decline in earnings for a high school graduate, with exactly 12 years of education, occurred when school size increased by 145 students but

when the division size increased by 947 students a 2.1% increase in earnings for a high school graduate were observed. When including division and school size as related to state share of funding a negative relationship was found with the rate of returns to education but no relationship was found when considering state share of funding and returns to education. With an increase of one standard deviation in the state share of funding a decrease of 0.88 standard deviation was observed in the rate of returns to education. For a student with 12 years of education, a 2.2 % decrease in wages was associated with a 10% increase in state share funding. Teacher/pupil ratio and term length had no relationship to returns to education but teacher salaries were positively associated with returns to education. Meanwhile, the rate of returns to education showed an increase of 0.87 standard deviation when teacher wages increased one standard deviation. An increase of 2.3% in earnings for high school graduates were linked to a change of 0.07 in teacher wages.

A Spearman rank correlation of the three cohorts using per capita income and the corresponding census percentage of rural population with school, division, and class size, income was negatively related to teacher/pupil ratio but positively linked to teacher salaries and length of school term (Berry & West, 2008). For all three cohorts, division size was found to be unrelated to income while the state share of funding was negatively related to income. However, school size was found to be positively associated to income. School size was found to be negatively correlated to with the section of the population categorized as rural. In stage two of the regression analyses, parental income had no relationship to returns to education. A positive correlation was found between returns to education and rural populations. High school dropout rates were found to be positively associated with school size while being negatively associated with division size. States with larger schools had students completing fewer total years of education. Students completed more years of schooling with fewer dropouts when correlated to small class size and higher teacher wages. The findings indicated that a 1% decrease in weekly wages was associated with an increase of 100 students in a school size.

Based on the analyses conducted by Berry and West (2008), they concluded that students from states with smaller schools had a higher rate of returns to education and completed more years of schooling than did those from states with larger schools. Some modest gains were found to be associated with consolidation of smaller divisions into larger divisions but the effects of the large schools negatively affected students' outcomes. Thus, concluding that the number of

students was relevant when designing policy for consolidation of schools and school divisions. It should be noted that the Berry and West study contained several weaknesses that temper the interpretation of the findings. For example, family background and community influence could not be removed when examining the relationship between consolidation and student outcomes. The movements of professionalization, better teacher pay, centralization, and larger schools and divisions, in education between 1930 and 1970 saw sizes in schools and divisions increase as well as the state share of funding and state involvement. It was difficult to determine what transpired as a consequence of consolidation or what resulted because of school reform due to voters who valued education.

Cost

In the early 1990s, New York offered an initiative to consolidate or reorganize school divisions because of the perception that there would be significant cost savings gained through economies of scale. Duncombe, Miner, and Ruggiero (1994) conducted a study to determine the potential cost savings of division consolidation in New York. The study investigated merging divisions with 500 or fewer students with neighboring divisions. In reviewing available literature at the time of the study, the literature indicated that overall there was little evidence that consolidation saved money over the first few years. It was difficult to use a case study and determine if cost savings were seen at a later time because many other changes occurred over the period of study which confounded the effects of consolidation (Duncombe et al.).

Duncombe et al. (1994) defined economy of scale related to education as the cost of educating students who meet graduation requirements. The educational output was measured in terms of student test scores which were examined in terms of the relationship between various school inputs (i.e., schools, classrooms, and number of students served). Environmental factors (e.g., parental background, student characteristics, and physical factors) were taken into account when studying student test scores and other factors. One physical factor considered was the size of the school division and its relationship to student achievement. The environmental factors and purchased inputs (e.g., teachers, para-professionals, and equipment) were used to arrive at an equation that produced a cost model and measures of economies of scales in New York; $S=h(G,g(P,F,ST))$ where S was student achievement; G was purchased goods and non-purchased

factors; P was the physical characteristics; F was family background; and ST was student characteristics (Duncombe, et al.).

Duncombe et al. (1994) determined controlling environmental factors, factor prices (e.g., teacher salaries), student and family characteristics, the level of student achievement, and the demand for educational services when making comparisons of school divisions of varying sizes was important. The equation for total cost (TC), which represented economies of scale associated with size was $TC=c(h^{-1}(S,g(P,F,ST)),W)$ where S was the quality of public service; P was the physical factor which included the number of students in a division; F was family background; ST was student characteristics; and W represented resource prices. Economies of size existed when per pupil costs could be lowered by adding additional students to the school population.

Using the equation created, Duncombe et al. (1994) found in New York that per pupil expenditures declined from the smallest divisions to those between 1,000 and 2,500 students in size and then began to increase again creating a U-shaped cost function. The cost per pupil of a division with 50 students was $11,600 while the cost per pupil was $8,200 for a division with 500 students' enrolled. With an enrollment of 6,500 students the cost declined to a minimum of $7,200 but increased to $7,800 for an enrollment of 50,000. The cost for overhead, instruction, and administrative cost generally fit the same pattern as per pupil cost. Transportation cost followed the U-shaped pattern as enrollment increased. Transporting 50,000 students was much more expensive than transporting 1,100.

Seventeen divisions were identified by Duncombe et al. (1994) that could benefit if fully consolidated with an adjoining city division. Meanwhile 43 divisions were identified as having fewer than 500 students and would benefit from partial consolidation by sharing administrative cost. Centralized administration and support services could be shared by these divisions resulting in a savings but the services would varied from division to division based on need. Distance learning was recommended by Duncombe et al. for divisions with a large geographical area having an enrollment of less than 500 students as a way to improve the economical situations of the divisions.

Based on the analyses conducted, Duncombe et al. (1994) concluded that as enrollment figures increased per pupil cost fell when other factors (e.g., teacher salaries and capital cost) were controlled. The cost model indicated an 80% decrease in per pupil cost when enrollment

reached 500 students especially when considering administrative cost savings and, to a lesser extent, instruction and transportation cost.

In a related study of economies of scale, Jacques et al. (2000) examined the relationships between average cost and student achievement scores after division consolidation increased the size of public schools in Oklahoma. In addition, Jacques et al. studied the effects of reallocating the administrative cost savings to instruction. A plateau function with a constant value was used to determine the variable cost (e.g., administration, instructional, and transportation cost) which indicates economies of scale for school divisions above a certain size. School divisions' student achievement test scores and school variables were estimated using a production function which related output (the measure of school quality) to the amount of inputs (student, parental, and school variables). To increase the accuracy of the test for expense and school quality functions, adjustments were made for heteroscedasticity, which is the variance of the dependent variables (e.g., administration, instructional, and transportation cost) across the data, and hierarchical modeling, which organized the data into a tree like structure.

Jacques et al. (2000) used data supplied by the Oklahoma Department of Education for the 1994-95 school year, which indicated there were 557 school divisions in Oklahoma. Only 547 of school divisions were included in the analysis because scores for divisions with fewer than six students taking a test not being reported. The Criterion Referenced Test (CRT), which is unique to Oklahoma in grades 5, 8, and 11 and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in grades 3 and 7 were used to compare academic achievement scores of the participating school divisions. All tests were equally weighted but had many limitations such as: (a) failure to measure all student knowledge, (b) teachers instruction may have been geared towards teaching to the test, (c) aptitude, social class, and unknown influences affected students' scores, and (d) special education students may not have been participating in testing. Therefore, it was impossible to realize how well schools taught these students. Student demographics of race, gender, and socioeconomic status and parental data such as levels of education were used to help describe the school divisions' performance.

Average daily membership (ADM) was used to calculate the per pupil expenditures for instructional, administrative, and transportation cost. Jacques et al. (2000) examined 123 school divisions with an ADM greater than 1,000 students–74.3% of the total public school enrollment for 1994-95 in Oklahoma. Eighty five percent of the total public school divisions' enrollment in

the state had an ADM over 500 students during that same school year. The data indicated that as ADM increased from fewer than 100 students up to 500 students, the average per pupil cost decreased from $6,973 to $5,106. When the ADM reached 501 students and continued to increase to greater than 1,000 students, the decline in the average per pupil cost was small going from $4,548 to $4,363. If the school division had an ADM of 965 students or greater, Jacques et al. found no significant gains in economies of scale for the average per pupil cost. The remainder of the Oklahoma public school divisions with an ADM of 964 students or less had economies of scale with respect to expenditures per pupil.

Additional analyses conducted by Jacques et al. (2000) determined transportation costs were almost linear for small sized to median sized school divisions spending $255 per student with an ADM of 150 students. Transportation cost of a large school division with an ADM over 1,500 students cost $119 per student. Transportation cost accounted for less than 5% of the average total variable cost in Oklahoma, therefore consolidation would have only a small increased effect on the total expenditure. The larger school divisions' economies of scale were about the same when using average total variable cost which includes average administrative cost, average instructional cost, and average transportation cost. As school sized increased from school division with an ADM of 100 to a school division with an ADM of 1000 students, total variable cost was decreased by 28%, instructional cost was decreased by 26.6%, administrative cost was decreased by 32.2%, and transportation cost was decreased by 44.8% per pupil. In summary, Jacques et al. findings indicated that consolidation was more cost effective provided that capital expenditures, such as a new building, do not offset the savings.

Lawrence et al. (2000) reported 1995-96 budget information from 128 high schools in New York which was used to calculate per pupil spending in large (2,000 or more students) and small (less than 600 students) schools. Schools with fewer than 600 students were found to have spent $1,410 more per student than schools with more than 2,000 students. When Lawrence et al. compared the cost per graduate, smaller schools spent $49,553 per student versus $49,578 at larger schools. Larger schools graduated 51% to 56% of the students while smaller schools had a graduation rate of 64%. When dropout rates for larger schools were examined by Steifel, Iatarola, Fruchter, & Bernie (1998, p. iii-v), they found the rate to be 13% for larger schools compared to 5% for small schools. Steifel et al. offered these findings as a possible explanation why it cost less per pupil to graduate from a smaller high school than a larger high school.

In a related study of cost, Duncombe and Yinger (2005) investigated the relationship between per-pupil spending and enrollment in divisions that consolidated in New York State between 1985 and 1997. Twelve consolidations occurred during this time frame so that a minimum of two years of data before and after consolidation could be examined. In conducting the analysis other factors (e.g., student performance) that might influence spending where controlled: (a) the percent of elementary students in reading and math that did not reach minimum competency on the PEP tests, (b) high school dropout rates, and (c) the percentage of students that passed a set of difficult exams to leave high school with a Regents diploma.

Duncombe and Yinger (2005) found that an enrollment of 6,000 students in a division produced the lowest total cost while operating or instructional cost was lower with an enrollment between 1,500 to 3,000 students and transportation cost were lowest for divisions close to 1,000 students. They further determined that one half of the savings was due to a drop in administrative cost from $1,124 per pupil with 50 pupils to $193 per pupil with an enrollment of 1,500 students.

Five sources of economies of size related to education have been determined by Pratten (1991) and Tholkes (1991). Likewise five sources of diseconomies of scale related to education have been determined by Guthrie (1979), Howley (1996), and Lee and Smith (1997). Table 3 summarizes Duncombe and Yinger (2005) analysis based upon reviews of the work of others over a wide range of enrollment as a result of consolidation regarding the association of economies of size,(i.e., the relationship between per-pupil spending and enrollment) after accounting for other influential factors that affect expenditures. Duncombe and Yinger, also analyzed diseconomies of scale (i.e., the relationship between output and cost) as reported by others. Table 3 provides a comparison of the five sources of economies of size and diseconomies of scale.

Consolidation of school divisions has slowed some since the early 1970s but incentives have been offered in eight states to encourage small divisions to reorganize by consolidating (Gold, Smith, & Lawton, 1995). For example, New York offered an additional 40% in operating aid for a period of five years to small divisions that consolidated and an additional 30% for building capital projects within ten years of reorganization. Twelve pairs of divisions took advantage of the incentives offered from New York State from 1987 to 1995 (New York State Education Department, 1999).

Table 3

Economies of Size versus Diseconomies of Scale

Economies of Size	Diseconomies of Scale
Indivisibilities – services provided to students by educational professionals that do not decrease in value with increased student numbers	Higher Transportation Cost – larger distances to transport students
Increased Dimension – the cost of capital output, such as school building and equipment	Labor Relations Effects – increased teacher cost
Specialization – employment of specialized employees	Lower Staff Motivation and Effort – less flexibility in larger schools with more formal rules and procedures
Price Benefits of Scale – bulk purchasing of supplies and equipment	Lower Student Motivation and Effort – less personal contact and sense of belonging
Learning and Innovation – collaboration among colleagues and lower cost of advancement in curriculum or management	Lower Parental Involvement – less personal contact and less rewarding participation in larger school activities

Duncombe and Yinger (2005) indicated differences in divisions such as teacher salaries, student characteristics, management, and staff motivation between consolidating and non-consolidating divisions provided for bias of the research results. Duncombe and Yinger addressed these threats to internal validity by collecting pre- and post- consolidation data on variables in the cost model with a control group of approximately 190 rural divisions which represented 95% of the remaining rural divisions that did not participate in consolidation. The results were compared to the divisions which underwent the consolidation process. A multivariate regression method was used to control bias on observable differences in divisions while an interrupted time-series methodology was used to control unobservable division effects. Selection bias was controlled by utilizing an estimation of fixed effects and time trend for each division using panel data on unobservable characteristics and factors. To determine the impact of

consolidation, the standard formulation of an educational cost function was applied to determine total spending or broke it into functional subcategories.

Duncombe and Yinger (2005) found by using data from 1985, consolidated divisions had less local monies and more state aid than did non-consolidated divisions. The analysis revealed that consolidating divisions spent less on instructional and non-instructional aspects of education except for central administration than did non-consolidated divisions. The data also showed in 1985, consolidated divisions had fewer schools with smaller enrollments, fewer students per administrator, lower property values, and a lower percentage of graduated students attending college. These differences remained steadfast until 1997. By 1997, the analyses indicated all of the consolidated divisions showed significantly higher per pupil expenditures in all categories of aggregate spending with capital spending being three times as much as it had been in 1985. Comparison of 1985 pre- and 1997 post- consolidation data revealed a very small increase in student performance in schools that underwent consolidation (Duncombe & Yinger). Comparable spending in operating cost, maintenance expenditures, and capital expenditures increased in consolidated schools as well as in the non-consolidated schools, whereas, spending for teachers and central administration grew more slowly or declined when comparing pre- and post- consolidation data. A two stage least square regression was used to estimate the cost with student outcomes, teacher salaries, and state aid ratio considered as endogenous. Operating expenditures, capital expenditures, and selected functional subcategories of expenditures were estimated using a different regression. The results of the analysis of operating costs used a regression coefficient to predict future outcomes. The results were statistically significant for the PEP test, dropout rate, teacher salaries, the share of students in secondary schools, the core efficiency variables, state aid, property values, and median income which boosted cost. Not many variables were significant when performing regressions on capital cost. Based upon these analyses, Duncombe and Yinger concluded that school operating costs were significantly related to: the aid received by neighboring divisions with similar enrollment; the average performance of neighboring divisions; the average incomes, property values, and teacher salaries; and the average share of socioeconomically disadvantaged students in neighboring divisions.

When using results of their study to determine functional spending categories of three hypothetical consolidations roughly equivalent to the types of consolidations in their data, economies of size were found by Duncombe and Yinger (2005). For example, they found that as

enrollment increased, central administrative cost decreased. Contrary to expectations, economies of size were also clear when looking at transportation savings that ranged from 32.2% to 18.1% after consolidation. These findings are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Size and Saving Comparison

Size of divisions consolidated	Savings
Two 300 pupil divisions consolidated	22.4% decline in per pupil spending for operating cost
Two 1,500 pupil divisions consolidated	8% decline in per pupil spending for operating cost
Consolidation of the two small divisions	18% increase in savings for instruction with a 22.5% savings for teaching

Ducombe and Yinger (2005) found diseconomies of scale for school divisions with more than 751 pupils when looking at capital spending which increased while those divisions with student numbers at or smaller than 751 supported economies of size. Per pupil operating cost and functional spending subcategories increased at the time of consolidation followed by a gradual decline in the years after consolidation. Duncombe and Yinger discovered substantial savings occurred several years after consolidation even though the initial costs appeared greater when consolidation took place regardless of enrollment numbers.

What Does a School Mean to a Community?

A sense of community and collective identity is assembled though the local school. Lyson (2002) defined community boundaries by the schools, churches, volunteer fire departments, and other public buildings located there. Schools serve the population of the community as an educational institution, an employer, and a place of recreation, social and cultural events. Federal, state, and local elections along with sporting, theater, and musical events and other civic activities were often hosted at the community school. The school provides a place for generations to come together and where the community identity is formed (Langdon, 2000). Schools secure and fuse communities together by bringing people from an assortment of

backgrounds and different ages together for a variety of activities and services (Lawrence et al., 2002).

Lyson (2002) established that when a school is closed in a community, civic participation declines because citizens feel a loss of control in the educational setting. The control is transferred from the local government to state officials and school administrators. If consolidation occurs and a school is closed, the community has the potential to lose the identity associated with the community school. Bard et al. (2006) determined that if consolidation had occurred in a town and a school was retained in that community then the community was economically and fiscally better off than a town that no longer had a school. Further, Bard et al. found that if a community lost their school, often local employers moved businesses reducing taxes paid which affected the annual school budget. According to Sell et al. (1996) students feel the impact of consolidation immediately, whereas, the impact on the respective communities, socially and economically, takes place over several years.

Lyson (2002) has pinpointed community characteristics associated with the lack of or existence of a school. Lyson's research focused on two types of rural communities: those with a population of 500 or less and those with populations between 501 and 2,500. Data were collected from the U. S. Census Bureau and from the New York State Department of Education. In 1990 in New York State there were 357 incorporated communities with populations of 500 or less and between 501 and 2,500 people. Based on the names and addresses of all the public schools located within the 357 communities, Lyson identified communities that did and did not have a school. He found that the small communities that contained schools had housing values and property values that were appreciably higher than those communities without a school (Lyson). Without a school in the community, property values declined. Small towns and urban neighborhoods did not attract young families without the presence of a good school. The population of a town without a school decreased at a faster rate than in a town that contained a school (Lawrence et al., 2002). A larger percentage of newer homes were built in communities with schools as compared to communities without schools. Municipal water and sewer systems were more likely to exist in communities with public schools than in communities that did not contain a school according to Lyson.

The income gap between the rich and poor was greater in small rural communities without a school than in communities with schools, likewise more households received public

assistance in communities without a school than in communities with schools (Lyson, 2002). The poverty level for families and children was lower in communities without public schools than for those with schools. Mills and Ulmer (1946/1970), using a comparison of civic welfare in medium sizes American cities where everything was identical except the economic units, indicated communities with sturdy public infrastructures displayed higher levels of well-being and welfare. According to Lyson's study, communities that were able to maintain a public school after consolidation retain the identity that the school provided, eliminated the potential of lost taxes, halted the declining value of properties, and prevented businesses from leaving. These items provided for the economic growth of a strong self-sustaining community.
Table 5 illustrates the results of Lyson's research comparing small and rural communities.

Table 5

Comparison of Small and Rural Communities

	Small communities (population of 500 or less)	Rural communities (population between 501 and 2,500)
Without schools	46.4% grew in population	29.3% grew in population
With schools	60% grew in population	33.3% grew in population

Bailey's (2000) found that a loss of the community school due to consolidation had a profound effect on employment, housing values, commercial property values, and available loan capital for businesses located in the region. For example, the community identity is often a result of the social and cultural activities that takes place in the school; without a school, the identity is negatively affected. Bailey also found that consolidation had a pronounced political effect in that the local officials lose control of educational decisions to the state and professional administrators.

Conclusions and Implications

Consolidation of divisions and schools has provided a means for small rural divisions to attempt to meet the ever increasing cost of educating students. In the age of accountability for educational success of all students, small schools and small school divisions possibly offer students more individualized instruction which may contribute to greater academic achievement, opportunities for more participation in extra-curricular activities, and greater student support (Butler & Monk, 1985; Cotton, 1996; Nachtigal, 1982). On the other hand, consolidation might offer more opportunities for social involvement, greater variety of academic courses, more extra-curricular activities, an increased number of specialized instructors, and potential financial gains (Bailey, 2000; Bard et al., 2006).

Researchers have also found that closing an area school can have devastating effects on the community (Bard et al., 2006; Lyson, 2002). The community may lose its sense of pride, tradition, and belonging (Langdon, 2000; Lawrence et al., 2002). Bailey (2000) and Lyson indicated that a community that does not contain a school has a larger percentage of low income families receiving public assistance leading to a higher poverty level and a larger gap between the wealthy and poor in the community. If the community can retain a school, property values tended not to decrease, businesses remained, municipal water and sewer systems were usually available, population growth may occur, and the housing industry improved. Maintaining a public school in a community helps the community thrive (Bard et al.; Lyson).

Small rural areas are always in need of finding ways to cut cost and save money in education. The research is conflicting when considering the before and after cost of closing schools and eliminating school divisions. Some studies (e.g., Jacques et al., 2000) indicate that reorganizing school divisions into larger ones provides for better education for all students while providing capital to operate the division. On the other hand, some studies report that small schools may cost more to operate but the benefits to the students outweighed the extra funds being spent to keep them open (Lawrence et al., 2002; Steifel et al., 1998). Studies of the cost of consolidation indicated that it does not initially save money but that the savings occur several years after the consolidation has taken place (Duncombe & Yinger, 2005). Much of the research on the topic indicates that the only saving that occur come from centralized administrative cost (Duncombe & Yinger).

Summary

The review of literature suggested that consolidation provided a diverse, comprehensive curriculum, better facilities, better qualified teachers, a greater variety of extracurricular activities for students, and a broader, more-diverse social experience (Benton, 1992; Monk & Haller, 1993; Self, 2001; Sell et al., 1996). Other research findings reviewed also indicated that consolidation was harmful as smaller schools provided greater individual student support and more participation in extracurricular activities (Cotton, 1996; Flanning, 1995). Researchers have also reported that teachers experienced more stress due to fear of job loss and change during consolidation, while students must ride the bus for longer periods of time daily, parent participation in schools was reduced, and the rural communities were damaged due to loss of their community schools (Cotton; Lewis, 2003). There is evidence that if stakeholders and communities are kept informed during the planning of consolidation, stress and anxiety are reduced (Chance & Cummins, 1998; Nitta et al., 2008). Students want to be included in decisions such as choosing a new name, mascot, and colors for the consolidated school (Chance & Cummins).

School size has been investigated by researchers and supported by organizations that support small schools and small divisions (Howley & Bickel, 2000; Howley & Howley, 2006). Most of the outcomes support small schools when considering poverty and minority students (Howley & Bickel). More incidents of discipline are reported in larger schools than in smaller schools (Bailey, 2000). One of the most prevailing statistics to come from the research was that a larger percentage of students graduate from small schools than from large schools (Bard et al., 2006).

Some researchers have examined the effects of consolidation on student achievement. During the largest time frame for consolidation, standardized testing was not prevalent in education in the United States; therefore, comparing student achievement based on standardized test scores cannot be conducted for that era in education. Berry and West (2008) explored rates of return to education using cohorts of white males born between 1920 and 1949 to determine student achievement. The studied stated that students from states with smaller schools had a higher rate of returns to education than did states with larger schools.

The information about cost and savings is at best confusing. There is some evidence that savings accrue through consolidation, meanwhile, other evidence indicates just the opposite.

While several published studies attempted to arrive at the magic number where economies of scale and economies of size appear, to date, consensus has not been achieved regarding the size of the school or division that produces optimal cost effectiveness.

A community will suffer if the school shuts its doors forever (Bard et al., 2006; Langdon, 2000; Lawrence et al., 2002; Lyson, 2002). The community most likely will experience a decline in property values, loss of business, lack of interest in locating in the community, and other possible devastating effects (Bard et al.; Langdon; Lawrence et al.; Lyson). In many incidents the school defines the community and provides the identity for the community (Langdon; Lawrence et al.; Lyson).

Chapter 3

Methodology

The researcher employed a historical case study methodology to examine the issues surrounding the consolidation of five public schools in Henry County, Virginia. The intent was to (a) identify the issues and challenges involved in the consolidation process and (b) describe the events leading up to the school closings.

According to Yin (2009), a case study has a two part definition. The first part begins with the scope of a case study:

> (1) A case study is an empirical inquiry that
>
> - investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
> - the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
>
> In other words, you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions–believing that they would be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study. . .
>
> Second, because phenomenon and context are not always distinguishable in real-life situations, other technical characteristics, including data collection and data analysis strategies, now become the second part of our technical definition of case studies:
>
> (2) The case study inquiry
>
> - copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
> - relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
> - benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 18)

The case study method allows investigators to use documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events while attempting to understand complex social phenomena (Yin, 2009).

Sources drive all histories, but all sources are not created equal (Storey, 2004, p. 18). Primary sources include personal memoirs, government documents, transcripts of legal proceedings, oral histories and traditions, archaeological and biological evidence, and visual sources like paintings and photographs which originated in the time period the historian is studying (Storey). Secondary sources, which include books and articles based on primary sources, are accounts or reflection by persons who were not actually present during the historical event (Storey).

The primary sources used by the researcher included: (a) the former superintendent's personal notes, (b) interviews of participants who were associated with consolidation in Henry County between 2001 and 2010, (c) official school board meeting minutes, (d) local media accounts, and (e) newspaper editorials. No secondary sources were used.

Description of the Participants Interviewed

The participants interviewed were individuals who were involved in the consolidation process in Henry County at different times during the period beginning in 2001 and ending in 2010. An initial list of possible interviewees was constructed by talking with the former superintendent and reviewing the Henry County Public School Division web site. A list of all school board members was obtained from the site, along with a list of central office administrative personnel. Articles pertaining to consolidation in the Martinsville Bulletin newspaper were also used to identify possible participants. The final names of potential participants as having knowledge regarding the consolidation process were provided by people who were interviewed. Individuals who held various leadership and/or professional education roles in Henry County schools who were identified to be interviewed were: (a) the former superintendent, (b) school board members, (c) central office personnel, and (d) educators employed in Henry County. Parents, community members, and local county officials were also identified through the newspaper articles and referred by interviewees as individuals who had a role in the consolidation process in Henry County. Table 6 identifies the roles people played in consolidation, the number of people contacted as possible interviewees, and the actual number of people in each role who agreed to participate in the study.

Table 6

Roles, Number of Initial Contacts, and Number Interviewed

Role during consolidation	Number initially contacted	Number interviewed
Superintendent	1	1
School Board Members	10	6
Central Office Personnel	4	3
Principals	2	1
Government Officials	2	2
Community Members	2	1
Parents	4	1

After the initial list and contacts were made, 17 people agreed to be interviewed. Two of the individuals who originally consented to be interviewed subsequently chose not to participate. Both agreed to appointments on at least two separate dates but failed to keep the appointments. The community member sent a representative to the interview. The representative who was interviewed had not lived in Henry County during the time of consolidation, so that interview was not included in the study. Therefore, data from 14 interviews were analyzed and included in this dissertation. The interviews were conducted during three separate visits: July 26 – 28, 2010, September 15 – 17, 2010, and November 1 – 4, 2010.

Interview Protocol

Each person who was identified as a potential interviewee was contacted by telephone and/or e-mail to obtain consent to be interviewed. If the individual agreed to be interviewed, the time, date and place of the interview were established during the initial contact. A follow up e-mail or letter was sent to confirm the interview along with a brief explanation of the research study and a list of interview questions (see Appendix A).

The interview questions were reviewed and suggestions were made by dissertation committee chairs and former Henry County Superintendent prior to being submitted the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) or inclusion in the actual interview process. The IRB granted protocol approval from June 29, 2010 to June 28, 2011 (see Appendix B).

The interview was conducted using friendly dialogue. The interviews were conducted in locations such as a public library, a hotel lobby, a school, official public offices, and homes of interviewees. The interviewee chose the location which allowed them to be as comfortable as possible. Prior permission was obtained to record the interview and quote the informant anonymously in narrative text whenever needed (see Appendix C). Each interviewee was assigned a number and quoted by participant number. Interviewees were promised anonymity because consolidation is still occurring in Henry County. Questions were nondirectional and evolved as the research unfolded especially during the interviews (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). According to Seidman (2006):

> The key to asking questions during in-depth interviewing is to let the questions follow, as much as possible, from what the interviewee is saying. Although the interviewer comes to each interview with a basic question that establishes the purpose and focus of the interview, it is in response to what the participant says that the interviewer follows up, asks for clarification, seeks concrete details, and requests stories. (p. 81)

A copy of the researcher's vita was supplied to all interviewees.

Document Review

In addition to interviews, the following sources were used to gather data and information: (a) official Henry County Public School Board meeting minutes and other reports pertaining to consolidation, (b) local and area newspaper articles, and (c) the Superintendent's personal notes concerning consolidation.

Data Analyses

The data analyzed in this case study were derived from the consolidation events occurring in Henry County beginning in 2001 and ending at the closing of the 2010 school year. In addition, the political, economical, social, and historical conditions which lead to the consolidation topic and finally consolidation of five schools were examined. For this research,

the data included interviews, observations, documents including school board meeting minutes, superintendent's personal notes, and articles in the local newspaper, and the researcher's impressions and judgments of field notes that were taken.

Yin (2009) states, "With data triangulation, the potential problems of construct validity can also be addressed, because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (p. 116 & 117). Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of evidence to investigate a single phenomenon (Yin). Since there were multiple sources of data, triangulation was used to cross-validate and assess the accuracy of the information collected.

All interviews were tape-recorded and the tapes were transcribed by the researcher into narratives. The narratives were not provided to the interviewees for additional comments. These narratives were then analyzed for emerging themes, phrases, and word or word clusters. The narratives were coded for themes. Once the themes were identified and assigned a color, each narrative was cut into strips with the participant's name, date, and time of interview on the back of the corresponding colored note card. Some statements were placed under multiple themes. The colored note cards were then placed together in chronological order to tell the story of consolidation in Henry County, Virginia. The results of data for the study are presented in the chronological order.

The interviews were analyzed after transcription as were data contained in a variety of documents. After the analyses were completed, only limited quotes by the interviewees are presented to preserve anonymity. All of the interviewees were vocal during public meetings and school board meetings: therefore, the majority of the quotes reported were obtained from school board meeting minutes and/or the local newspaper.

Figure 1 was constructed to visualize the purpose of the research, research question, and analysis of data. The first column presents the purpose of the research. The second column specifies the research question and the final column indicates the intent of the analysis. The researcher was able to view the chart and move from one column to another to stay focused on the research.

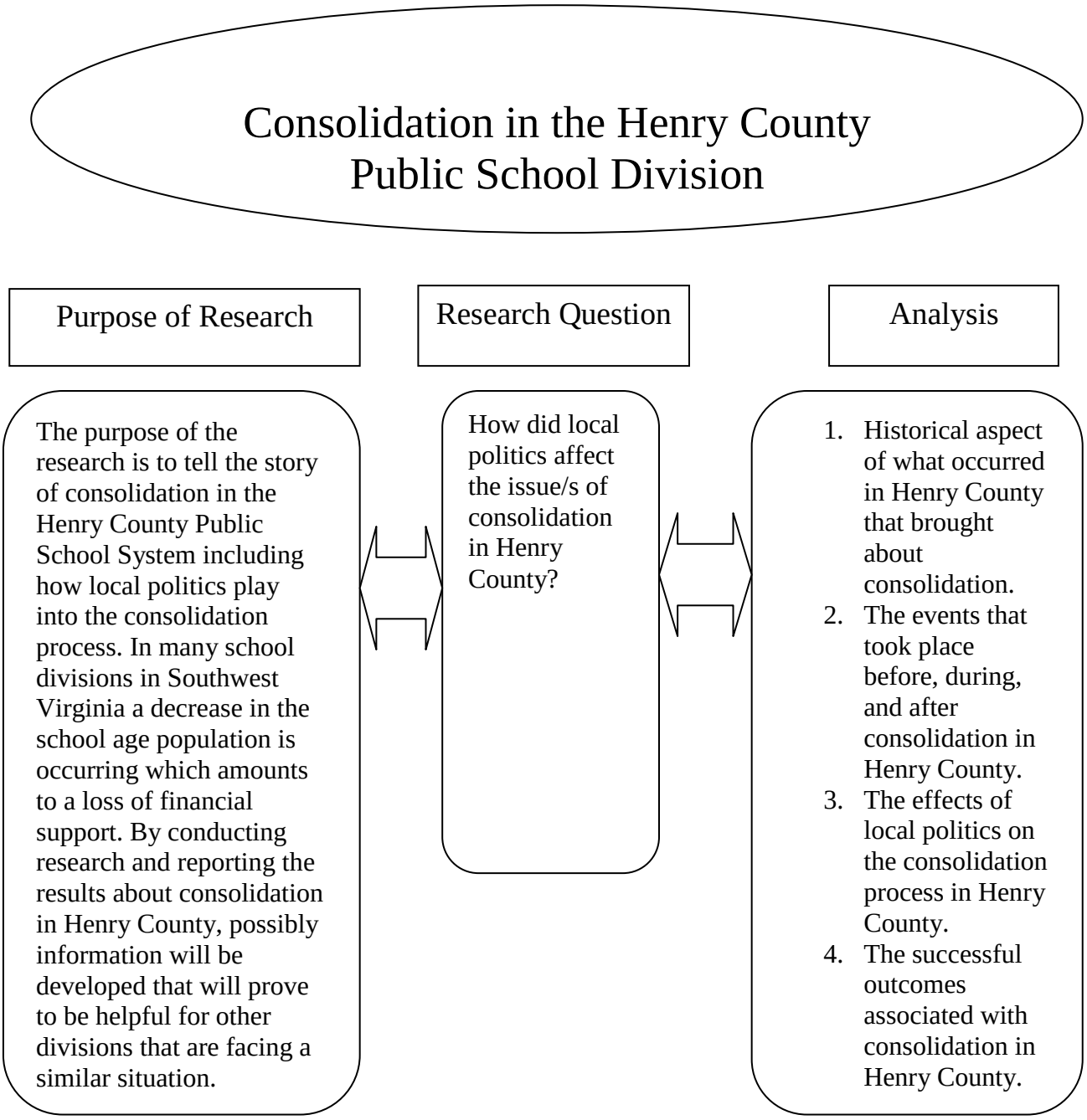

Figure 1. Consolidation in the Henry county public school division.

Summary

A historical case study method was used to study the consolidation and closing of five public schools in Henry County, Virginia. The data collection involved multiple sources (i.e., interviews, artifacts, and observations) to understand the complex phenomena of consolidation in Henry County. The data analyses were derived from the events in Henry County beginning with consolidation discussions in 2001 and ending in 2010 when the last schools were consolidated into a newly renovated building.

Chapter 4

Consolidation in Henry County

Consolidation Begins in the 1980s

Henry County covers 382 square miles in the Piedmont region of Virginia on the North Carolina border (http://www.henrycountyva.gov/About.html). School consolidation was not a new topic for Henry County in the early 1980s (Wooding, January 18, 1985). Henry County's Board of Supervisors had given the school board permission to apply for a State Literary Fund loan to build a new high school in the Ridgeway community located in the southern section of the county near the North Carolina border (Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010; Wooding, January 18, 1985). The school board planned to use an additional $2.8 million of surplus monies available from the secondary school construction fund to construct the new high school (Wooding, February 3, 1985). Shortly after the approval for the loan application, the board of supervisors decided not to approve the $2 million bond sale for the construction of a new high school in the Ridgeway community. The board of supervisors was split on the decision to construct a new school and the project eventually stalled in 1982 (Participant 4; Wooding, January 18, 1985).

In 1980, Magna Vista Farm donated approximately 110 acres of property to the Henry County School Division for construction of a new high school (Earthman, 1985; Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 3, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Wooding, January 29, 1985). The Magna Vista property is in close proximity to the North Carolina border in Henry County (Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010). If future consolidation been considered Magna Vista High School would have been built in a different, more central location (Participant 4; Participant 12). At the time of the donation, the Magna Vista property contained neither public sewer nor water nor was the property accessible to a major highway (Participant 3; Participant 7). The owner of the Magna Vista property owned additional properties in the area. The owner thought that if a high school was built on the Magna Vista property, the surrounding property would become more valuable when public water and sewer were constructed for the new high school and he would benefit financially (Participant 3; Participant 12). Shortly after the donation of the land,

site development of the land began (Earthman). Members from both the school board and board of supervisors questioned the feasibility of building the new school on the proposed site location in the Ridgeway community (Participant 2; Participant 4; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 7). Approximately $600,000 had been spent designing the building and developing the site before the project was halted by the board of supervisors (Participant 2; Participant 4; Push for Ridgeway School Resurfaces, 1985). In the mid 80s, the Commonwealth of Virginia was experiencing financial difficulties and the state budget was frozen. The freeze in the state budget halted all Literary Fund loan applications (Wooding, January 18, 1985) and Henry County's plan to build a new school was directly affected.

In a February 1984 appeal to the Henry County Board of Supervisors, the Henry County School Board requested permission to build a new high school or upgrade and expand two of the existing high schools in the county. Neither plan required a tax increase. The board of supervisors was still split on the decision (Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010). Supervisor Moses Craighead believed that because of school segregation extra schools were built in awkward areas. In the opinion of Supervisor S. E. Moran, the school division had more schools, more teachers, and more buses than the county had 20 years ago with fewer students and therefore did not need a new high school. Jack Dalton, another member of the board of supervisors, interjected that the board of supervisors was overlooking two important factors: integration and the middle school concept when considering the proposals (Wooding, 1984). At that time neither board proceeded with additional plans or discussions and the proposals were dropped.

In January1985, the Henry County School Division was notified that the $2 million loan from the State Literary Fund was available to use for construction of a new $11.7 million high school in the Ridgeway community (Wooding, January 18, 1985). The school board voted four to three to present the proposed project to the board of supervisors for a second time. Two of the three school board members who voted against building a new high school claimed dissatisfaction with structural design. The third member who voted against the proposal did not feel a new high school was needed and that remodeling two older high schools would better serve the communities. At the January 21, 1985 school board meeting, six of seven members from board of supervisors were present. Based on statements made during the school board meeting, members of the board of supervisors plainly stated that although the board of

supervisors' position had not changed since 1982, the board of supervisors would hear and vote on the proposal on January 28, 1985 (Wooding, January 22, 1985).

The meeting held by the board of supervisors on January 28, 1985, failed to produce the needed votes for the school board to continue its quest to construct a new school using the design from 1982 and the property donated by Magna Vista Farm (Participant 3, interview July 28, 2010; Wooding, January 29, 1985). The motion to build a new school failed by a four to three vote (Wooding). Immediately following the vote, a motion was made instructing the school board to meet certain specifications which included: (a) acquiring a site with at least 50 acres within sight of U.S. 220, (b) redesigning the building with a roof guaranteed for 20 years, (c) proving the school could be built without a tax increase, (d) closing at least four schools once the new school was completed, and (e) proceeding with the middle school concept (Participant 3; Wooding). Since the conditions of the motion were not included on the agenda for the meeting, the chairman of the board of supervisors ruled the motion to be out of order and a vote could not be taken. Three members of the board of supervisors agreed to change their vote to yes, if the new school could be constructed closer to highway 220 (Wooding).

Myron Cale, Associate Superintendent for Financial and Administrative Services with the State Department of Education, informed the school board that any change in design and site would require the Henry County School Division to reapply for another State Literary Fund loan. Cale stated that it would take an additional 18 months to two years to have a new application approved (Wooding, January 29, 1985). Cale's information did not deter the board of supervisors' decision to reject approving the construction of a new school on the southern end of Henry County. The publics' disapproval of the board of supervisors' decision was obvious when yelling and protesting erupted from county residents following the vote not to build a new school (Wooding).

The board of supervisors held a special called meeting on February 2, 1985 to reintroduce the motion made by Supervisor Sammy Redd at the January 28, 1985 board meeting (County to Seek Site for Ridgeway School, 1985). The detailed motion included several stipulations. The school board had to search for a new site with at least 50 acres already equipped with adequate utilities within one-half mile radius of U. S. 220 South. A requirement for a new design of the facility was included in the motion. The motion also required the school board to provide the board of supervisors with a complete cost analysis including construction, equipment, road, and

utility improvements. The school board was instructed by the board of supervisors to hire an acceptable consultant to conduct an independent survey of present and future educational needs. The last section of the motion requested proof that the school could be built without a tax increase to the county residents (County to Seek Site for Ridgeway School). The provision in the January 28 motion that at least four schools would be closed when the new school opened was omitted from the new motion. One member of the board of supervisors called for Redd to include closing four schools in the motion. Redd believed the results of the educational needs survey to be conducted by the consultant should be used to determine the number of schools to be closed. The school board believed the vote was a positive move in the right direction and the motion passed by a six to zero margin (County to Seek Site for Ridgeway School; Wooding, February 3, 1985).

At the February 7, 1985 school board meeting, board members agreed to search for a new construction site in the Ridgeway community. The chairman of the school board reminded members that a previous school board had spent a year considering 24 possible sites before choosing the Magna Vista site. The chairman told the school board that the board of supervisors had previously approved the site when the site was selected several years earlier but that after approximately $600,000 had been spent, the decision had been reversed (Push for Ridgeway School Resurfaces, 1985; Wooding, February 8, 1985). Several members of the school board expressed concern about repeating the process of searching for a new site only to have the board of supervisors reject the proposed site again (Wooding).

A suggestion from Supervisor Moran was made to the chairman of the school board that the board search in the Fontaine community for possible sites. Time was spent searching for a new site to build the school in the Fontaine area. Nine possible sites that met the requirements of the board of supervisors were found. Rumors began surfacing that Moran would benefit financially from a school locating in the Fontaine community; however, Moran publically denied any personal connection to the properties being considered (Wooding, February 12, 1985).

After evaluating the budget, the Henry County School Board voted to build the new school at Magna Vista. Although the board of supervisors had instructed the school board to look for a new site closer to US 220, the school board voted to proceed with construction at Magna Vista. The budget constraints facing the county were the key factor in the selection of the Magna Vista site. The property had been donated to the school system and approximately $600,000 had

already been spent on site development (Earthman, 1985; Push for Ridgeway School Resurfaces, 1985; Wooding, February 8, 1985).

In addition to the promised $2 million from the State Literary Fund loan, the school board planned to finance the construction of the school using $9 million from bond sales and school board construction money (Wooding, March 30, 1986). The Magna Vista project was again halted when Moran and a resident of Henry County filed suit to stop the planned construction of a new high school in the Ridgeway community of Henry County. The decision to build a new school on the Magna Vista property was eventually cleared by a judge who ruled that the school board had the right to spend school board money on construction of a new school without approval from the board of supervisors (Wooding).

Bids were received for construction of the new Ridgeway School on March 27, 1986. The low bid was $9.3 million for construction of the building which did not include cost for water, sewer, landscaping, paving, or equipping the building (Wooding, March 28, 1986). The bid was slightly higher than anticipated. When members of board of supervisors learned about the bid, statements in the *Martinsville Bulletin* sent a clear message to the school board indicating the board of supervisors would not authorize additional borrowing to complete the school (Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Wooding, March 28, 1986). The board of supervisors estimated the cost of construction would be approximately $12.53 million to complete the entire building which was about $1.1 million more than the school board had budgeted (Wooding, March 30, 1986). The school board awarded the bid and construction began on Magna Vista High School without the support of three members of the board of supervisors and the at-large member who voted only if there was a tie (Participant 4; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010). The school was constructed and furnished for a little over $12 million (Wooding, April 4, 1986).

Merger Talks Begin

Supervisor member at large, Marvyn King, presented a plan for consolidating the Henry County and Martinsville City School divisions in 1986 (Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Wooding, April 1, 1986). Neither school board members nor other board of supervisors members supported King's plan to consolidate the divisions. School board member, Kathryn Wickline

said, “If that (consolidation) ever comes about, in my estimation it’s a long way down the road” (Wooding).

Magna Vista High School Opens

Magna Vista High School officially opened on September 6, 1988 with an enrollment between 950 and 975 students. Before Magna Vista High School opened, Henry County had one middle school located in the Bassett community. When the new high school opened Drewry Mason and Carver high schools were converted into middle schools (Participant 10, interview September 16, 2010). By doing so, Henry County Public Schools had embraced the middle school concept (Brumble, 1988; Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 3, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010).

After Magna Vista opened, school enrollment in Henry County remained fairly constant until the end of the 1990s. Between 1998 and 2000, many businesses were downsizing and some businesses shut down completely leaving 6,488 people without jobs (Brown, 2002; Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 10, interview September 16, 2010; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010). In the summer of 2002, an additional 2,300 jobs were lost when VF Imagewear closed (Brown; Participant 7). As job opportunities diminished, enrollment in the schools decreased as well (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Participant 2; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 6; Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010; Participant 12; Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010; Participant 14). The reduction in school enrollment in Henry County from 1988 to 2010 is reflected in table 7.

Consolidation Becomes a Topic of Conversation

Henry County was economically strapped in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 9, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010) and the school board was faced with addressing the challenges of too many schools with declining school enrollment (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 6,

interview September 15, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010). The need for consolidation became apparent to Dr. David Martin, then superintendent of Henry County, and

Table 7

Fall Enrollment Figures for Henry County

School Year	Fall Enrollment
1998[a]	9,105
1999[a]	8,981
2000[a]	8,807
2001[a]	8,775
2002[a]	8,526
2003[b]	8,180
2004[b]	7,815
2005[b]	7,895
2006[b]	7,821
2007[b]	7,680
2008[b]	7,563
2009[b]	7,518
2010[b]	7,491

Note.
[a]Henry County Public Schools Fall Enrollment Information 1975–2000.
[b]Virginia Department of Education: Fall Membership Report, Retrieved October 18, 2009 from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/enrollment/fall_membership/index.shtml

school board members (Participant 3, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 12). Martin and the school board formed an ad hoc committee for the purpose of developing a consolidation plan for the county (Participant 5; Participant 6). The ad hoc committee consisted of the elected school board members and one person appointed from each district in Henry County, three assistant superintendents, and the superintendent (Henry County School Board, November 21, 2001; Participant 5; Participant 9). The ad hoc committee conducted nearly 30 public hearings and studied consolidation intensely. While the committee did not reach a consensus in developing a consolidation plan for Henry County, the ad hoc committee made several recommendations (Henry County School Board, November 21, 2001; Participant 6; Participant 9). The

recommendations included: a proposal to redistrict including two high schools and four middle schools; renovating Mt. Olivet, Fieldale, Ridgeway, and Spencer-Penn elementary schools; utilization of the most modern facilities to their fullest capacity; restoring and preserving of the historic facilities; updating overcrowded facilities; maintaining appropriate neighborhood middle schools; and establishment of a feeder plan that would equalize enrollment while maintaining reasonable safe travel for students (Henry County School Board, December 7, 2000). Martin accepted another job and left Henry County on August 25, 2000 before consolidation became a reality (Henry County School Board, July 6, 2000; Participant 9).

New Superintendent–Consolidation Options Discussed

With the loss of approximately $2 million in funding in 2001, the school board realized something had to be done. Dr. Sharon Dodson, the newly appointed superintendent was directed to look at the feasibility of reconfiguring the schools to include two high schools, four middle schools, and ten elementary schools. School board members wanted to combine Laurel Park High School and Magna Vista High School at the Magna Vista site and Fieldale-Collinsville High School and Bassett High School at the Bassett site (Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010). Laurel Park and Fieldale-Collinsville high schools were to be converted to middle schools while Axton middle school was to become an elementary school. Mt. Olivet, Figsboro, and Collinsville were elementary schools whose configurations would change to PK–5 (Participant 2; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010). The Center for Community Learning, Regional Alternative Program, and adult education were to be housed in the John Redd Smith Building. Irisburg, Spencer-Penn, and Fieldale elementary schools were slated for closure (Henry County School Board, November 21, 2001; Participant 2; Tracey, November 22, 2001). Fieldale Elementary and Ridgeway Elementary should have been condemned before consolidation due to the structural problems in both facilities according to Participant 14 (November 3, 2010). Two school buildings built in the 1920s were in such poor condition that major repairs would have been required for the students to continue occupying them (Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010). The school board used the best buildings when planning for consolidation as noted by two participants (Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010).

In a presentation by Dodson and the central office staff, the feasibility of having two high schools, four middle schools, and ten elementary schools was offered as a possible option to declining enrollment and finances (Hairston, December 7, 2001; Henry County School Board, December 6, 2001). Dodson said,

> Given the present and foreseeable future economic conditions, the age and location of the schools, the declining student enrollment, the significant instructional program needs and the commitment to providing the best possible education for our community, the answer is yes, the reconfigured schools could give Henry County the resources to develop some of the highest performing schools in Virginia. (Hairston)

After the presentation by Dodson and the central office staff, the school board directed Dodson to determine the financial impact of a two-high school configuration versus a three-high school plan. The board requested the report be completed before a public hearing concerning consolidation on December 11, 2001 (Hairston; Henry County School Board).

At the public hearing held on December 11, 2001, 65 people spoke in opposition of the two-high school plan and in favor of keeping the smaller schools (Henry County School Board, December 11, 2001; Tracey, December 12, 2001). Geographic issues with the locations of Magna Vista and Laurel Park high schools were of a major concern to the two communities (Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010). Only five people spoke in support of the two-high school plan. The chairman of the board informed speakers that questions would not be answered and that swearing, threatening, and attacking people with words would not be tolerated. School board members listened to arguments made in support or opposition of the two-high school consolidation plan (Henry County School Board; Tracey). Curtis Millner, the newly elected school board member from the Irisburg district, suggested giving 20% of the salary paid to him as a school board member to the schools instead and encouraged central office administration and other school board members to give 10% of salaries earned to help keep schools open (Tracey). Millner publicly supported the three-high school plan that would have kept Bassett, Magna Vista, and Laurel Park high schools open but would have closed Fieldale-Collinsville High School (Tracey).

Sandra Wimbush, a parent from Fieldale-Collinsville, spoke on behalf of the students at Fieldale-Collinsville. Wimbush questioned the equity of splitting students from Fieldale-Collinsville into three schools if Laurel Park was left as a high school. Many who spoke at the

public hearing believed closing Irisburg Elementary, a historically Black school, was senseless because the school had been renovated and 15 additional years of payments were owed for the renovations (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010). Many speakers indicated that if Irisburg were closed, the economy of the community would deteriorate since new businesses would likely not locate in the area. Some speakers believed that only the eastern end of Henry County would suffer financially when Laurel Park High School was closed and converted to a middle school (Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Tracey, December 12, 2001).

Consolidation Vote

On December 14, 2001, a special called school board meeting was held to discuss and vote on Resolution No. 8, a two-high school configuration plan. (see Appendix D.) The motion to adopt the resolution was approved unanimously by school board members (Hairston, December 16, 2001; Henry County School Board, December 14, 2001). After the vote was taken, the audience expressed dissatisfaction forcing Sheriff Frank Cassell to remind the audience to be considerate and calm down. A discussion among board members occurred about leaving the names of the high schools the same or whether the names should be changed. Two board members felt students should have some input in selecting names, mascots, and colors for the consolidated schools. Eventually all motions pertaining to names, mascots, and colors were tabled (Hairston; Henry County School Board; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010).

At the January 3, 2002 meeting, only seven people registered to speak and one of the seven did not attend the meeting (Henry County School Board, January 3, 2002). Twenty residents attended the school board meeting. Most of the 20 residents had united to form a group called Citizens for a Responsive Government and were opposed the consolidation plan that closed three elementary schools and converted two high schools into middle schools (Hairston, January 4, 2002). Five, of the remaining six speakers, opposed Resolution No. 8 (see Appendix D) passed on December 14, 2001. The five speaking against a two-high school plan suggested that the board wait at least one year before implementing the proposed consolidation plan. The speakers felt the board could configure a better plan for the consolidation of schools. The last speaker supported the plan and felt that the two-high school option best addressed the interest of the citizens of Henry County and that the school board had acted in a responsible manner

concerning consolidation (Hairston; Henry County School Board). Following speeches from community members, three board members openly discussed the issue with school board members James Franklin and Charles Clifton supporting the resolution and Millner opposing. Millner made a motion to rescind the resolution but the motion died for lack of a second (Hairston; Henry County School Board). After the school board agreed to continue with the consolidation plan, the Citizens for a Responsive Government group stormed out of the meeting location to convene in the hallway and discuss strategies to impede consolidation. The group decided to hire a lawyer to file an injunction to slow the consolidation process and force school board members to dialogue with community members. During the time that the injunction would be filed and the legal battle that would follow, the Citizens for a Responsive Government felt that they could construct a better consolidation plan for the school board to adopt. The group later returned to the school board meeting and sat quietly (Hairston).

Sidney Clower-County Administrator Influences Boards

At the January 14, 2002 special called meeting school board meeting, Sidney Clower, County Administrator, and the Henry County Board of Supervisors attended. The board of supervisors had questions concerning the reconfiguration plan for the school board (Hairston, January 15, 2002; Henry County School Board, January 14, 2002; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010; Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010). Clower suggested other sources of revenue might be available to compensate for the county's shortfall in funding. Memorial Hospital was being sold and a large amount of the money had to be invested back into the community through a foundation which was to be established after completion of the sale (Hairston; Henry County School Board; Participant 10, interview September 16, 2010). Clower advised both boards to petition the Memorial Hospital Board for $1.5 million for each of the following two years to offset lost revenues. Clower stated that while the money from the hospital board would be a temporary solution to the funding problem the additional monies would allow extra time to have a group of professionals study the situation and make suggestions for resolving the funding problems in Henry County (Hairston; Henry County School Board). Clower also hinted at exploring consolidation of the county schools with Martinsville City Schools (Hairston). Both boards agreed to make a written petition to the hospital board for the

monies to give the school board time to consider other alternatives (Hairston; Henry County School Board).

Three people interviewed thought Clower initially supported the reconfiguration plan of the schools but was blackmailed into a decision reversal by someone who had knowledge of crimes Clower was committing at the time (Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 7, interview September 16, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010). Clower was convicted of three counts of embezzlement by the state court and ordered to serve an 18-month prison sentence followed by 90 days in the Diversion Center incarceration/work release program in Chatham (Hale, 2002; Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010). Clower was also ordered to pay $900 in fines, make restitution of $678,057.66, and purchase a $200,000 life insurance policy with the Henry County PSA as beneficiary (Hale). Clower had used the money he had embezzled to pay child support for an illegitimate child that was conceived with a woman working with him in the PSA general manager's office (Clower Paternity Possible, 2002). Upon being released from the Virginia penal system, Clower was indicted by a federal grand jury on one count of mail fraud and five counts of filing false income tax returns (Ayers, 2003). Clower pleaded guilty to all counts and was sentenced to 41 months in the federal prison system (Hairston, May 21, 2004).

Board of Supervisors Halt Consolidation Plan

The Henry County Board of Supervisors met on February 25, 2002, to entertain a request by the school board for $780,000 to be utilized for renovations at Bassett and Magna Vista high schools (Tracey, February 26, 2002). The school board was not requesting any new or additional monies but only authorization to transfer funds from the following year 2002–03 school division budget. The board of supervisors denied the request by a vote of 6–0 (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Participant 3, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010; Tracey). The supervisors from Collinsville-David Davis, Ridgeway-Francis Zehr, Horsepasture-Debra Buchanan, and Iriswood-Paula Burnette, respectively spoke publically about the budget issues facing the school board. Each of the supervisors who spoke stated that the school board could reduce the budget while maintaining 20 schools in Henry County (Participant 13; Tracey). Members of the board of supervisors believed

a better plan for reconfiguration could be developed to save money (Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 5; Participant 13; Tracey). Community members present at the board of supervisors meeting cheered after the vote. The chairman of the board reminded those present that the school board could still continue with the proposed reconfiguration plan and that they should not count the board of supervisors vote as a victory for stopping consolidation (Tracey).

During the March 7, 2002 school board meeting, Dodson stated it appeared that both taxpayers and the board of supervisors were opposed to the reconfiguration plan for school consolidation. Dodson recommended the school board cease action on consolidation of schools until the board of supervisors conducted a study or submitted a plan for reconfiguring schools in Henry County (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010). Dodson also suggested that a committee composed of various community members be formed to advise the superintendent in matters such as declining enrollment, aging school facilities, support for education, and equitable, competitive educational opportunities relating to educating children in Henry County (Hairston, March 8, 2002; Henry County School Board, March 7, 2002; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010). As part of the proposal, Dodson proposed that steps should be taken in dealing with the issues facing the county schools. A vote was not taken on Dodson's recommendation at the school board meeting (Hairston; Henry County School Board). The board voted to ask the board of supervisors to approve a request to transfer $278,000 from the school board's transportation and facilities budget categories into the maintenance category. By moving the funds the school board could award construction contracts and hire architectural and engineering services to continue with consolidation. Following the school board's vote to ask for transfer of funds between categories to continue with consolidation, Reverend Tyler Millner said,

> The citizens have expressed themselves, and now it seems we have gone into the good-old-boy, back-room politics, which is what the school board has been doing up to now. I hate to think our board of supervisors have moved into that same mode. (Hairston)

Dodson pointed out that the school board and the board of supervisors were going to have to work together to arrive at a solution for the financial problems the school division faced (Hairston; Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 14). "The board of supervisors can't say, 'no, we're not going to fund you the money' and the school board can't say, 'we're going to do it with or without you,'" said Dodson (Hairston).

Superintendent's Advisory Committee Appointed

At a special called meeting on March 12, 2002, school board members voted unanimously to accept Dodson's recommendations proposed at the March 7 meeting (Henry County School Board, March 12, 2002). Dodson stated,

> This will not be a committee for the board. It's an organized committee for me–a way to get the thoughts and ideas from various people in the community about the best way to proceed because these issues aren't going away. (Tracey, March 13, 2002)

According to Dodson, the goal of the committee was to offer advice on how to best deal with the declining enrollment dilemma, the economy, and improving education for the students in Henry County. Chairman of the board, Kathryn Wickline called the vote "a dark day for education," but felt relieved (Tracey). For five years, the school board had been trying to convince a divided community that consolidation of schools would best serve the educational needs of students in Henry County. The people in attendance at the special called meeting cheered when the vote to accept Dodson's proposal passed (Henry County School Board; Tracey).

School Board and Board of Supervisors at Odds

After the school board voted on the motion to cease action on the reconfiguration plan, tension between the board of supervisors, the school board, and the superintendent of public schools in Henry County became apparent (Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010; Tracey, January 16, 2003). Dodson and the school board publically stated that when consolidation was again discussed in Henry County the board of supervisors would be responsible for bringing up the issue and developing a plan. The board of supervisors felt the school board was elected to make policies and decisions concerning the school division (Participant 6; Participant 13; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010; Tracey). Paula Burnette, Iriswood Supervisor, stated, "That's not my job. It's their job to come up with a plan that is reasonable and in which the numbers don't change as much as last year" (Tracey). "The board of supervisors do not open or close schools. They appropriate the money to the school division. Period," said Benny Summerlin, County Administrator (Tracey). All of the supervisors agreed with the statements made by Burnette and Summerlin. Supervisors did not want to get involved in the school board's business unless the school board asked the supervisors for help (Participant 6; Participant 13; Participant 14; Tracey). When Dodson was asked to

comment on how the school board was going to handle the approximate $2 million short fall for the 2003–04 school year, Dodson said, “When the school board dropped the issue, the motion was clear that it would be up to the board of supervisors to bring it up again” (Tracey).

Principals’ Budget Advisory Committee Recommendations

During the 2002–03 school term, school officials projected that only 52% of the available space in high schools was currently being utilized, while 84% of the available space in the middle schools and 85% at the elementary schools was being used (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010; Tracey, January 17, 2003). With only approximately 52% of the space in the high schools being utilized, school board members realized something had to be done (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010). The school board and superintendent realized that the instructional programs were suffering as a result of funding cuts (Participant 5). The school board was experiencing drastic cuts in both state allocations and local funding. In 2002, the school board appointed a seven-member principals’ budget advisory committee charged with the sole responsibility of finding ways to balance the school division’s budget (Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010: Tracey). Keeping the promise not to discuss consolidation, the superintendent and the school board relied on the recommendations of the principals’ budget advisory committee to balance the budget for the 2003–04 (Tracey). In the pre-budget public input hearing and work session held January 16, 2003, the seven-member principals’ budget advisory committee offered a list of suggestions that might be helpful in balancing the budget. The committee recommended:

- charging rental fees for building usage
- eliminating secondary summer school tuition
- increasing tuition for the school of practical nursing program
- eliminating one middle school foreign language teacher
- reconfiguring schools
- increasing revenue through dual enrollment tuition
- eliminating high school activity bus runs
- eliminating the middle school alternative educational program
- eliminating three instructors for the gifted and talented program
- eliminating paraprofessionals at the middle school level assigned to the computer labs

- eliminating transportation for students participating in day trade programs
- eliminating two bus driver positions
- reducing the JROTC staff by two positions
- eliminating the assistant superintendent position
- eliminating one classified position at the school board office
- increasing employer contribution to health care insurance
- eliminating middle school athletics programs
- discontinuing the year long program at Rich Acres Elementary School
- reducing revenue for staff development
- reorganizing personnel in the facilities maintenance department
- eliminating uniforms for maintenance employees
- eliminating 11 teaching positions in grades 4 through 8
- reducing elective offerings for high schools
- eliminating 7 health and physical education teachers in elementary schools
- reducing field trips
- eliminating 10 teaching positions for art and music in the elementary schools
- changing the 4 X 4 block schedule to a 7 period day schedule to eliminate teachers and elective courses (Henry County School Board, January16, 2003; Tracey).

The list of suggestions saved approximately $2,041,000 for the 2003–04 school budget (Henry County School Board). According to Dean Randall, the elected chairman for the principals' budget advisory committee, the group did not discuss a specific plan for reconfiguring schools in Henry County (Tracey).

Surveys Distributed

A survey was distributed among Henry County residents seeking input on the 2003–04 school budget. (see Appendix E for results published in the *Martinsville Bulletin* on February 10, 2003.) The surveys were distributed in the schools and made available through the *Martinsville Bulletin*, on the internet, and at the Henry County Administration Building. The survey asked respondents to identify themselves as a parent, a county resident, or school employee. Of the 3,500 surveys returned, 71.4% identified themselves as parents, 23.4% were county residents, and 5.2% were county school employees (Tracey, February 7, 2003). Dodson presented a $61.7

million preliminary budget to the board of supervisors that reflected an increase of $226,000 over the previous year's budget (Henry County School Board, February 6, 2003; Tracey, February 7, 2003). According to Dodson, the board used suggestions from the survey in developing the preliminary budget. The data from the survey indicated the community did not favor the following program changes: the elimination of bus transportation for high school, "day trades" program, a decrease in field trips, the elimination of middle school athletics programs, the restructuring of pupil transportation, nor the elimination of high school activity runs. However, the board felt that the items needed to be cut in order to balance the budget (Henry County School Board, February 6, 2003). Dodson realized middle school athletic programs were important and that middle school students looked forward to participating in the sports programs but recognized choices had to be made (Tracey, February 7, 2003). A question on the survey addressed the possibility of reconfiguring schools. Predictions were made that closing certain sites would save approximately $250,000 per school closed and 47% of the people responding to the survey thought reconfiguration should be considered (Tracey, February 10, 2003).

Debra Buchanan, Supervisor for the Horsepasture District, was dissatisfied with the survey concerning consolidation completed for the Henry County School Board. Buchanan wanted to distribute a survey dealing with public school issues designed for her constituents in the Horsepasture District (Horsepasture to Have Its Own School Survey, 2003). Buchanan believed the school board's survey was stacked to reflect a specific point of view and felt individuals supporting consolidation could have completed multiple surveys. In an effort to determine if participants were taxpayers, parents of students in the school system, and/or senior citizens residing in the Horsepasture District, Buchanan developed a simple survey that required participants' signatures (Horsepasture to Have Its Own School Survey). Buchanan sought permission from Dodson and the school board to distribute the survey to students attending schools located in the Horsepasture District (Horsepasture to Have Its Own School Survey).

In a letter to Buchanan dated Monday, February 10, 2003, Dodson responded to the request to allow the new survey to be distributed to students in the Horsepasture division. Buchanan was informed that the survey had been sent to the school board's attorney to determine the legality of distributing the survey within the schools in the Horsepasture Division. Dodson stated, "Pending the receipt of legal advice, permission for distribution is denied at this time. I'm sure you can understand the need to confirm compliance with appropriate policy and relevant

sections of the Code of Virginia," (Buchanan, Dodson Differ on New Survey, 2003). Two sections from the Code of Virginia were included in denying the request. Buchanan looked at the possibility of distributing the survey through community organizations such as the Ruritan Clubs, fire departments, and rescue squads after the request was denied. The survey contained nine questions divided into two sections. One question specifically addressed the issue of consolidation. Buchanan stated, "If people in my division want consolidation, that's the way I'll vote. If I'm not their voice, then who is? The way revenues are, we might get a considerable number back who say 'Let's look at it.'" (Buchanan, Dodson Differ on New Survey).

At the March 6, 2003 school board meeting, Buchanan asked permission to distribute the survey composed for the Horsepasture District throughout the schools located in the Horsepasture District. Since the Henry County School Board did not have an adopted policy dealing with the distribution of surveys within the schools, Buchanan's request was denied. The board voted 6–0 supporting the superintendent's decision with one member abstaining (Henry County School Board, March 6, 2003; Survey Refused, 2003). School board member, Curtis Millner, abstained feeling distribution of the survey was a matter between Dodson, Buchanan, and the school board's attorney. School board members felt that by allowing Buchanan's survey to be distributed, the school board could possibility open the door for other individuals or groups wishing to distribute other surveys as well (Henry County School Board; Survey Refused).

County-City School Merger Study Conducted

A joint session between the Henry County School Board and the Martinsville City School Board was held on March 13, 2003. The purpose of the combined school boards' meeting was to formally consider Phase I of the feasibility study conducted by Dr. David Alexander, Dr. Jack Davis, Dr. John Schreck, and Dr. Wayne Worner concerning merging the two school divisions (Henry County School Board; Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010). No votes were taken and no discussions occurred after the presentation (Henry County School Board).

Revenue Shortfall

In a budget meeting between the board of supervisors and school board members, the school division requested level funding for the 2003–04 school year. Dodson reminded the board of supervisors that in the previous year the school board had trimmed $1 million from the 2002–

03 budget. Members of the board of supervisors and the county administrator projected a shortfall of approximately $1.1 million to $1.5 million for the following year (Henry County School Board, February 24, 2003; Tracey, February 25, 2003). County Administrator, Benny Summerlin stated that since the school division comprised 68% of the total county budget, the board of supervisors was asking the school division to make up 68% of the shortfall in revenue (Henry County School Board; Tracey). In the opinion of Dodson, another million dollar cut in the school budget would have compromised the education of the youngsters in Henry County (Tracey).

During the week before, the board of supervisors and school board met to discuss the school board's preliminary budget and members of the board of supervisors attended a retreat where a supervisor from another county spoke about experiencing consolidation and the financial impact. During the combined meeting, Supervisor R. E. (Mike) Seidle, Jr. brought up the issue of consolidation. Seidle was the only supervisor who had voted yes to advance the school board the funds needed to begin a renovation project. Board of Supervisors Chairman David Davis also spoke in favor of consolidation but no decisions were made. School board member Curtis Millner stated the school division could not continue to financially support 20 schools but hoped that a feasibility study underway on combining Henry County Public Schools and Martinsville City Schools would offer the public a friendly solution (Tracey, February 25, 2003; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010).

In an April 3, 2003 news release, Dodson informed the public that the school board had incorporated 11 ideas from the survey in arriving at the preliminary budget for the following school year. Since the board of supervisors planned to cut $1.47 million from the previous year's allocations in an effort to balance the county budget for 2003–04, Dodson expected to reduce the school division's budget by the same amount (Tracey, April 3, 2003). Even though one of the suggestions on the survey was to close schools, Dodson said she would not recommend closing any schools. "It'll all be on the table," Dodson said. "But operating fewer than 20 schools would not be my recommendation" (Tracey).

Renovations and Upgrades Begin

In April 2003 the school board started awarding contracts for renovations (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010). The first renovation project approved was for Carver Middle School

(Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010). The main office was to be rearranged to improve security and privacy while providing ample office space. The assistant principal's office was to be moved upstairs to improve supervision and control. A health clinic was to be added on the first floor and several classrooms on the second floor were to be modified to provide additional space. A new HVAC system was to be installed. A second renovation project updated the intercom systems at Bassett Middle and Campbell Court Elementary Schools (Henry County School Board, April 3, 2003).

Lump Sum Funding Questioned

At the April 15, 2003 budget work session, Dodson began the meeting by recommending that the school board assume responsibility to bear the school division's share of the financial burden facing Henry County. The board of supervisors requested the school board reduce the preliminary budget by 8% or $1.47 million (Henry County School Board, April 15, 2003; Powell, April 16, 2003). The first suggestion the school board and Dodson made to the board of supervisors was a request to allow the school system's funding be appropriated in a lump sum rather than by categories (Henry County School Board; Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Powell). Lump sum funding would allow the school board to have sole responsibility to transfer funds among the various budget categories. In the past transfers between categories had been a responsibility shared by both boards (Henry County School Board; Participant 2; Participant 4; Powell). "Giving the schools their local funding in a lump sum would help the school board 'manage funds in a more business-like manner' and increase efficiency by causing less paperwork and 'streamlining the bureaucracy,'" Dodson said (Powell). In arriving at the dollar amount needed to make reductions, the school board recommended a reduction in staff based on the decreased enrollment numbers ($400,000), reducing the proposed raise from 3.4% to 2.25% ($470,000), having the cafeteria budgets reimburse the school system for eligible operation and maintenance costs ($100,000), and transferring funds from the textbook account ($500,000) (Henry County School Board; Powell).

Four of the six members of the board of supervisors believed that the time had possibly come to give the school board members more freedom to do the job for which they were elected (Hall, April 18, 2003; Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010). Two county citizens who

spoke at the public hearing for the 2004 fiscal budget argued that the board of supervisors should not consider lump sum funding (Tracey, April 18, 2003). Both boards must vote to transfer funds from one category to another which often takes up to two months and can delay payment of bills indicated Davis. As long as Dodson continued to provide the board of supervisors with a monthly report showing how money was being spent, Davis vowed to keep an open mind concerning lump sum funding. "I feel like the school board runs the school system and those people (school board members) have to answer to the residents of Henry County for their decisions. We're going to have to give them that freedom," Davis said (Hall). Seidle stated, "They are elected, too, and need to do what they think is best for the children in Henry County" (Hall). Jim Adams, Blackberry Division Supervisor, said

> The lump sum appropriation has merits. It would increase (the school board's) timeliness in reacting rather than having to get on a board's agenda and wait for approval, and it would allow them some movement of funds from one category to another without requiring the supervisors' approval. (Hall)

Buchanan and Burnette promised to keep an open mind concerning lump sum funding when the vote arose (Hall).

Nursing Program Cut

Henry County school officials decided to drop the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program at Laurel Park High School. The LPN program cost $80,000 a year to operate (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010). Students enrolled during the 2003–04 term were allowed to complete the 18 month program but no new students were accepted (Tracey, April 21, 2003). School officials determined the LPN program could easily be eliminated in an effort to save money (Tracey).

County Officials Tour Henry County Public Schools

After the May 19, 2003 special called school board meeting, members of the Henry County School Board, Dodson, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors Davis, and County Administrator Summerlin boarded a school bus to tour three Henry County Public Schools (Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010). Fieldale Elementary School, which at that time was 62 years old, was one of the stops. The building had leaky ceiling tiles, corroded floor tiles,

and the foundation had shifted. “I’ve heard about the disrepair (at Fieldale Elementary), but I didn’t know it was that bad. I think they’ve done a super job there, but they could do a super job in a much nicer facility,” said Davis (Tracey, May 20, 2003). The group toured the new Center for Community Learning, which served students who would have otherwise been expelled from public school. The Center for Community Learning had been relocated to Fieldale-Collinsville High School. The previous Center for Community Learning had been housed in Martinsville at an annual rental cost of $56,400 (Tracey). Members of the tour group were impressed with the Fieldale-Collinsville facility. Davis stated, “I would love to see our elementary and middle and high school students go to school in facilities like that. That’s what our children deserve” (Tracey). The tour was completed with a stop at Collinsville Primary School (Tracey).

Lump Sum Funding Granted

When the board of supervisors met on May 27, 2003, the board voted 4–2 to approve lump sum funding for the school board for the 2004 fiscal year (Hall, May 28, 2003; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010). Burnette and Buchanan opposed the motion (Hall). Buchanan said roughly 70% of the entire county budget goes to the school system (Hall). “As supervisors, we need to exercise fiscal responsibility and not shirk our jobs as elected officials. A lump sum allocation takes away what little checks and balances citizens have,” Buchanan said (Hall). “The county administrator is only authorized to spend up to $15,000 without coming to us, so how are we giving 68 percent of our budget to the school board to spend at their choosing?” said Burnette (Hall). Seidle felt that by not allowing lump sum funding the board of supervisors would be micro-managing school board members. “They were elected to manage the school system. They need to get on with the program,” Seidle said (Hall).

Consolidation Planning Begins

On the same day the board of supervisors met, the school board met with a facilitator to discuss how to best approach the topic of consolidation in Henry County (Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010). The school board felt something had to be done since the county had 400 fewer students and a budget that was $2.5 million less than two years prior (Hairston, May, 28, 2003). The facilitator, Vincent Cibbarelli, urged the board to make the best use of the resources available when considering how to overcome a long list of problems with a minimal

amount of solutions (Hairston; Participant 9). "Maintaining status quo is not an option," stated Millner concerning the county's 20 school configuration (Hairston). Millner had opposed the two-high school plan for consolidation before being elected in 2001. School board member, Clifton reminded the board that the school system had several dilapidated buildings that could not be repaired but needed to be replaced and this would not be possible with a declining budget. Another board member, Dan Pace had made a pact when Millner was elected not to discuss the topic of consolidation unless another party brought the matter up. "I think now is the time to discuss it. I don't think we can continue to operate 20 schools," stated Pace (Hairston).

Ultimately, the school board reached a consensus to begin formal talks regarding consolidation at the June board meeting. The school board and superintendent felt keeping the citizens informed about the proposed plans for consolidation was necessary. The school board and superintendent also believed that the county constituents' opinions were important when planning consolidation (Hairston, May 28, 2003; Henry County School Board, May 27, 2003). Dodson clarified that consolidation would begin in the 2004–05 academic year (Consolidation Final Vote is Due Thursday, 2003).

In remarks concerning consolidation school board member Tom Martin said, "The main thing is not to do anything you don't want the public to know. The public has to be involved all the way, not just brought in at the end" (Tracey, May 29, 2003). "Hopefully people can get their ideas out in front. They can give us options from which to deal with," Millner said (Tracey). Dodson said,

> I think the situation in our community makes it more compelling for people to become more informed of the facts driving the need for this. It's our goal to get the information out and have it readily available for all the groups affected. (Tracey)

Consolidation Vote Unanimous

Members of the school board voted unanimously in favor of consolidation at the June 5, 2003 school board meeting (Henry County School Board, June 5, 2003; Tracey, June 6, 2003). Prior to the vote being taken, four citizens from Henry County asked to address the board. One person was opposed to consolidation regardless of reasons, one person supported consolidation unconditionally, and two others conditionally supported consolidation (Henry County School Board; Tracey). Board members realized the school division could not continue supporting 20

schools while losing approximately 100 students per year and receiving less and less funding from both the state and local governments (Henry County School Board; Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010; Tracey). "I don't see us continuing to operate 20 schools. We have schools that should be torn down," said Millner (Tracey). School board member, Franklin, informed the public that the previous plans from 2001 had been thrown out the window and everything on the table was new. In an effort to develop a cohesive plan, Dodson and the central office staff were instructed to gather the best and most current data available to use in developing consolidation proposals. The board agreed to hold a work session at the July 3 meeting if not before that date (Tracey).

Choosing a Consolidation Plan Timeframe

Board members discussed the merits of voting on a consolidation plan before January, 2004 when newly elected board members would take office. Millner felt the vote should come in January, while Franklin and Martin thought waiting until January was too late. Martin said, "If we let it lay here from now until Dec. 31, anything can happen" (Tracey, June 8, 2003). Two board members had chosen not to run again while two other members had opposition in the upcoming election. In January 2004, the school board would have at least two new members with the possibly of up to four new members. Millner believed the new board should be involved in the decision making process. Millner's reasoning for opposing a vote on consolidation until January was to include the newly elected school board members in the decision. In Millner's opinion, the added time would allow the central office staff ample time to plan for the best use of all available space. Board members all agreed that the plan should begin with the high schools since all four high schools were operating at about half of their capacity (Tracey). Enrollment figures versus capacity projections are displayed in Table 8. Some board members hoped that by consolidating high schools enough money would be saved to enable the school board to offer the International Baccalaureate program at the high school level. Millner was the only board member to speak publically in support of keeping three high schools instead of going to a two-high school configuration (Tracey, June 8, 2003). Millner stated that many parents were opposed to having schools with enrollments of approximately 1,200 students. Parents preferred having smaller high schools. Millner also suggested that in order to better utilize acceptable space and eliminate

mobile units, the board needed to develop new attendance zones for the elementary schools (Tracey).

Table 8

2003-04 Enrollment Figures versus Capacity in Henry County Public High Schools

High schools	Current enrollment	Capacity	Percentage of capacity
Laurel Park	469	1,094	42.8%
Fieldale-Collinsville	638	1,097	58.2%
Bassett	691	1,368	50.5%
Magna Vista	779	1,428	54.6%

Note.
Tracey, June 8, 2003, Retrieved from
http://www.martinsvillebulletin.com/article.cfm?ID=4364&back=archives

On Thursday, June 19, 2003 school officials released four possible consolidation plans (Participant 10, interview September 16, 2010; Tracey, June 20, 2003). (See Appendix F for plans published in the *Martinsville Bulletin* on June 25, 2003.) The four plans called for the closure of Fieldale, Figsboro, and Spence Penn elementary schools. Two plans designated the closure of Ridgeway Elementary and one plan added Bassett Middle School to the list of schools which would be shut down (Tracey). Dodson said the plans were developed based on feedback from county residents at the time. "These (plans) are not definitive. These are the four plans the administrators came up with. I wouldn't rule out other suggestions," stated Dodson (Tracey). The school board planned an open forum at Fieldale-Collinsville High School from 2:00 until 7:00 pm on June 26, 2003 (Henry County School Board, June 24, 2003; Tracey). Wickline expressed hope that the community would support at least one of the four plans. Wickline said,

> Our citizens understand that we must place our resources on the instructional program, not bricks and mortar. We put the students first. We have a bleak economic situation in our community, and it is our responsibility to respond to it by using our limited financial resources to the best advantage of our students. (Tracey)

More Renovation Bids Awarded

At a special called meeting on June 24, 2003 several bids were awarded for school renovation projects in Henry County (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010). John Redd Smith Elementary and Carver Middle School received new dropped ceilings and fluorescent lighting throughout the buildings. The intercom systems were upgraded at both schools. A new steel canopy was installed at the main entrance of Carver Middle School and the road was paved for parent drop-off and pick-up (Henry County School Board, June 24, 2003).

Consolidation Plans Released for Public Input

In an article published in *The Martinsville Bulletin*, parents were invited to attend an informational meeting June 26, 2003 at Fieldale-Collinsville High School (Tracey, June 25, 2003). Parents were encouraged to drop in anytime between 2:00 and 7:00 pm to view and discuss the four proposed consolidation plans (Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010; Tracey, June 25, 2003). School officials were stationed throughout the gym to discuss the plans, answer questions, distribute estimated savings, and take suggestions. Parents were encouraged to ask questions about the attendance zones for children based on each of the four plans (Participant 4; Participant 14; Tracey, June 27, 2003). (See Appendix F for plans published in *Martinsville Bulletin.*) School board members were seated in the middle of the gym floor and available to discuss the proposed plans (Tracey, June 27, 2003). Approximately 250 to 300 people attended the informational meeting (Tracey, June 27, 2003). Most of the board members said residents preferred Plans 2 and 4 with some people preferring the plan that kept three high schools open. Some of the most vocal citizens from 2001 were pleased with the information people received (Tracey, June 27, 2003).

Dr. Jim Beckner, Director of Finance for Henry County School Division, provided information about the projected savings and financial benefits of each of the four plans. Beckner stated the estimates included fixed costs but did not factor in costs that change from year to year. Plan 2 which proposed closing five schools produced the greatest savings: $1.4 million in maintenance and operational cost (Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010; Tracey, June 27, 2003). Proposed Plans 1 and 3 which would have closed three schools produced the least amount of savings: $750,000 (Participant 2; Tracey). Plan 4

proposed eliminating middle schools and was projected to produce a savings of $1,000,000 (Participant 2; Tracey).

On average in 2003, elementary schools in Henry County were approximately 54 years old. Buildings with this amount of age and wear require a tremendous amount of money and time in maintenance (Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010). "I'd like to redirect maintenance from putting out fires -- doing patches for roof leaks, replacing windows that have rusted out -- to improving the schools," said Clay Watlington, Director of Facilities and Maintenance for the school system (Tracey, July 1, 2003). Fieldale, Spencer Penn, and Ridgeway elementary schools, along with Bassett Middle School, were by far the buildings in the worst structural shape and required the most manpower and money to keep them operating safely (Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010). Watlington felt Plan 2 was the best choice because Plan 2 closed the greatest number of schools. In Watlington's opinion, by closing schools that are not structurally sound and in need of extensive renovations, the maintenance department could utilize time and resources to renovate the structurally sound facilities (Tracey).

Informal Vote on Consolidation Plans

An informal vote at the school board meeting held July 3, 2003 indicated that six of seven board members preferred the two-high school plan (Henry County School Board, July 3, 2003; Tracey, July 4, 2003). Iriswood board member, Millner, was the only board member opposed to the two-high school plan. Millner preferred the three-high school plan or the plan that would have kept all four high schools open while adding middle school students to each of the high schools. Millner was opposed to the two-high school plan because neither of the schools was centrally located and students in the Iriswood district would have the longest bus rides. Millner also suspected that with two-high schools a larger number of disciplinary referrals would occur since enrollment would range from 1,300 to 1,400 (Tracey). "If we go to three high schools, in a few years, with the declining enrollment, we'll have to go through this again," said Wickline, in explaining why she preferred a two-high school proposal (Tracey). DeWitt House, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, stated that due to a decreasing student population many courses had been dropped from the Henry County curriculum. Both Amherst County and Salem school divisions had approximately the same number of students as Henry County but were able to offer 25 to 30 more classes (Schools: Quality at Issue, 2003; Tracey). House said, "Under the

two-high school plan, you utilize the curriculum you have, but you also have the opportunity to expand the curriculum" (Schools: Quality at Issue). After hearing the information provided by House on the curriculum in Henry County, board member Kelly Cecil said, "I think we can do better with less, if that means going to two high schools, that's what we ought to do" (Schools: Quality at Issue). "I don't think we're offering our students the same education they could get elsewhere," indicated board member, Dan Pace (Schools: Quality at Issue).

Initial Consolidation Cost Made Public

Dodson informed the school board at the July 3, 2003 meeting that in the prior three years, 125 positions had been eliminated without using the reduction in force policy, but the county was now faced with the dilemma of hiring 11 new teachers needed for 2003-04 (Henry County School Board, July 3, 2003; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010). During the meeting a bid was awarded for renovation to Bassett High School. The renovations were necessary to proceed with consolidation regardless of the plan chosen (Henry County School Board). Beckner, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance, informed the board that in order to proceed with consolidation Plan 2, an initial cost of $2.7 million would be required to renovate facilities in Henry County (Tracey, July 4, 2003). Although Plan 2 required new revenue initially, Plan 2 was projected to produce the greatest savings for the school division. Beckner indicated the school board would save approximately $1.4 million in personnel and maintenance costs (Tracey, July 4, 2003; Tracey, July 21, 2003). Personnel savings would net $1.1 million by reducing staff by five principals, one assistant principal, two librarians, two guidance counselors, seven clerical positions, five day custodians, five night custodians, one day maid, and two bus drivers (Tracey, July 21, 2003). The remaining $300,000 would come in maintenance savings from electricity, heating and cooling, water, sewer, renovations, supplies, telecommunications costs and equipment for the five schools closed (Tracey, July 21, 2003). Beckner stated that the renovations could be completed using the annual maintenance funds and that the school board would not need to petition the board of supervisors for an advancement on the following year's budget. Beckner indicated the board of supervisors could not derail the school board's plan to consolidate in 2004-05 (Tracey, July 21, 2003).

Possible Busing Issues Identified

The major point of concern expressed at a public forum held at Fieldale-Collinsville High School on July 14, 2003, revolved around the amount of time children would be on buses due to the geographic locations of Laurel Park and Magna Vista (Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010; Tracey, July 15, 2003). School officials believed a plan could be devised to ensure that a child was never on a bus more than an hour one way (Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010; Tracey). Parents felt that was not possible and voiced concerns at the forum. Assistant Transportation Director Tim Fulcher informed parents that during the 2003–04 school year, 101 bus routes existed and of those only two or three were longer than an hour (Tracey). Children in the eastern and southern sides of the county would be riding the bus for longer periods of time, if Plan 2 was adopted (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 9; Tracey). One parent, supporting the three-high school plan, stated that if the board approved the two-high school plan, a student would be driving/riding 60 miles one way to school but would only have to drive/ride a few miles if Laurel Park was left open. Some people voiced concern about the number of schools children would be attending before graduating from high school (Tracey).

Consolidation Plan 2 Official

Only 20 community members were present for the 13 minute meeting on July 23, 2003 when school board members voted on the proposed consolidation plan for the 2004–05 school year (Henry County School Board, July 23, 2003). Plan 2 which reconfigured the high schools from four to two schools and closed five schools was adopted by a vote of 6 to 1 (Henry County School Board; Tracey, July 24, 2003; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010). Millner continued supporting a plan that would include Laurel Park as a high school (Henry County School Board). At the completion of the meeting, Dodson said,

> It's time to move ahead. We do have a large agenda to get through, and we will certainly be offering the community many chances for involvement. A steering committee of administrators, teachers, parents and residents will be created soon to oversee the reorganization. This group will create smaller committees to determine issues at the

school level, including creating new school colors and mascots and, if necessary, renaming the high schools. (Tracey)

Another Business Shuts Down–Additional Revenue Losses

Less than two weeks after voting to close five schools, County Administrator Summerlin informed Dodson that Pillowtex closed at the end of July, 2003 which meant an additional $915,000 dollar revenue loss for the county (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010; Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010; Tracey, August 5, 2003). The school system was expected to bear 68% of that loss which amounted to an additional $622,000 deficit for the public school (Tracey). "This (closing of Pillowtex) makes it even more compelling that we operate fewer facilities. It's not going to lessen the need to move to consolidation, but hasten it," said Dodson (Tracey). The school board examined the budget closely at the August 7, 2003 monthly meeting seeking ways to address the funding loss caused by the closure of Pillowtex. The board was able to reduce the budget by $440,000 by eliminating 9.5 teaching positions, charging rental fees for use of classrooms, eliminating a maintenance position, and reducing the amount of allocated money for field trips. (Schools Cut Staff, Spending, 2003). The board was still faced with the challenge of addressing the additional $182,000 discrepancy. After evaluating the county budget, members of the board of supervisors voted to modify the school budget by decreasing the percentage deficit from 68% to 50%. The school board would now be expected to cover only $457,692 of the shortfall (Hairston, August 26, 2003).

Petition Filed to Halt Consolidation

A citizen and candidate for the at large position on the Henry County School Board, Sue Harris DeBauche, filed a petition in the Henry County Court System to halt consolidation until after the November 4, 2003 election. DeBauche stated in the petition that the court needed to intervene because: (a) Many people and students would be harmed by the consolidation plan. (b) The current school board would not be harmed if the school board could not move on consolidation. (c) The majority of the public wanted to see consolidation halted, as about 1,000 people had signed petitions in opposition to the plan. (d) After the election, at least two and as many as four new members of the school board would take office January 1. The election would

show whether the public wanted to continue with the consolidation, because the citizens of Henry County could vote for four board members who may oppose the plan. (e) Among other points, the petition criticized the school board's decision to spend up to $30,000 with the public relations firm of John Lambert Associates in Roanoke to help with communication on the consolidation issue (DeBauche Files Petition to Halt Consolidation, 2003). Henry County School Board Attorney, George Lyle, stated that he felt the school board should be allowed to proceed and therefore filed a petition in response to the one by DeBauche (DeBauche Files Petition to Halt Consolidation).

Steering Committee Appointed

The school board proceeded with consolidation plans at the September 4, 2003 monthly meeting by appointing a steering committee composed of: DeWitt House, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, chairman; Charles Preston, Director of Human Resources; Kathryn Wickline, chairman of the school board; Kay Hixson, principal of Figsboro Elementary School; Travis Clemons, principal of John Redd Smith Elementary School; Jonathan Craig, assistant principal of Drewry Mason Middle School; Moriah Dollarhite, assistant principal at Magna Vista High School; Deana Johnson, school psychologist; and Melany Stowe, career development coordinator and public information officer (Henry County School Board, September 4, 2003; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Tracey, September 5, 2003). The steering committee's task was to facilitate the reorganization of Henry County Schools and develop a reasonable plan of action. The committee was also responsible for developing a timeline for the completion of major tasks that would need to be achieved during the 2003–04 school year to ensure consolidation would be implemented in the 2004–05 academic year (Henry County School Board; Participant 5; Tracey). "The committee will make recommendations about how many committees there will be and what types of representation they need," Dodson said (Tracey).

House, chairman of the steering committee, prepared a list of subcommittees needed to address the problems and issues the board would be confronting. House suggested that the subcommittees take the following into consideration: (a) combining or moving support groups, such as parent teacher organizations or booster clubs, (b) extracurricular activities which will

increase in numbers at the middle school and high school levels, (c) faculty transitions which will include combining some staff, (d) student transitions which will include combining student bodies at all levels, (6) transportation issues, and (f) curriculum and instruction which will include how to move instructional programs from one facility to another and combining curriculum programs (Tracey, September 10, 2003). Each subcommittee reported recommendations to the steering committee. The steering committee accepted, modified, or rejected the recommendations and sent the suggestions back to the subcommittees. When the steering committee authorized a subcommittee's recommendations, the proposals were taken to the Henry County School Board for approval (Tracey).

New Horticultural and Livestock Facilities to be Constructed

The board awarded bids for construction of a new horticultural facility and livestock facility at Magna Vista (Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Tracey, September 5, 2003). The old facilities were located at Laurel Park High School which was slated to become a middle school (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Participant 2; Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010; Tracey). In other business, the school board purchased a boundary and route planning service to assist with developing bus routes once schools were closed (Henry County School Board, September 4, 2003; Tracey). Dodson indicated these were the first of many steps to be taken toward consolidation the next year. Dodson stated,

> We have to make continual progress toward the goal of having the schools ready for next year. We need to take full advantage of all the time we have between now and then. I expect we'll have something (on consolidation) every time we (administration and the school board) meet. (Tracey)

More Bids for Renovation and Upgrading Awarded

Ed Page, Mayor of Ridgeway, approached the school board at the October 2, 2003 meeting requesting Ridgeway Elementary School be given to the town for a community center once the school was closed (Henry County School Board, October 2, 2003). In other business, the board awarded a bid to renovate and change Carver Middle School to an elementary school

(Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010). Millner again cast the lone vote against awarding the bid for the renovations. Millner felt the 50 year old building would not be conductive to educating pre-school/kindergarten age students and expressed concern for using county funds to update the building. According to Millner, the area in front of Carver would not accommodate the number of elementary students whose parents would drop off and pick up children (Henry County School Board; Powell, October 3, 2003). A second bid was awarded to convert a technical area at Bassett High School into three separate classrooms which would provide additional space. In a report to the board, the steering committee suggested a list of subcommittees needed, recommended possible members to serve on these subcommittees, and determined meeting dates (Henry County School Board; Powell). (see Appendix G.)

The school board held a special called meeting on October 13, 2003 for the purpose of awarding a contract to assemble a new horticulture facility at Magna Vista High School. The county's previous horticultural facility had been located at Laurel Park High School (Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010). During the meeting, Millner questioned the equity of programs that would be available in the high schools (Henry County School Board, October 13, 2003; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010). "It looks as though the Board is trying to create two separate schools systems," stated Millner (Henry County School Board, p. 3). Dodson explained that there would indeed be equity of programs but not necessarily the same programs would be available in both schools because vocational and career programs were very expensive to operate. According to Dodson, youngsters at both high schools would have opportunities to take the same number of career and technical education and advanced courses but not always the same courses. The open enrollment policy would allow students to enroll at the high school that offered the program best suited for the students' educational needs (Henry County School Board; Participant 5; Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 8).

Legislators Visit Henry County Schools

At the end of the meeting on October 13, 2002, legislators (State Senator Roscoe Reynolds–Ridgeway, Delegates Ward Armstrong–Collinsville, and Robert Hurt–Chatham), board members, and school officials boarded a bus for a tour of Magna Vista High School and Ridgeway Elementary School as part of "Take your Legislators to School Week" (Legislators

Get Lesson, 2003). "The purpose of this is for them (legislators) to come in and see the needs first-hand. They're very supportive of education and very vocal about the relationship between education and economic development," said Dodson (Legislators Get Lesson). "It just reaffirms every time I go into the schools the state of education funding. I hope in this session, we'll be able to convince the majority that we need to fully fund education," said Reynolds (Legislators Get Lesson). Hurt said,

> One thing I love about coming to the schools is that you realize what makes a good school work is the people. I enjoy the school tours in my division and find them to be helpful because funding for education is a big part of my work as a legislator. (Legislators Get Lesson)

Chairman of the Board of Supervisors Supports Consolidation

Board of Supervisors' Chairman David Davis publically endorsed two incumbents and one other pro-consolidation candidate for the upcoming November 2003 elections. Davis stated,

> Only the two incumbents and one new candidate have accepted the consolidation plan and said that they are looking to make the transition for the children a smooth one by working with the transition teams. Those are the candidates who we all need on the school board. (Davis Backs Three, 2003)

According to Davis, the school board is elected to improve schools and with the consolidation plan implemented major improvements would occur. Davis said,

> Our school system needs to be moved into the 21st century with its programs and its technology. By consolidating schools we can offer a larger variety of classes to students. We certainly do not need candidates that speak half-truths and twisted facts. Our children have been through enough. In the end, I feel they will show all of us just how mature they can be. We need to vote for the candidates that have accepted the consolidation plan and we all need to work together to make the transition a smooth one for our children and our school system. (Davis Backs Three)

Three New School Board Members Elected

The 2003 November election saw three new school board members elected to office. Martin Kendall won the at-large seat while Mary Martin and Terri Flanagan were elected in the Ridgeway and Horsepasture districts respectively. "You won't see the board just giving a rubber stamp to anything anymore. I think the rubber-stamp days are gone," said Martin (Tracey, November 5, 2003). "I hope my voice on the school board will result in positive changes for Henry County," Kendall said (Tracey). The three newly elected board members indicated that the issue of consolidation would be revisited. The three new board members wanted to examine the three high school reconfiguration plan to determine if the three high school plan would better serve the students in Henry County. "I'd like to talk this plan over first and make some changes in that. A three-high school plan would be better for the county," said Kendall (Tracey). Flanagan said, "I just want us to work together and make sure we make the right decisions" (Tracey). One of Martin's goals was to improve communication between the central office administrators, board members, school staff members, parents, and residents (Tracey).

New Board Members Speak About Consolidation

Although Millner was worried that preparations for the plan approved in July might have been too far along to stop it, Millner supported the three newly elected board members desire to re-examine the consolidation plan of two-high schools versus three-high schools (Tracey, November 6, 2003). "I'll have to take a good look at where we are. I don't want to waste money. But I don't think we need to close five schools. This plan was put together too hastily," said Millner (Tracey). "I'm not ready to say right now that we're going to turn this around and keep these schools open. I don't know that that's the best thing to do," said Flanagan (Tracey). Martin said,

> We need to see how far they (the board) have committed us. Until then, I don't know what can be done. But I do think it (three high schools) is a possibility. I won't try to stop everything altogether, because I know something has to be done. (Tracey)

Flanagan understood that with a three-high school plan that the students from Fieldale-Collinsville would be split among the three high schools. Flanagan said,

> I know that we have to do something, but I haven't been there and studied this on a daily basis like the (current) board members. We've just got to make sure that the plan is right for all the children. (Tracey)

High School Name and Mascot Committee Makes Recommendations

The high school name and mascot committee was composed of parents and students in Henry County (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010). "The people in the schools that will move wanted new names and mascots, and everyone at the schools that are staying wanted to keep it the same," said Lindsey Wilson of Laurel Park High School (Tracey, November 7, 2003). "We decided to compromise," said Alison Prato of Bassett High School (Tracey). At the November school board meeting, the committee presented the recommendation to leave the high school names the same but use the mascots from the schools that were closing. The members of the committee believed that keeping the school names and adding the mascots of the moving schools would maintain the heritage of each of the schools (Henry County School Board, November 6, 2003; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010; Tracey). The twelve students and parents who composed the committee examined the most economical solution which was keeping the names of the two remaining schools and using the mascots from the two that would become middle schools: Bassett Cavaliers and Magna Vista Lancers. In addition to keeping the schools names and using the closing schools' mascots, the committee suggested combining school colors: keeping blue and white at Bassett while adding orange from Fieldale-Collinsville, and introducing red from Laurel Park to the school colors of navy and gray from Magna Vista. The committee believed the plan offered the best economically sound solutions available and recommended the plan be adopted (Participant 5; Participant 10, September 16, 2010; Participant 14; Tracey).

House said the estimated cost to completely change names, colors, and mascots would total approximately $500,000 (Tracey, November 7, 2003). The projected cost included: painting the schools, painting the stadiums, purchasing new uniforms for all sports and bands, and adding the new names and mascots. If the board accepted the proposal from the committee, the estimated cost would be about $30,000 according to House (Tracey). Some students felt the schools remaining open should keep the current name and mascots (Mascot Allegiance, 2003; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010). Ashley Mullins, a junior in 2003 at Magna Vista, had

spent $300 on a class ring with an emblem of a Warrior on the ring and had no desire to purchase a new a ring (Mascot Allegiance). Terrance Carter, who played football for the Laurel Park Lancers, wanted to continue playing for the Lancers (Mascot Allegiance). “I think it will make our students feel a little more at home going into a new environment. You have the Bassett name but you have your mascot over there,” said Matt Heaton (Mascot Allegiance). Sarah Cobler said the money should be spent on curriculum instead of paint and new uniforms. “I think 20 years down the road it’s not going to matter what mascot you get but what education you get,” said Sarah (Mascot Allegiance).

Curriculum and Instruction Committee Report

Mrs. Gracie Agnew, principal at Fieldale-Collinsville, was the chairman of the curriculum and instructional committee which received input from a committee of students who recommended new course offerings based upon student surveys (Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010). The committee recommended 46 new courses be added to the curriculum in the fall of 2004 (Participant 11; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010; Tracey, November 24, 2003). The registration form for Henry County high schools contained 231 courses for students to consider (Tracey). The class offerings were contingent on the number of students enrolling in the course. “I know here at F-C, you have students who want to take a class, and it’s sad when you're not able to offer it. If we go to consolidated high schools, we will be able to offer more,” said Agnew (Tracey). Not all classes will be offered at both schools but students had the freedom to attend the school which best addressed the student’s educational needs (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 11). Some of the new courses were added based on feedback from former students enrolled in college. Because not all dual enrollment courses could be transferred as a core subject, advanced placement courses were added. Career and technical courses were added based on surveys returned to the committee (Participant 11; Participant 14; Tracey). Registration was slated to be completed by December 19, 2003 (Tracey).

School Names and Mascots to Remain

The school board opted not to accept the recommendation of the names, colors, and mascots committee at the December 4, 2003 monthly meeting (Participant 5, interview July 28,

2010; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010). School board member, Cecil made the motion to leave the name and mascots the same. During the previous year, Cecil had voted to eliminate middle school sports. The cost of middle school sports had been approximately the same amount of money needed to make the suggested changes in colors and mascots. Cecil felt the additional cost of approximately $30,000 should not be spent on needless things (Henry County School Board, December 4, 2003; Tracey, December 10, 2003). Franklin seconded the motion stating concern that Martinsville City Schools would eventually be forced into the county system and therefore, only the city schools would be able to keep the heritage of the schools intact (Henry County School Board). "We just don't have the money, and in two or three years, people really won't care about the mascots," said outgoing board member Tom Martin (Tracey). Millner thanked the committee for the efforts and hard work but voted against the mascot changes because Millner was opposed to the two-high school consolidation plan. Millner stated,

> I don't want Laurel Park to lose its identity. I think the two high schools will be a disaster and we'll have to reopen another school. I would hope it would be Laurel Park, because that makes the most sense. This is where the population is shifting. We say we don't have money, but we're starting 46 new courses. We find the money to do what we want to do. They (the other board members who voted against change) were using money as an excuse. (Tracey)

Wickline and Clifton believed changing the mascots and spending $30,000 one time was the only fair thing to do (Henry County School Board, December 4, 2003; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010; Tracey, December 10, 2003). "Some people just don't want to change anything, but we're talking about (a large number of) seniors coming from Laurel Park and F-C who will have nothing in their new school from their old," said Clifton (Tracey). The motion passed five to two. "I was disappointed in the vote. They (the board members who voted against change) were trying to make a problem out of the money. But it was to be phased in. It might not have cost $30,000 right off," stated Wickline (Tracey).

Additional Contracts Awarded for Renovations

Even though, three new board members were taking office in January 2004, the school board continued awarding contracts for the completion of renovation projects required before consolidation could be successful. The board awarded contracts to complete Phase II of renovations at Bassett High School and finalized site preparation work at Magna Vista High School for the horticultural facility (Henry County School Board, December 4, 2003; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010). At a special called meeting December 15, 2003, the board awarded a contract to complete modifications for 13 additional classrooms at Magna Vista High School. A contract to upgrade the electrical circuitry at Drewry Mason Middle School was awarded. The final contract for construction of a parking lot entrance/exit at Magna Vista was granted (Henry County School Board, December 15, 2003; Participant 5; Participant 8).

Curriculum Expos Held

In planning for consolidation in the fall of 2004, Magna Vista and Bassett High Schools held "Curriculum Expos" in December of 2003. The Expos provided an opportunity for parents and students in eighth through eleventh grade to receive information on the new and existing course offerings for the 2004–05 school year. Some of the new classes offered included: creative writing, sports medicine, trigonometry, psychology, principles of engineering, industrial maintenance technology, firefighting, forensic science, early childhood education, and the Teacher Cadet program (Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010; Tracey, December 8, 2003). Guidance counselors were present to answer questions about graduation requirements and how students earn verified credits. "All courses will be shared with parents and students. Some teachers will have syllabi, or videos, and we'll have Power Point presentations going on. It'll be exciting," said Linda Dorr, Career and Technical Education Director for Henry County (Tracey).

New School Board Members Publically Discuss Plan 2

Although the three newly elected school board members had not taken office in December 2003, the three implied in the *Martinsville Bulletin* that consolidation might not proceed as passed by the 2003 school board (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010). "I don't

think it's gone too far. I still think we need a change," said Milton Kendall, the newly elected at large member, speaking in regards to the $1.7 million already awarded to proceed with renovations (Tracey, December 23, 2003). "I still haven't given up on getting it (the plan) stopped. I hate to see any of the high schools close. But I'd rather see three than two," said Kendall (Mascot Issue, 2003). "As far as I can see, nothing has been done that didn't need to be done. I'm still hoping to see three high schools," stated Flanagan, newly elected member from the Horsepasture District (Tracey). The newly elected member from the Ridgeway District, Mary Martin, was still considering the best way to reconfigure schools but suggested that consolidation should slow down (Tracey).

Prior to the first meeting of the school board with the new members, Kendall, Flanagan, and Wickline expressed concern about Laurel Park remaining open as a high school and Fieldale-Collinsville becoming a middle school. If this scenario were to occur the Fieldale-Collinsville students would be split among the three remaining high schools (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010). "I've talked to some of the kids from Collinsville, and they're getting ready to go to Bassett (High School), then we (the new board members) come along and say we want three high schools, and they think the community will be divided," said Flanagan (Tracey, January 5, 2004).

School Board Reorganized

The school board reorganized at the first meeting in January, 2004. For the past 15 years Wickline had served as chairperson of the school board (Millner Takes Helm, 2004; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010; Wickline, Millner, 2004). The three newly elected officials along with Millner decided to unseat Wickline as chairperson. Millner was tapped as the chair and Flanagan as the vice chair for the 2004 year by a 4 to 3 vote (Henry County School Board, January 8, 2004; Millner Takes Helm; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 9). The votes were split between board members for consolidation and those opposed to the plan (Millner Takes Helm; Participant 4). The newly elected leadership team appeared to be anti-consolidation (Millner Takes Helm). Approximately two and one-half hours later, the same group who voted Millner as chair, decided to suspend consolidation. Martin alleged the suspension would not be a lengthy one, but thought new board members needed time to review the finances of consolidation.

Consolidation Plan 2 Halted by New Board Members

The first board meeting with the newly elected officials saw approximately 75 people attend the meeting in an area which roughly held 30 people (Monks, January 9, 2004). Prior to the 4 to 3 vote to halt consolidation heated discussions occurred (Monks; Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 3, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010). Willie Martin, a Laurel Park High School teacher and a parent of children who would be affected by consolidation, said,

> I believe that disaster will hit Henry County only if we turn away from the current school board plan to consolidate. These students have psychologically prepared themselves to make this move and actually are more than eager to go. Haven't we played with their emotions long enough? (Monks)

Mr. Darryl Holland criticized the four members who voted to suspend consolidation indicating students felt like ping pong balls being batted around (Monks). Holland said the students would be at more at ease if the board just stuck with the original consolidation plan. "Our children are ready to go and I say let them," stated Holland (Monks). "There needs to be a decision made, the roller-coaster effect has gone on too long," chimed in Mr. Bonell Young, the band director from Fieldale-Collinsville High School who was afraid students might not be able to participate in the Bands of America competition because of the consolidation suspension (Monks). Andy Parker, a Henry County Supervisor, indicated that funds would be freed up and an improved curriculum would exist if consolidation occurred. In Parker's opinion, changing the plan would squander taxpayers' money that had already been spent on renovations for consolidation as well as dashing the hopes of kids who are looking forward to the new classes being offered. "As a parent, I want the best education I can get for my children. That curriculum was designed to prepare our children for the future," said Parker (Monks).

As a result of Martin's motion to suspend consolidation, many people in attendance at the school board meeting made negative comments towards Martin. Martin was asked by Carver Middle School Principal Kim Yates why Martin had not researched the financial situation concerning consolidation during the two months since being elected. Sandra Wimbish, a Collinsville resident, accused the group who voted to suspend consolidation of doing so for ulterior motives. "Some of you are saying you're for education but you're for keeping Laurel Park open. And don't say you don't have a three-school plan in mind. I'm not stupid," said

Wimbish (Monks, January 9, 2004). Another Collinsville resident, Kim Joyce informed Martin that the three high school plan had been favored by Martin according to statements made by Martin in the *Martinsville Bulletin* (Monks). At this point Martin became upset and stated, "Don't direct everything at me, me, me. I was directed to make this motion" (Monks). Other members of the audience wanted to know if an illegal meeting between board members had taken place prior to the scheduled school board meeting. In an interview after the meeting, Martin said a meeting had not taken place but that some of the board members had communicated with each other on the phone (Monks).

New Board Members Tour Henry County Schools

Dodson and Watlington, Director of Facilities for Henry County School Board, and school board members boarded a bus to visit the schools in Henry County on Saturday, January 10, 2004 (Monks, January 11, 2004; Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Participant 9, September 16, 2010). School board member, Mary Martin, who worked16 hours the previous day, did not attend the tour of the schools (Monks). Principals from each of the schools were available to answer any questions board members had. According to Millner, the tour offered the three new members an opportunity to view the completed renovation projects, to assess the renovations in progress, and to verify the need for future renovations necessary for consolidation to proceed. Since winning the election in November, Kendall had made a priority of visiting all the schools in Henry County. Flanagan had not toured any of the schools previously. Flanagan asked questions of several of the building principals. Flanagan said, "I'm really loving this. I'm loving this because I'm getting answers to my questions" (Monks).

Two School Board Members Voiced Opinions Publically

Two school board members voiced ideas and concerns about consolidation in Henry County in an interview conducted by the *Martinsville Bulletin*. Kendall stated, "But people in Collinsville don't want their (students) split up. So to be fair to them, we should look at four" (Tracey, January 11, 2004). Kendall voiced opinions during the campaign that all four high schools should remain open and that 7th and 8th grade students should be moved to the high school buildings. Millner was concerned with spending money renovating buildings that were more than a half century old. "I don't agree with fixing up these 60-year-old buildings. We need

new schools in Henry County," said Millner (Tracey). Since the topic of consolidation had risen two years before and Millner was the lone opponent of consolidation, Millner indicated pleasure with the direction of the new board. "It feels good to have some support," Millner said (Tracey).

School Board Members Received Answers about Consolidation

To provide board members answers concerning renovation expenditures, bus routes, course offerings, and building capacity if the number of students increased in the future, a special called school board meeting was held on January 12, 2004 (Henry County School Board, January 12, 2004; Monks, January 13, 2004). Board members questioned the central office staff during the meeting about future and past consolidation cost, bus routes, curriculum changes, and enrollment projects (Henry County School Board; Monks). At the end of the meeting the announcement of another special called meeting to be held on Wednesday, January 14, 2004, to receive public input was made (Henry County School Board). "The 14th (Wednesday) will be a meeting where a decision is going to be made, but it won't be a debate. It won't get out of hand like the last one ... We will maintain order," Millner said (Monks).

Students Upset that Consolidation Halted

After the vote to halt consolidation, some students made feelings and wishes known. Will Nelson, a sophomore at Laurel Park, appeared to support consolidation stating, "I want to stay (at Laurel Park) but I kinda want to go, too, because there ain't as many girls at this school as there would be at the other one" (Students Frustrated, 2004). Sophomore Lindsey Wilson from Laurel Park said a number of students from Laurel Park were stressed out by the decision to halt consolidation. Wilson along with friends were excited about going to Magna Vista in the fall and having the opportunity to take new advanced courses which would ultimately make the students more attractive when applying for colleges. "I think about it a lot. I've kinda decided I want to go to Magna Vista. Even if they don't go through with consolidation, I'm kind of considering going over there anyway," said 16 year old Wilson (Students Frustrated).

On the other hand, some students were excited to remain at their current school for another year. Brandon Dillard, a junior at Fieldale-Collinsville said, "My friends were excited. We was talking about next season -- football, basketball" (Students Frustrated, 2004). Dillard had hopes that Fieldale-Collinsville would remain open until graduation in 2005 but if

consolidation was going to take place Dillard wanted to know so preparations for the 2004–05 school year could be made (Students Frustrated). "I'd like them to make a decision. I think it's really hard because you don't know if you're going to be with your friends next year. They're putting us on an emotional roller coaster," said Katelyn Ison, a Fieldale-Collinsville sophomore (Students Frustrated). Ison did not favor the three-high school plan which would split the Fieldale-Collinsville students among the three remaining high schools. Ison said, "I am horrified at the by the prospect of being separated from my friends" (Students Frustrated).

Consolidation May Cause Segregated Schools

In an interview with the *Martinsville Bulletin*, Millner signified opposition to the consolidation plan because of a racial imbalance among students within Henry County schools (Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010). "I'm real concerned if we go back to segregated schools. I don't really want a school with a majority African-American population because that is what Laurel Park is and that's why I think (it) is catching so much flack," the Iriswood District school board representative said concerning implementation consolidation Plan 2 (Monks, January 14, 2004). The minority makeup of Bassett High School was predicted to have 25.2% of the student population while 41.7% of Magna Vista's population would represent minorities based on 2003–04 enrollment figures (Monks). During the 2003–04 school year, the minority populations at the four high schools were: Bassett 24%, Fieldale-Collinsville 27%, Laurel Park 59%, and Magna Vista 32% (Monks). Millner suggested the minority populations should be about 33% at each high school which would mirror the racial makeup of Henry County. Based on this reason, Millner supported a three or four-high school reconfiguration plan (Monks).

Consolidation Plan 2 Back on Track

At a special called school board meeting held January 14, 2004, 47 speakers addressed school board members. Thirty-five of the speakers favored continuing with implementation of Plan 2 and 12 opposed Plan 2 (Henry County School Board, January 14, 2004; Monks, January 15, 2004; Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010). Of the 35 speakers in favor of Plan 2, nine were middle and high school students in Henry County. Amy Kanode, a Magna Vista student, indicted that the students of Henry County were ready to meet the challenges of consolidation while addressing the board. "This consolidation has the opportunity to be revolutionary -- which

means ‘most awesome,” said Kanode, while encouraging the board members to go forward with consolidation (Monks). “Without consolidation, I am faced with a lack of challenging courses for next year,” Courtney Newman, a Bassett High School junior said. “Consolidation is a step forward -- a step for a better future for Henry County” (Monks). “We feel that adopting the three high school plan for consolidation would not be the best option because it would be a step backward,” Matt Heaton Fieldale-Collinsville’s sophomore class president said (Monks).

Eleven school officials spoke during the meeting on January 14, 2004. Three were principals. The principal of Fieldale-Collinsville, Mrs. Gracie Agnew, blasted critics who used racial imbalance as an argument for or against reconfiguring schools stating, “That way of thinking is a problem” (Monks, January 15, 2004). Agnew, who is Black, said racial imbalance was not the problem facing school officials but that declining enrollment was a challenge (Monks; Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010). Agnew questioned what would happen if consolidation did not proceed since athletic schedules had been based upon consolidation plans. “We won’t have a football schedule next year at Laurel Park and Fieldale-Collinsville because we made plans based on the reconfiguration,” Agnew said. “We won’t have a team to compete -- that is a concern of ours” (Monks). Cindy Joyce, a guidance counselor at Bassett High School, told the board the students were traumatized after the board halted consolidation. “The look on the children’s faces would have truly unnerved you,” Joyce said (Monks).

During the meeting on January 14, 2004, Franklin moved that the Henry County School Board revoke a previous motion made during the January 8, 2004 meeting that suspended renovation projects that were necessary for consolidation in Henry County to occur (Henry County School Board, January 14, 2004). In addition to the motion to revoke the previous motion, Franklin moved that the superintendent and/or designees be directed to work toward the completion and implementation of Plan 2 in order that classes would begin on September 7, 2004 (Henry County School Board; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010). The motion was seconded by Wickline. Cecil, Flanagan, Franklin, and Wickline voted in favor of the motion. Kendall, Martin, and Millner opposed. The motion carried (Hairston, January 15, 2004; Henry County School Board; Monks, January 15, 2004; Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 3, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010). Flanagan, who previously voted on January 8 to suspend consolidation, was the swing vote necessary to proceed with Plan 2 for consolidation (Participant 3; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010). Flanagan said, “I

decided to move forward with reconfiguration after touring school construction sites and listening closely to my constituents' desires" (Monks). The people of Collinsville and Fieldale did not want the children separated into three different high schools (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Participant 4; Participant 7). Flanagan's vote was influenced by the people in the communities who spoke concerning students being separated into three high schools (Monks). A loud round of applause erupted from the nearly 360 residents of Henry County who attended the special called meeting (Monks). Henry County Sheriff Cassell looked relaxed and relieved following the meeting which had approximately 25 to 30 policemen in attendance (Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010). Cassell said,

> This was one of the most intense meetings, but it couldn't have gone better in terms of how the people conducted themselves. Despite being hit so hard for so long, the people's conduct here tonight speaks to the caliber of community we have. (Hairston)

Mixed emotions were expressed by students following the school board's vote to get back on track with consolidation. Various groups of students were excited about going to school with different kids, while others were apprehensive about changing schools. Many students who were interviewed by the newspaper were relieved and felt a huge burden had been lifted when the school board finally decided to proceed with consolidation. Some students at Laurel Park and Fieldale-Collinsville continued to hope that consolidation would disappear (Monks, January 16, 2004).

School Board Members Vowed Consolidation Would Go Smoothly

After the motion to reconfigure schools in Plan 2 had been passed, the three school board members voting against the plan vowed to ensure consolidation went as smoothly as possible (Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010). "I will get behind this plan and do everything I can and make sure everything that the kids and the teachers have been promised is produced," Martin, the Ridgeway Division school board representative, said. "I will do my part to make it successful" (Monks, January 18, 2004). Millner said,

> I'm going to support the two high school plan, and it's not because I think it's the best plan, but it's the plan that has been accepted by the board. In my position, I'd be derelict of duty if I didn't. (Monks)

"It's been a touchy situation, but I hope it's over now and we can move forward and look ahead to the future," said Kendall (Monks). Millner stated the board would revisit the recommendations of the committee that suggested keeping the names of the two high schools and using mascots from the schools slated to close and incorporating the colors from all four schools (Monks). The previous school board had rejected the idea of spending $30,000 to add the colors and mascots (Tracey, December 10, 2003).

Divided School Board–Good Thing

While some people thought a divided school board was a bad thing, Millner saw the division as a refreshing change from the way business was previously done by school board members. The split vote of 4–3 on consolidation demonstrated school board members were finally receptive to what constituents wanted (Monks, January 25, 2004; Participant 3, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010). "In the past the board has been unanimous on everything, which means some board members voted because of other board members without giving thought to what their constituents want," Millner said (Monks). Millner hoped the community would perceive this board as a board for the people of Henry County rather than a board with a reputation of being distant with the public. Millner felt a major change needed to occur in the way the board selected a chairman. Prior to Millner becoming chairman, Wickline had been the chairman for 15 years straight (Monks; Participant 4). Millner believed the chairman should be sequentially changed allowing different leadership styles. Millner hoped the school board would arrive at a viable plan for the future of the Henry County School Division during his tenure on the school board (Monks).

Another Budget Shortfall

At the January 29, 2004 public hearing for input on proposed FY 2005 budget, members of the school board learned of $450,000 shortfall due to skyrocketing retirement costs (Monks, January 30, 2004). "This is clearly more severe than in past years and the basic reason is the increase in our retirement rate contribution for teachers," said Beckner, Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance (Monks). Beckner informed school board members to expect $2 million for projected expenditures with revenues of $1.56 million making a disparity of nearly one–half million dollars (Monks). The $1.46 million in projected savings under Plan 2 kept the shortfall

from being tripled according to Beckner (Monks). “If we didn’t downsize or consolidate the picture would be very bleak,” stated Beckner (Monks). School board members indicated that a priority for the 2004–05 school year was to provide teachers and administrators with a 5% raise which was built into the budget (Monks).

School Name and Mascot Revisited

The school board agenda for February 5, 2004 included consideration of mascot/color change for Henry County High Schools (Henry County School Board, February 5, 2004; Monks, February 6, 2004). Abigail Staples, a junior from Fieldale-Collinsville and member of the school names, colors, and mascots committee, addressed the school board. Staples suggested the most logical way to solve the issue would be to make Bassett the Cavaliers with blue, white, and orange as the colors and make Magna Vista the Lancers with navy, gray, and red colors (Henry County School Board; Monks; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010). Various petitions from Fieldale-Collinsville and Laurel Park students were presented to the school board encouraging the board to change the mascots and colors for Bassett and Magna Vista High Schools (Henry County School Board; Monks). Wickline made a motion to follow the recommendations of the committee but the motion died for lack of a second (Henry County School Board). Kendall made a motion to incorporate two Laurel Park colors into Magna Vista’s colors and two Fieldale-Collinsville colors into Bassett’s colors. Flanagan seconded the motion (Henry County School Board; Participant 9). A lengthy discussion occurred and Cecil amended Kendall’s motion to change the colors for Bassett to blue, orange, and white and to change the colors for Magna Vista to navy blue, gray, and red which was the recommendation of the school names, colors, and mascots committee. Franklin seconded the motion. The motion was defeated by a 5–2 vote (Henry County School Board; Monks). Following additional discussion, Kendall’s original motion to incorporate two colors from Laurel Park into Magna Vista’s colors and two colors from Fieldale-Collinsville into Bassett’s colors passed unanimously (Henry County School Board; Monks; Participant 9).

“We’re not gonna look stupid or anything. Some art people can come up with something that’s going to look reasonable,” said Flanagan, referring to how the school emblems and sports uniforms would look with all those colors (Monks, February 6, 2004). Ridgeway Division board member Martin stated, “I know that the kids are disappointed with this. Our options today were

to give you your colors or give you nothing. I knew coming here today what would or would not pass with this board" (Monks). Millner indicated that incorporating the new colors would be up to each school's booster clubs since the school board would not provide funding for new uniforms or for color scheme changes. Parents from Fieldale-Collinsville and Laurel Park stormed out of the school board meeting after the vote to add Fieldale-Collinsville and Laurel Park colors passed. "It's going to be a color nightmare. It's crazy, it's just crazy," one woman said. "Hey, we can be the Rainbow Warriors," chimed in her friend. "Once again Henry County comes through in shining colors," added another (Monks). Because parents were both visibly and verbally upset with the school board's decision, doors had to be closed for the continuation of the meeting (Monks).

Reverend Tyler Millner Speaks Out

During the same meeting held February 5, 2004, Reverend Tyler Millner addressed the school board. Reverend Millner felt Plan 2 was unethical, had racial overtones, was not good stewardship (Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010), and Plan 2 could possibly impact the economy of the eastern half of Henry County, therefore Reverend Millner asked the board to consider a motion that would amend Plan 2 (Henry County School Board, February 5, 2004). Reverend Millner also asked for the resignation of Superintendent Sharon Dodson (Henry County School Board; Monks, February 6, 2004). If Dodson did not tender a resignation, then the board should entertain a procedure for the process of review and consideration of the leadership Dodson brought to the school division (Henry County School Board). According to Reverend Millner, Dodson was deceptive in informing the board that there was not enough money to operate the schools but found $1.5 million to reorganize and renovate buildings listed in Plan 2 for consolidation (Henry County School Board). Finally, Reverend Millner asked that in the future the school board consider working with community partners where education was concerned (Henry County School Board). The school board listened to Reverend Millner but did not act upon his suggestions (Monks).

Administrative Assignments Presented to Board

During the February 5, 2004 school board meeting, administrative assignments for the 2004–05 year were considered (Henry County School Board, February 5, 2004; Dodson

Defends, 2004). Millner and Martin opposed the assignments due to a racial imbalance created in the schools. Millner was upset that there would be no black administrators at Magna Vista High School. Martin agreed with Millner and wanted to make changes to administrative assignments but did not divulge the changes. Four of the administrators were black while the remaining 25 were white with two positions not being filled (Dodson Defends). "We struggle with racial balance of the administration and teaching staff. We'd like it to reflect the community but that's difficult for everyone. I don't know many school systems that can achieve that. We probably do better than most," Dodson stated (Dodson Defends). Dodson and the central office staff worked to achieve racial balance as much as possible with the people who were certified for administrative positions (Dodson Defends).

Disposal of Four Buildings

The school board had three options to dispose of the four buildings (Bassett Middle School, Fieldale Elementary, Spencer-Penn Elementary, and Ridgeway Elementary) that were vacated after the 2003–04 school year ended (Henry County School Board, March 4, 2004; Monks, March 5, 2004; Tracey, April 5, 2004). Figsboro Elementary, which was built in 1965 and still in good shape, was retained as a possible instructional site for future needs (Henry County School Board; Tracey). At the March 4, 2004 school board meeting, board members decided to form a committee called the Surplus Real Estate Disposition Committee to determine what to do with the five buildings that would no longer be in use (Tracey). The committee was made up of: James Beckner (chairman and Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations), Milton Kendall (board member), Mary Martin (board member), Lynn Fitzgibbons (principal representative), a county government official, a patron from each affected school zone area (Bassett, Fieldale, Figsboro, Ridgeway, and Spencer), Clay Watlington (Director of Facilities), and George Lyle (school board attorney) (Henry County School Board; Monks; Tracey). The options the committee could bring to the board for consideration were: (a) auction the buildings off, (b) lease the buildings, or (c) transfer ownership of the buildings to the board of supervisors (Henry County School Board; Monks; Tracey). A public hearing had to be held and the board of supervisors had to consent before Options 1 or 2 could proceed (Monks; Tracey).

Dr. Dodson's Contract Revisited

During a closed session of a school board meeting in February 2004, a board member brought up Dodson's contract (Dodson's Contract, 2004). "Everybody was talking ... I don't know who exactly brought it up and said we needed to go over her contract," Flanagan said (Dodson's Contract). Typically the superintendent's contract was reviewed at the school board members' retreat during the month of November at the Virginia School Board Association Annual Conference in Williamsburg. The three new board members were seeking more information on Dodson's contract since the newly elected officials were not in office during the annual retreat (Dodson's Contract). Dodson had not requested a review of the existing contract. Dodson was paid approximately $100,000 annually as stated in the contract which would expire in 2006 (Dodson's Contract). Millner and Martin declined to make a statement citing a personnel issue but Flanagan said,

> I think she is doing a fantastic job. From what I can get from other school board members and past school board members, when she was brought here, they put the question to her: "We need the SOLs passed and the schools accredited." They asked if she could do that and she said "yes" and she has done that. She's a good leader and she's proven that. (Dodson's Contract)

At the time, the school board did not vote on renewing Dodson contract (Dodson's Contract).

Advancement of Money Needed for Drewry Mason Renovations Denied

The board of supervisors voted 3 to 2 to approve a request by Dodson to advance $750,000 to cover approved purchase orders related to renovations at Drewry Mason (Hall, March 23, 2004). According to George Lyle, county attorney, the motion failed as a result of a state mandate requiring a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of serving members of the board of supervisors for money amounts over $500 (Hall). Participant 12 (November 1, 2010) said, "This was the only incident recalled of not advancing the school division money during consolidation." Paula Burnette was representing the board of supervisors at a meeting with Governor Mark Warner and was not present at the March 22, 2004 meeting, and therefore did not cast a vote for the advancement (Hall). Supervisors Andy Parker, Jim Adams, and David Davis voted in favor of advancing the money while H. G. Vaughn and Debra Buchanan voted against advancement of the money (Hall). "I was completely perplexed by H.G. and Debra's

vote," Parker said in frustration. "Ultimately, it ends up delaying construction and the constructions got to happen. The most efficient time to do it is when school's out" (Hall). Dodson and the school board had anticipated the funds would be available but due to Pillowtex closing, $500,000 was cut from the local budget (Hall). Students from Ridgeway Elementary, which was slated to close at the beginning of 2004–05 school year, were to attend Drewry Mason which was being converted from a middle school into an elementary school (Participant 3, July 28, 2010). Dodson stated, "We'll start school with the students at Ridgeway and we'll continue to work on Drewry Mason" (Hall).

In the *Martinsville Bulletin*, Dodson pointed out that the vote to not advance the money would not stop consolidation, only slow it down a bit (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; School Budget, 2004). Dodson indicated that the board would prioritize the list of capital improvements and determine if work would begin July 1, 2004 at Drewry Mason. By not putting bids out until July 1, renovations could not begin until the middle of August because of a six weeks span necessary to get bid specifications, seek bids, order materials, get permits and certifications according to Dodson (School Budget) . "It would have been helpful to start now and get everything committed so we could send the first truck out when the last student leaves Drewry Mason at the end of the school year this spring," Dodson added (School Budget).

"The problem is, if they (school officials) come asking for funds from next year's budget, they have to justify a need," said Ridgeway District Supervisor Vaughn who voted against advancing $750,000 to the school board (Official: School Vote, 2004; Participant 4, July 28, 2010). Vaughn implied the school board did not demonstrate need when requesting the $750,000 appropriation (Official: School Vote; Participant 4). "They don't have their numbers together to show that they have a shortage this year and need to pull from next year's budget," Vaughn said (Official: School Vote). Newly elected school board member, Martin, agreed with Vaughn. Martin said,

> Classically, the school board has money left over each year that they encumber (commit to particular uses) and carry over. I talked to (Assistant Superintendent of Finance) James Beckner a few weeks ago and he indicated to me that he wouldn't know how much those numbers would be until April or May. The supervisors were just being cautious. Nobody's trying to cut anybody off at the knees here. (Official: School Vote)

According to Martin, specs were being drawn up with bids expected beginning April 19, 2004 and ending May 3, 2004 (Official: School Vote). Martin indicated the board would vote on awarding contracts for work at Drewry Mason at the May 6, 2004 school board regular meeting (Official: School Vote).

School Board Approves 2005 Fiscal Year Budget

Even though the state of Virginia had not passed a budget for 2005 fiscal year, the Henry County School Board was required by law to pass a budget prior to April 1, 2004 (Patterson, March 31, 2004). Dodson, central office staff, and school board members arrived at a $66.2 million budget which was an increase of $5.2 million over the 2004 fiscal year budget (Henry County School Board, March 30, 2004; Patterson). The reason given for the budget increase was that the state would appropriate approximately $41 million which was an increase of $4.8 million (Patterson). The school board arrived at these numbers based on two proposed budgets, one by Governor Warner of $59 billion and the second a $62 billion package by the Senate (Patterson). The budget included a 5% raise for employees and an increase of $1.1 million to $4.1 million for the Virginia Retirement System for all employees (Patterson). The school board budget requested $16,694,215 from local funds which represented a 3% decrease from the previous year's local funds from the Henry County Board of Supervisors (Henry County School Board). "We've gone with what we feel is a conservative revenue estimate from the state," Dodson said in presenting the proposal (Patterson). The board approved the budget by a margin of 5 to 1. Kendall, the at large member, voted against the budget because 25% of the schools in Henry County were being closed at the beginning of the 2004–05 school year and the projected budget had a $5.2 million increase (Henry County School Board; Patterson).

Dr. Dodson Offered a New Contract

Resolution R 04-12 which pertained to offering Dr. Dodson a new contract was voted on at the April 8, 2004 board meeting. (see Appendix H.) The motion passed by a 4–3 vote (Henry County School Board, April 8, 2004). The new contract would supersede the contract that Dodson had that ran through the 2005–06 school year. In the new contract, Dodson received a 5% increase in salary which was what was proposed for all Henry County School Division employees for the 2004–05 school year. Two new items were added to the new contract: Dodson

would receive a $600 monthly automobile allowance in lieu of being provided a county car; the board also agreed to purchase 4 years of retirement from the Virginia Retirement System for time Dodson had worked out of the state of Virginia (Patterson, April 9, 2004).

Millner voted against renewing Dodson's contract. "The school system is going through its most chaotic time since integration," Millner said, adding that he wanted to see how the consolidated system worked for a year before committing to a new contract for Dodson (Patterson, April 9, 2003). Millner implied that Dodson's contract was revisited before time due to superintendent vacancies in surrounding counties in Virginia and that implementing consolidation had not been discussed prior to offering Dodson a new contract. Board member, Martin implied that she had not been on the board long enough to evaluate the job Dodson was doing as superintendent and therefore, could not support issuing a new contract for Dodson (Patterson, April 9, 2004). During the school board meeting, Martin quoted from a handbook about how to be a successful board member, and read from the section on the warning signs of board failure stated: "A fourth sign of failure is evident when the board does not listen to the community. Any board that behaves as if its only obligation is to vote the opinions and convictions of its members and brook no interference from the community is well on its way to serious failure" (Henry County School Board, April 8, 2004). Kendall, the at large member of the board, voted against issuing a new contract because the constituents of his division spoke against the role Dodson played in consolidation (Patterson, April 9, 2004). Millner indicated his willingness to work with Dodson to improve the county schools. Millner said, "The majority has voted. And we'll go with it" (Patterson, April 11, 2004). Wickline, Franklin, Cecil, and Flanagan voted in favor of issuing the new contract. "We didn't want anyone else to have her," Horsepasture District representative Flanagan said in statement supporting her vote for a new contract for Dodson (Patterson, April 11, 2004). The remaining board members voting in favor of the new contract did not make public statements concerning the votes.

Public Hearing Held on Proposed 2005 Fiscal Year Budget

On April 15, 2004, a public hearing was held on the proposed Henry County fiscal year 2005 budget (Patterson, April 16, 2004). Two people spoke in support of returning the $881,636 that the board of supervisors had previously cut from the school board's budget (Patterson). Jesse Crawford expressed concerns to the board of supervisors about the elementary schools in Henry

County. “Elementary schools have been the stepchild of this system for decades. Put the money back,” Crawford, a resident from the Horsepasture District, said (Patterson). The board of supervisors did not advance $750,000 to the school board for renovations at Drewry Mason which caused Crawford to be upset. Ridgeway Elementary School was a worry for Crawford because Ridgeway had several unsecure entrances and was full of asbestos. Crawford wanted Ridgeway to close and Drewry Mason to open as an elementary school for the Ridgeway community (Patterson). Patricia Grandinetti, the principal at Campbell Court Elementary, also spoke encouraging the board of supervisors to return the money cut and to allow the school board to keep any surplus monies to apply to future capital outlay projects within the school division (Patterson).

School board member Martin did not want to receive unjust criticisms from the public due to the difficult decisions the board of supervisors had to make concerning the school board budget. In referring to the school board, Martin said, “Spilled milk in my kitchen is my problem” (Patterson, April 16, 2004). Martin hoped the board of supervisors and school board could communicate better and form “one winning team for all of Henry County” (Patterson).

Supervisor Vaughn asked what knowledge Dodson had about an e-mail floating through the school system about the 5% raise being tied to the $881,636 being cut from the school board’s budget by the board of supervisors (Patterson, April 16, 2004). The board of supervisors was informed that Dodson had just received the e-mail shortly before attending the public hearing on the budget (Patterson). Teachers’ raises were dependent upon the state budget and were not tied to the local funds according to Dodson (Patterson).

The county’s proposed budget reflected the change in the composite index which decreased from 0.29 to 0.27. Henry County Central Accountant, Jimmie Wright said,

> The composite index is the state’s funding formula that determines the county’s ability to pay. If that (index) decreases, it means the county doesn’t have the resources to fund the school like they originally did. That resulted in an increase of the state’s share (of school funding) of $874,436. (Hall, April 20, 2004)

Surplus Real Estate Disposition Committee Recommendations

On May 6, 2004, the Surplus Real Estate Disposition Committee recommended that the board hold a public hearing to place Bassett Middle and Spence-Penn Elementary Schools on the

market. Figsboro Elementary would be retained by the school board since the building was the most modern of the facilities slated for closing. Fieldale Elementary would be transferred to Henry County. Ridgeway Elementary would remain open due to lack of funds to complete renovations to convert Drewry Mason from a middle school to an elementary school. Once Ridgeway Elementary was vacated it would be transferred back to Henry County or sold (Patterson, May 7, 2004). The motion to accept the recommendations of the Surplus Real Estate Disposition Committee passed by a margin of six to one (Henry County School Board, May 6, 2004; Patterson). Martin voted no because of disagreements with some of the recommendations (Henry County School Board, May 6, 2004; Patterson). Placing the schools in responsible hands was a critical part of consolidation according to Martin. "They may not be community schools anymore, but the buildings are still part of the community. ... We haven't explored all the viable options yet," stated Martin (Patterson). During the June 3, 2004 school board meeting the board voted unanimously to return the three properties back to Henry County following a public hearing (Henry County School Board, June 3, 2004; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010).

Lump Sum Funding Rescinded

During the May 24, 2004 Henry County Board of Supervisors' meeting, Vaughn made a motion to rescind lump sum funding granted to the school board during the fiscal 2004 school year (Hairston & Hall, May 25, 2004; Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010). "The schools' budget comes from the taxpayers and categorical funding will ensure that spending is publicly accounted for. I just like the flexibility of categorical appropriation," said Vaughn citing reasons for the motion (Hairston & Hall). The motion carried by a four to two vote with Davis and Parker voting against the motion. Both supervisors wanted to see lump sum funding continued. Davis said, "I think the school board did a good job managing last year's appropriations" (Hairston & Hall). "It shows a lack of trust by certain members of the board. In light of all the changes we are going through, it certainly would help to have greater harmony and trust between the boards," said school board member, Franklin (Hairston & Hall). Dodson added, "I'm disappointed that only two supervisors have confidence in the school system's ability to administer its budget" (Hairston & Hall).

Merger Between County and City School Divisions Reexamined

In June, 2004 the subcommittee that studied the merger of Martinsville City Schools and Henry County Schools recommended consolidation by 2008 to both school boards and the board of supervisors at a meeting held on June 10, 2004 (Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; School Merger Urged, 2004). The subcommittee consisted of Millner and Franklin from the Henry County School Board, James Johnson and Nancy Baker from the Martinsville School Board, Superintendents Sharon Dodson from Henry County and Ira Tollinger from Martinsville, and Barry Greene, a resident of Henry County and former mayor of Martinsville (School Merger Urged). Chairman Green of the subcommittee that worked on the issue with consultants from Virginia Tech stated,

> Although the committee is impressed with the level of quality education offered (to) students in the school systems, we are of one mind that a merged system will enhance that quality, and that is why we ask the two school boards to agree, in principle, on a merged system to be phased in over four years. (School Merger Urged)

The subcommittee recommended that by August 2004 the two boards become committed to the merger and appoint a joint committee to begin dealing with the issues surrounding the merger (Participant 4; School Merger Urged). "It has concluded that a merged system will enable the community to continue to offer students a quality education in the most cost-effective manner," said Greene (School Merger Urged). The subcommittee recommended closing three or four elementary schools, cutting central office staff, and operating under one school board whose size, membership, and other factors needed to be negotiated through the work of the joint committee (School Merger Urged). "We can take the best of each system and make it available to the other. The better programs from each school system will become the benchmark for all programs and will improve the quality of the combined system," said Greene (School Merger Urged).

Agricultural Teachers Tour State of the Art Greenhouse

As a result of consolidation, a state of the art greenhouse was installed at Magna Vista High School (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 10, interview September 16, 2010; Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010). The greenhouse was the largest high school facility of its kind in the country costing $175,000 (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 6, interview September 15, 2010;

Patterson, July 9, 2004). Prior to school opening in the fall of 2004, more than 100 East Coast agricultural teachers came to Magna Vista to tour and christen the new greenhouse (Patterson). The Magna Vista facility was 4,920 square feet making the greenhouse 2.7 times larger than the facility at Laurel Park (Patterson). The greenhouse at Laurel Park was left intact for middle school students (Participant 7; Participant 11). The seventh and eighth graders would receive a full semester of horticulture while the sixth grade students would have a six week introductory course (Participant 6; Patterson).

Brochure Published Concerning Possible County-City School Merger

At the end of July in 2004, the Martinsville–Henry County Chamber of Commerce published a brochure supporting the merger of the county and city school divisions. The five-page brochure stated that "one unified school division offers our community the best opportunity to offer our children the best possible education" (Patterson & Wray, July 28, 2004). The brochure stated,

> We can take the best programs from each system and make them available to the other. We'll be able to offer more courses to our students ... The better programs from each school system will become the benchmark for all programs and will improve the quality of the combined system. (Patterson & Wray)

The brochure was published for public distribution and given to Chamber members, area residents, and both school boards (Patterson & Wray).

School Board Meeting Held in Richmond Questioned

During the Virginia School Board Association's Governor's Conference on Education held in Richmond in the middle of July, the school board members and superintendent rented a conference room at the Richmond Marriott and conducted a meeting to approve the development of a plan to evaluate school board operational procedures (Participant 1, interview July 26, 2010; Wray, August 1, 2004). Martin questioned the legalities of conducting such a meeting in Richmond where media and county citizens could not attend. Dodson insisted the meeting was legal because the meeting was discussed at the July 1, 2004 school board meeting where a reporter from the *Martinsville Bulletin* was present. According to Henry County School Board's policy, members of the media must be notified of meeting times and locations at the same time

board members are contacted (Henry County School Board Policy BDDA, 2009; Wray). Dodson stated that since the media was present when the meeting was planned, no further notifications needed to be given (Wray).

During the July 19, 2004 school board meeting held at the Richmond Marriott, Martin secretly taped the session (Participant 1, interview July 16, 2010). "I wasn't sure if it was a proper meeting or not," said Martin (Wray, September 30, 2004). A tape recorder that Martin carried in her briefcase was placed underneath the conference table to record the meeting. Martin stated,

> I was uncomfortable with the meeting, although they said it was OK, and I just felt like it (recording the session) needed to be done. It was a gut instinct, a gut feeling. In case we were doing something wrong, if someone alleged that we did, there would be something to say "No, it didn't happen," or "Yes, it did." (Wray)

The fact that Martin taped the session came to light when Martin offered the tape to Millner to use in transcribing the minutes (Participant 1). Once the taping was made know to school board members, many felt violated and lost trust in Martin as a school board member. "I wouldn't mind if she'd put the recorder on the table; I did mind that it was under the table. I just felt betrayed ... I felt like I couldn't trust her," said Flanagan (Wray). "It was the worst, underhanded thing that could have been done ... nobody knew what she was doing. I was really upset when I heard, that she would be that type of person," said Wickline (Wray). "It's as though there is a lack of trust and also it's just unnerving to know someone's taping things and you don't know that they are," said Millner (Wray). Martin added,

> If there is ever a time again when I feel uncomfortable with something like that, I'll set the tape recorder up in the middle of the table. It was never my intention to harm anyone. I'm new, I'm learning and I was uneasy with the situation in Richmond. (Wray)

Additional Merger Talks Held

On August 2, 2004 the Martinsville City School Board voted to wait until August 24 to decide on the merger (Patterson, August 3, 2004). On August 5, 2004 the Henry County School Board voted three to two against the resolution endorsing one school system but agreed to form a committee to begin looking at the issues and questions related to becoming a unified school division at the September 2 monthly school board meeting (Henry County School Board, August

5, 2004; Language Problems, 2004; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Patterson, August 6, 2004). (See Appendix I.) Subcommittee chairman Greene said,

> It's very difficult right now to word a resolution that everybody feels completely comfortable with. The issue is, on one side of the coin, that everybody is aware of how much effort is going to be required to study the issue and the questions that need to be addressed before a final decision is made to merge the two school systems. ... On the other side of the coin you can't vote for a merger or for a single school system because of the fact that these issues haven't been resolved. (Language Problems)

Martin requested both school boards meet prior to voting on the resolution to merge the two divisions. The board directed Dodson to make the arrangements (Henry County School Board; Patterson, August 6, 2004).

Preparing Students for New Classmates

In order to begin the school year on an upbeat note, the central office of Henry County brought in motivational speaker, Adolph Brown to speak with approximately 100 middle school students on Monday and 100 high schools students on Tuesday. These students were identified by principals as being leaders (Patterson, August 11, 2004). "Change is inevitable; growth is optional," Brown told a group of county high school students at Magna Vista High School. "Attitude is everything. No problems in the world today are solved by individuals. Everything is solved by groups. People need to be familiar with different people and cultures," stated Brown (Patterson). Jordan Joyce, an 11th grade student, coming from Fieldale-Collinsville to Bassett said because of Brown's speech she would probably just speak to everybody and try to make everybody feel like one big family so the transition would go smoothly (Patterson).

Combined Bassett and Fieldale-Collinsville Band Camp Conducted

During the summer of 2004, 150 students from Bassett and Fieldale-Collinsville came together as one group during band camp (Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Patterson, August 19, 2004). "We've been here two weeks and you would never know who came from what school. They're going to come to school and have 150 friends," said Trey Harris, Bassett High School's band director (Patterson). "It's (the transition) been very smooth; you'd hardly

know that it was two separate bands," said senior David Reynolds (Patterson). "I didn't think it would be fun, but it was. We adopted each other's ways and came together," said Susan Rakes a senior from Fieldale-Collinsville (Patterson). "This is a good start for consolidation. This is the biggest organization bringing students and parents together in consolidation," said band booster club President Tom Prato (Patterson). The newly combined band was scheduled to play in St. Petersburg, Florida and in Indianapolis, Indiana during the fall of 2004 (Peterson).

Both School Boards Vote to Continue Merger Study

The Henry County and Martinsville City school boards held a combined meeting to vote on the authorization to create a steering committee comprised of all the members of both school boards to manage the merger study (Henry County School Board, August 24, 2004; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Patterson, August 25, 2004). At the meeting, all members present from both boards voted to continue studying the feasibility of merging the two school divisions (Henry County School Board; Participant 4; Patterson). The chairmen from the two boards met with consultant Wayne Worner and proposed three subcommittees should be established to further address issues relating to merging the two systems. These subcommittees would address issues such as: (a) Finance, which would include facility ownership, treatment of debt and funding a single school system budget (b) School board makeup, which would include the number of members, areas members would represent, and how members would be chosen, and (c) Salaries and benefits, which would address how to equalize different packages offered by the county and city (Henry County School Board; Patterson). "We should tackle the really hard subjects first. The feasibility of a merger would be easier if these three issues are settled," said Martinsville Chairman Jim Johnson (Henry County School Board; Patterson). "There's no point in dealing with minor issues if the major ones cannot be resolved," Henry County's Chairman Millner said (Henry County School Board; Patterson). Both boards announced that no school board monies would be used to conduct the study. The Harvest Foundation granted $20,000 to be used, but this money was contingent on each board contributing $5,000 (Participant 10, interview September 16, 2010; Patterson). The following day the Lucy P. Sale Foundation granted the $10,000 necessary for the subcommittees to be formed to complete the merger study (Patterson).

First Day of School in 2004

The planning and renovations projects were completed and the first day of school finally arrived for the newly consolidated schools in Henry County on September 1, 2004. On the first day of school, the major problems were those expected: bus and traffic problems. Fieldale-Collinsville Middle School, Stanleytown Elementary School, and Bassett High School experienced traffic jams in the morning, but by afternoon dismissal these problems had been worked out satisfactorily. Laurel Park Middle School experienced bus problems on the first day but everything else appeared to go smoothly (Patterson & Wray, September 2, 2004). "Everything was in place, ready to go. You couldn't have believed it was the same school if you were in it three weeks ago," Wayne Moore, principal of Laurel Park Middle School, said concerning the construction that had taken place (Patterson & Wray). Lunch problems, which did not materialize on the first day of school, were the major concern of many principals. Kimberly Yates, principal at Fieldale-Collinsville Middle school was able to handle five lunch periods and get all the students served before the tardy bells (Patterson & Wray). Magna Vista High School opened the doors to over 1,200 students on the first day of school. "It's been like any other first day of school. I know some people are looking for drama, but it's been normal," said Magna Vista guidance counselor Sammy Redd (Patterson & Wray). "It went extremely well considering we rerouted about 100 buses and reassigned 700 staff members. The wrinkles will work themselves out," said Dodson in reference to the first day of school (Patterson & Wray).

Drewry Mason Site Questioned for an Elementary School

Even though Drewry Mason was slated for necessary renovations to become the elementary school for the Ridgeway community, school board members questioned the safety of placing elementary students near highway U. S. 220 South (Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010). The board wanted to consider other options before spending $3.5 million to renovate Drewry Mason (Henry County School Board, September 2, 2004; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Patterson, September 3, 2004). "We're open to any options right now, but we're concerned about its (Drewry Mason's) location," said Millner (Patterson). "Let's look at making use of what we already have to keep costs down. It may not be practical to put 'millions of dollars into Drewry Mason,'" said Martin (Patterson). Millner indicated that before plans were made to locate Ridgeway Elementary students into another facility, the school board needed to

contact the board of supervisors to determine if the supervisors would back the proposal (Henry County School Board; Participant 5; Patterson).

Drewry Mason Renovation Contracts Awarded

At the December 20, 2007 school board meeting the final renovation project was approved. This project was the renovation of the old Drewry Mason Middle School which would eventually house the students from Ridgeway Elementary (Henry County School Board, December 20, 2007; Hopkins, 2007; Participant 5, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010). A contract for $3,052,700 was awarded to Clark Construction to replace the HVAC system, upgrade the electrical system, replace lighting, construct a new wall, upgrade restrooms, replace floor and ceiling tiles, install new basketball goals and electrical bleachers in the gym, and site work including a place for a new playground (Hopkins). The final phase of consolidation in Henry County was completed on August 20, 2008 when Drewry Mason was officially opened as an elementary school to replace the old facility in the Ridgeway community (Barto, 2008; Participant 2, interview July 27, 2010; Participant 8; Participant 9, interview September 16, 2010).

What Happened to the Facilities that Closed?

Bassett Middle School was sold to EMI Imaging and the building is used to store medical records (Hall, October 16, 2006; Participant 3, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Participant 14, interview November 3, 2010). David Wright, president of EMI Imaging, created "Timber Tint Memories" and the "Hall of Remembrance" where yearbook covers and senior class photos of Bassett High School students from 1935 through 1978 are on display for public viewing (Hall, October 16, 2006). The company in conjunction with local churches also operates a food pantry from the building. Needy members of the community come on the third Wednesday of every month and receive meat plus an additional 50 to 60 pounds of food according to Wright (Hall, October 16, 2006). Spencer Penn Elementary had been in operation as a school since 1927 until it officially closed in 2004.The former school became the Spencer Penn Centre (Participant 3; Participant 4, interview July 28, 2010; Participant 7; Participant 12; Participant 14). Many community

members, former students, and teachers volunteered to renovate the building and turn it into a community center (Participant 4; Spencer Penn, 2008). Shortly after closing, Fieldale Elementary School was purchased by Victory International Ministries and Pastor Dan Schelling. In 2008, Victory International Christian Academy opened its doors in the former elementary school (Hall, September 22, 2008; Participant 3; Participant 7; Participant 12; Participant 14). Ridgeway Elementary is currently unoccupied. Members of the community have discussed renovating the building for a community center but at this time nothing has happened for that to occur (Powell, December 12, 2008). The Henry County School Board returned Irisburg Elementary to the county in 2011. At the present time, the county has not made any plans concerning the use of this building (Collins, February 7, 2011; Participant 7; Participant 12).

Consolidation Continues

School enrollment in Henry County continued the downward spiral with a 2010 fall enrollment of 7,491 students (Virginia Department of Education Fall Membership Report). The original consolidation plans did not include closing Irisburg Elementary School (Participant 4, interview, July 28, 2010), but due to decreasing enrollment and finances, the school board voted six to one to consolidate Irisburg Elementary into the Axton Elementary facility on March 4, 2010 (Henry County School Board, March 4, 2010; Participant 7, interview July 15, 2010; Participant 8, interview September 15, 2010; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010). To help alleviate financial constraints experienced by the Henry County School Division the doors to Irisburg closed on June 7, 2010 (Henry County School Board; Winston, 2010).

Merger Talks between Henry County and Martinsville City Schools Tabled

In March 2005 the Martinsville-Henry County Chamber of Commerce decided to table an offer to complete the merger study between the Henry County School Division and the Martinsville City School Division (Powell, March 11, 2005). The Martinsville City School Board was willing to participate and continue with the study but the Henry County School Board was not interested in the merger study (Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010). The only member of the Henry County School Board in favor of continuing the merger study was Millner. The monies from the Harvest Foundation and Lucy Sale Foundation, which had been given to

the Chamber of Commerce to complete the merger study, were returned (Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010; Powell).

In November 2008, Martinsville City Council conducted a brainstorming session to improve education and other topics in Martinsville and Henry County. Dodson planned to retire at the end of 2008–09 school year (Hall, November 23, 2008). Many present at the meeting felt with Dodson not seeking another term as superintendent that the time may be right to bring up merging the two school divisions. "I think it's obvious we need to be one school system. We need to merge as many services as we can with the county," said City Councilman Danny Turner (Hall). Again the public discussions halted concerning the possible merger of the two school divisions (Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010; Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010).

On Monday, February 8, 2010 the Martinsville City School Board passed a resolution to begin negotiation talks of a merger between Martinsville City Schools and Henry County Public Schools. On Tuesday, February 9, 2010, the Martinsville City Council adopted a resolution stating "the continuation of an independent school system in the city, funded even at current levels and with a declining student population is, over the long term, unsustainable without a significant increase in the tax burden to Martinsville's citizens. Henry County is faced with similar funding challenges which have already resulted in the recommendation of consolidation within its own school system" (Wray, February 10, 2010). The resolution further stated "the City Council urges both the Henry County School Board and the Henry County Board of Supervisors to immediately endorse the concept of substantive negotiations with the Martinsville School Board and City Council to explore all potential options for achieving the maximum cost savings to their citizens," (Wray).

The Henry County School Board, the Martinsville City School Board, and the Martinsville City Council agreed to review the partial merger study from 2004 (Collins, March 29, 2011; Participant 7, interview September 15, 2010). The Henry County Board of Supervisors did not formally agree to the review, but as individual members, the majority supported reviewing the merger study (Hall, February 11, 2010; Participant 12, interview November 1, 2010; Participant 13, interview November 3, 2010). DecideSmart, a consulting firm, was hired by both school boards to assist with the merger study (Collins). DecideSmart conducted employee surveys and attended all public forums held. Based on data gathered, the consultants

concluded that not all of the citizens of Martinsville and Henry County were sold on the merger (Collins). Interviews conducted with members of the Henry County Board of Supervisors revealed that the majority of the constituents from county divisions did not support the merger of the two divisions (Hall, March 30, 2011; Participant 11, interview September 17, 2010; Participant 12; Participant 13). All six members of the board of supervisors were polled on how a vote would go, if the board was faced with a motion to support merging the county and city school divisions. All six stated that a no vote would be given because constituents within their respective divisions were opposed to merging the two divisions. The constituents feared higher taxes as a result of the merger (Hall, March 30, 2011).

As a result of the supervisors' poll, members of the Henry County School Board voted on April 7, 2011 to kill talks concerning merging the two school divisions. The vote passed six to one. Only Ridgeway District's Charles Speakman opposed the motion to cease merger negotiations with the Martinsville City School Board (Hall, April 8, 2011). The school board supported a motion to have county Superintendent Anthony Jackson "pursue additional structured meetings" with city schools Superintendent Pam Heath and "investigate any opportunities" that would lead to better educational opportunities and efficiencies for the two systems (Hall).

Summary

Henry County first began consolidation talks in the early 1980s (Wooding, 1984). The construction of Magna Vista High School saw two older buildings closed (Brumble, 1988). As jobs were lost, the Henry County School Division continued to experience enrollment losses which affected the finances for the division (Brown, 2002; Wray, 2003). With the hiring of a new superintendent, Dr. Sharon Dodson, in 2001, consolidation talks began (Hairston, December 7, 2001; Henry County School Board, November 21, 2001; Tracey, November 22, 2001). The school board voted to reconfigure schools but needed financial support from the board of supervisors to carry out the plan (Hairston; Henry County School Board, December 14, 2001). The board of supervisors refused to advance funding for necessary renovations and consolidation died (Tracey, February 26, 2002).

In 2003 with additional job losses and financial shortfalls, the topic of consolidation was brought up by a principals' budget advisory committee (Tracey, January 17, 2003). The board of

supervisors voted to allow lump sum funding which meant the school board could transfer funds between non-encumbered categories (Hall, May 28, 2003; Powell, April 16, 2003). This allowed the school board freedom to use monies for renovations necessary to begin consolidation (Hall, April 18, 2003; Tracey, April 18, 2003). Consolidation plans were constructed and reviewed prior to the board members voting on consolidation. The plan chosen would close five facilities and have two high schools, three middle schools, and 10 elementary schools (Tracey, June 20, 2003). Three new school board members were elected in November 2003 (Tracey, November 5, 2003). The three newly elected board members and board member Curtis Millner voted to halt consolidation (Monks, January 9, 2004). A short time later, one of the new board members changed the vote to halt consolidation and the reconfiguration of schools continued (Henry County School Board, January 14, 2004; Monks, January 15, 2004).

On September 1, 2004 the newly renovated schools opened (Patterson & Wray, September 2, 2004). Henry County was now operating 16 schools instead of the original 20 facilities. Ridgeway Elementary continued to operate even though it had been slated to close. The funds necessary to renovate and upgrade Drewry Mason from a middle school to an elementary school were not available. Drewry Mason was renovated during the 2007–08 school term and opened its doors as an elementary school in the fall of 2008 thus completing the original consolidation plan (Barto, 2008; Henry County School Board, December 20, 2007; Hopkins, 2007). Even though Irisburg Elementary was not part of the original consolidation plan beginning in 2004, it closed on June 7, 2010 to help alleviate financial constraints in the Henry County Public School Division (Henry County School Board, March 4, 2010; Winston, 2010).

Three of the six schools that were closed have been sold by the board of supervisors of Henry County. One of the buildings houses a business, another building has become a private Christian school, and the last building is a community center (Hall, October 16, 2006; Hall, September 22, 2008; Spencer Penn, 2008). The remaining three schools are currently owned by the county and are not occupied.

School enrollment in Henry County Public Schools and Martinsville City Schools continue to spiral downward (Virginia Department of Education Fall Membership Report). These two separate education entities began formal consolidation talks on two separate occasions (Powell, March 11, 2005; Hall, November 23, 2008). On April 7, 2011 the talk of the merger of the two school divisions was halted when the board of supervisors from Henry County indicated

they would not support a merger at this time between the two school divisions (Hall, April 8, 2011).

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to identify issues and factors that influenced the closing of five facilities in Henry County. With respect to that purpose, the findings record the issues and challenges faced and met by the Henry County School Division during consolidation. The factors and issues which influenced consolidation were documented through interviews with stakeholders who were present during the initial consolidation talks and consolidation process and through documentation provided by articles in the *Martinsville Bulletin* and the Henry County School Board meeting minutes.

The primary reason for consolidation that took place in Henry County was the economy. Many jobs were lost in Henry County which resulted in financial losses and a decrease in population. Therefore, Henry County could no longer operate 21 schools facilities; it was no longer feasible to keep all of the buildings open. Many of the buildings needed repairs and maintenance that had been put on the back burned for years according to Participant 5 (interview July 28, 2010). Consolidation provided the funds for the facilities remaining open to be renovated and updated. Henry County could no longer keep the best buildings operating with only half the capacity of students attending them, while sending elementary children to buildings that were unacceptable for educational occupancy. Building capacity of the newer buildings had to be filled in order to operate a better school system and provide sound academic programs.

When the school board was planning for consolidation and considering which schools would be close, the community members did not want their schools closed regardless of the condition of the buildings according to Participant 3 (interview, July 28, 2010). "The biggest problem," according to Participant 8, (interview September 15, 2010) "was that parents and particularly the communities did not want to lose their school." These statements ring true in any community because according to Natchigal (1982), "The function of a rural school goes far beyond that of educating children; it is not only a piece of the local social structure, it is often the hub that holds the community together" (p.11).

The 14 individuals who were interviewed for this study felt that many successes were achieved through consolidation. Each individual interviewed believed the county school system

was better because the best buildings were renovated and updated along with a variety of new courses being offered which improved the academic programs. According to three participants, a large portion of the money that was saved during consolidation was placed back into the school division in the form of updating and renovating the facilities in Henry County. Participant 1 (interview, July 26, 2010) stated it best saying, "All the buildings that are currently being used have been updated and refreshed. With 21 buildings, it would not have been possible to do this. The money would not have been there."

Seven of the participants stated the biggest success of consolidation was the improvement of the academic offerings at the high schools. Once consolidation had been approved, the central office staff surveyed the students to determine interest in courses. As a result of the surveys, 46 new courses were offered with the total course offerings being 231 (Tracey, November 24, 2003). When discussing successes of consolidation, Participant 5 (interview July 28, 2010) stated,

> Oh, without a doubt an improved instructional program, there is not a doubt in my mind that we are offering a better education to our students today than we were prior to consolidation. The number of course offerings that's available to kids, the quality of the staff, and just being able to take advantage of efficiency of resources, money that we were having to spend on different things, now we're able to redirect that money to where it can benefit instructional programs and student learning. So, I hesitate to think where we would be today had we not consolidated. It is a scary thought in terms of what we would have been able to provide them from an instructional standpoint of view.

Participant 11 (interview September 17, 2010) said,

> It has allowed us to offer students classes that were being offered in Northern Virginia, you know, for example. One of the complaints that our students had, was they have all of these fantastic courses, you know, why can't we? It allowed us to offer a program that was funded at the level it needed to be funded, with the space that we needed to have, the equipment that we needed to have, in order to make it successful. We were able to hire more administrators and safety officers. They equipped the schools with the staff that was needed in order to run the schools successfully.

When asked during the interview, 'What do you think the failures were?, the answer given was surprising. The participants reported they did not see many failures with

consolidation. According to eight of the participants no failures were experienced at all. Four of the participants did not comment on failures when asked the question. Saving money may have been a problem according to Participant 4 (interview July 28, 2010) who said,

> I can't say that there were any failures, I can't think of any. Thing is, was that they didn't save any money, that was the bottom line of doing it, that was the whole bottom line. There would be no other reason for your county and my county to consolidate schools unless it's gonna save money, to take your money savings and offer more courses, a better education for the kids – they didn't do that. They didn't achieve the bottom line of saving money.

Participant 10 felt that consolidation worked but that the communities lost the family atmosphere that existed at some of the small elementary schools when they closed. Participant 10 (interview September 16, 2010) said,

> The only failure that I can think of is the loss of the family atmosphere that existed in many of the small elementary schools. For example, Figsboro Elementary had a carnival every year. People who had gone to school at Figsboro 40 years ago still showed up for their carnival. Everyone pitched in to help you know, it was a family atmosphere kind of thing. We have lost that, now that is something we have lost in consolidation; we don't have that closeness we used to have.

Regardless of issues related to operating a school division, politics play a role. Based upon statements from five participants, politics played a significant role in the consolidation process. Politics postponed consolidation when it was first approached in 2001. Politics kept consolidation from occurring until the division became so economically strapped that the school board had no other choice. The board of supervisors approved lump sum funding which permitted the school board to plan for and implement consolidation. Participant 11 (interview September 17, 2010) said,

> The politicians have their agendas and their agendas are the only things that are important to them. It bothers me that they do not put their agendas aside when dealing with the future of the children of Henry County. Consolidation should have been about what was best of the students.

According to Participant 5 (interview July 28, 2010),

> Politics were a huge factor in the whole consolidation process. The politicians looked at it as, yes, we need to be more efficient, and yes, we do have too many schools, but don't close any schools in my district. The politicians are always looking for what is going to give them the most votes and not what is educationally sound for the students. Once the vote was taken to consolidate, we didn't deviate from the plan. When something political got in the way, we just reorganized and reprioritized.

The superintendent and school board members successfully consolidated five schools in Henry County even when political obstacles were placed in their paths because the majority believed that consolidation was what was best for the kids. Participant 14 (interview November 3, 2010) said,

> Oh, it's the fruits of the pudding you know, and you don't know that when you're doing it. I mean, I wouldn't have been part of it, if it wasn't right for children, period, ok. I would have had no part of it, but when you came down to having to compromise the education of the students because the community's reluctance to deal with the fact that they were in a state of population decline, it's just not acceptable to me. End of story.

Participant 12 (interview, November 1, 2010) summed up consolidation in Henry County stating,

> The kids accepted it but the parents had a hard time with consolidating schools in Henry County. With the monies that were saved the school board renovated and updated the best facilities and added new academic courses while maintaining a low student teacher ratio.

Educational and community leaders faced with the possibility of having to reconfigure schools within a division may gain insight regarding consolidation by reviewing the factors and issues reported that relate to consolidation of schools within a single division. The data gathered provides knowledge about the consolidation experiences in Henry County relating to politics and personal beliefs of certain stakeholders. Evidence of the steps Henry County followed can provide educational and community leaders with a possible blueprint for reconfiguration of schools within a division. The findings indicate that with continued dedication to what is in the best interest of the students, consolidation can be successful even when some stakeholders reject the idea and plan of consolidation.

Future Studies

Continued research in the field of consolidation could possibly benefit educational and community leaders when considering reconfiguration within a division. The politics of the group supporting consolidation and the section of the community against closing schools should be examined to compare the commonality of people's perceptions and feelings regarding the reconfiguration of schools. Better understandings of these perceptions/feelings might assist decision makers in shepherding the consolidation process through the political landmines of the local political landscape. Likewise, studies of strategies to improve community involvement, student culture including extra-curricular activities, and staff cohesiveness when reconfigurations of schools occur should produce greater understandings of factors that promote a more positive consolidation experience in the future for those involved. While the financial implications associated with consolidations are often driving forces in the process, much has yet to be learned about how best to communicate this information to stakeholders in meaningful ways that provide better understand of the needs for and ramifications of consolidation.

Personal Disclosure

In 2001 the community where the researcher lives consolidated the elementary and high schools with an adjoining community in the same school division. The consolidation event is why the researcher became interested in the topic of consolidation within a single school division. Since it would be difficult to interview people from the community and area where one works-researching consolidation in one's community is not advisable. Therefore, the researcher chose to study consolidation in a single division in which she had no vested interest. The researcher had no preconceived notions or feelings concerning consolidation in Henry County. Triangulation was used to verify and validate information from the local newspaper, school board meeting minutes, and personal interviews with stakeholders from different roles in Henry County. Through the examination of consolidation in Henry County, the researcher was able to discover issues and facts associated with the closing of school facilities within a single school division.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

I. Introduction Statement: During the next 60 to 90 minutes, I would like to discuss with you the consolidation of schools in Henry County. During this time, you will have an opportunity to answer these questions in as much detail as you would like. If there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, please let me know and we will skip those questions.

II. Interview Questions:

1. In your view, what were the primary factors that influenced the decision to consolidate schools in Henry County, Virginia?

   Probes:
   Do you feel politics was a factor in the decision to consolidate schools in Henry County? If so, how?
   What is your perception of the role of the board of supervisors played in the decision to consolidate?
   You feel race was a factor in the decision to consolidate schools in Henry County? If so, how?
   Do you feel economics was a factor in the decision to consolidate schools in Henry County? If so, how?
   Etc.

2. What problem, if any, arose during the initial discussions and plans to begin consolidation? How were these problems resolved, if at all?

3. What successes resulted from consolidation?

4. What failures resulted from consolidation?

5. Do you have any documents you would be willing to share with me that would aide me in my attempt to understand the consolidation process that occurred?

6. This is the list of people I am planning to interview. Are there individuals not o the list that I should contact that would better help me understand the consolidation in Henry County?

7. Are there questions I did not ask that I should have, which would assist me with completing the story of Henry County's public schools consolidation?

III. Concluding Statement: Thank you for your time and valuable information.

Appendix B

IRB Approval

Invent the Future
V I R G I N I A P O L Y T E C H N I C I N S T I T U T E A N D S T A T E U N I V E R S I T Y
An e q u a l o p p o r t u n i t y , a f f i r m a t i v e a c t i o n i n s t i t u t i o n
V I R G I N I A P O L Y T E C H N I C I N S T I T U T E A N D S T A T E U N I V E R S I T Y

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
e-mail irb@vt.edu
Website: www.irb.vt.edu

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 30, 2010

TO: James Craig, Kathy Witt

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires June 13, 2011)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Consolidation in the Henry County Public School System

IRB NUMBER: 10-569

Effective June 29, 2010, the Virginia Tech IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore, approved the new protocol for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm (please review before the commencement of your research).

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:
Approved as: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6, 7
Protocol Approval Date: 6/29/2010
Protocol Expiration Date: 6/28/2011
Continuing Review Due Date*: 6/14/2011
*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:
Per federally regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals / work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

V I R G I N I A P O L Y T E C H N I C I N S T I T U T E A N D S T A T E U N I V E R S I T Y
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

cc: File

Date	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted

*Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this IRB protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the IRB office (irbadmin@vt.edu) immediately.

cc: File

V I R G I N I A P O L Y T E C H N I C I N S T I T U T E A N D S T A T E U N I V E R S I T Y
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Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Title of Research: Consolidation in the Henry County Public School System

Investigators: Ms. Kathy Witt, Doctoral Student at Virginia Tech, Dr. Jim Craig, Professor at Virginia Tech, and Dr. Ted Creighton, Professor at Virginia Tech

Purpose: As part of my graduate work at Virginia Tech, I am researching the school consolidation process. I am seeking the recollections and views of people involved so that I may tell the story of school consolidation in the Henry County Public School System. The pool of interviewees will come from Henry County Public School System personnel, school board members, board of supervisor members, and other parties who have relevant and important information.

Procedure: An interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes will be conducted in a location in Henry County that allows the interviewee to feel comfortable. During this time, I would like to discuss with you events that have occurred during your past concerning consolidation of public schools in Henry County. You will have the opportunity to answer a series of questions in as much detail as you would like about the consolidation process. If you would prefer not to answer any questions asked, we will skip that question.

Risk: There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: The information obtained from the interview will help researchers better understand the school consolidation process and tell the story of consolidation in Henry County. No promise or guarantees of benefits have been made to encourage you to participate.

Confidentiality: The information gathered from the interviews will be kept anonymous. If quotes must be used to enhance the information provided in the research, pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. All interviews will be transcribed by the doctoral student conducting the research. Only researchers directly involved in the conduct and completion of the project will have access to the data collected and at no time will the researchers release the results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. All data will be kept strictly confidential and destroyed within one year of completion of the study. It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

Compensation: You will not be compensated for participating in the interview nor are there any other direct benefits to you for participating in this study.

Freedom to Withdraw: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study and to not respond to interview questions at any time without penalty.

Subject's Responsibilities: I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the responsibility to answer the interview questions asked to the best of my ability.

Subject's Permission: I have read the consent from and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent.

Research Participant's Rights and Contact Persons: If I should have any questions about the protection of human research participants regarding this study, I may contact Dr. David Moore, Chair Virginia Tech Institutional Reviews Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, telephone: (540)231-4991; email: moored@vt.edu; address: Office of Research Compliance, 2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497), Blacksburg, VA 24060.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Dr. Jim Craig at (540)231-1631 or jimcraig@vt.edu.

Thank you for participating in this important study! We appreciate the time and effort you are offering!

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____

Participant's Name (Please Print)

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

_____

Researcher's Name (Please Print)

Appendix D

Resolution 8

WHEREAS, the School Board realizes that the vocational/technical opportunities in the four high schools have not been updated to reflect the needs of the twenty-first century and the special needs of our community in economic crisis, and the Board is dedicated to offering programs to all high school students that provide the skill development that prepares students for a successful future in the workforce and in further educational pursuits; and

WHEREAS, in 1988 the School Board instituted an organizational pattern for its schools that included middle schools and desires to maintain middle schools as the optimal configuration for meeting the needs of early adolescents; and

WHEREAS, the School Board has reviewed that the consolidation of schools has both curricular and financial advantages and has concluded that a consolidated school can offer an expanded curriculum and a more prominent identity in the community while reducing costs through economy of scale; and

WHEREAS, the School Board is committed to achieving equity in program offerings and facilities for students; and

WHEREAS, the Fieldale Elementary School suffers from outdated and overloaded mechanical and electrical systems and structural deterioration; has a dilapidated and leaking roof; has severe site limitations and major accessibility issues; and requires nearby rented space; and

WHEREAS, Spencer-Penn Elementary suffers from declining enrollment, structural deterioration, unhealthy presence of asbestos tiling, inability to expand on a small site, and insufficient electrical supply for today's technology; and

WHEREAS, architectural consultants have concluded that John Redd Smith Elementary "has outlived its usefulness" and suffers from the presence of asbestos, poor roof, insufficient electrical supply, dangerous student drop-off and loading areas, and distribution of the academic program over three buildings; and

WHEREAS, it is the desire of the School Board to reassign students to different facilities with as little disruption as possible and keep classmates together; and

WHEREAS, the School Board has studied these issues for a number of years and solicited and considered citizen input, including an Ad Hoc committee who agreed that the school system could no longer support four high schools and the comments and materials submitted to the School Board at the public hearing on December 11, 2001; and

WHEREAS, the School Board has determined that only two high school facilities have the capacity to accommodate the projected high school enrollment and improved instructional program; and

WHEREAS, the School Board recognizes a decision needs to be made as soon as possible so that students, employees, and parents can move forward with plans for the next school year, including student transition facilitation, personnel staffing, in-service training, bus route revisions, school renovations, financial planning, and other related activities; and

WHEREAS, after considering the aforementioned issues, the written and oral comments and materials received from the public, and the Report to the School Board dated December 6, 2001, the School Board is of the opinion that it must consolidate some schools in order to provide a reasonable program of education for the students of Henry County within the finite resources available to it and that such consolidation will contribute to the efficiency of the school division.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the School Board orders that, effective with the 2002-2003 school year: Laurel Park High School and Magna Vista High School be consolidated and that the consolidated school be located at the Magna Vista site; Fieldale-Collinsville High School and Bassett High School be consolidated and that the consolidated school be located at the Bassett site; Spencer-Penn Elementary and Fieldale Elementary be closed and that students attending those schools be reassigned to the Carver School site; Carver Middle School students be moved to the facilities currently occupied by the Fieldale-Collinsville High School; Axton Middle School students be moved to the facilities currently occupied by the Laurel Park High School; Mt. Olivet Elementary be reconfigured as a primary school; Axton School be reconfigured as an elementary school; Irisburg Elementary School remain in operation unchanged temporarily until enrollment in the eastern side of the county becomes somewhat more stabilized; John Redd Smith Elementary be closed and the students reassigned to Figsboro Elementary; and Figsboro Elementary students in the primary grades be assigned to Collinsville Primary.

Appendix E

Article Regarding Survey

Survey finds little harmony

Monday, February 10, 2003

By LES TRACEY - Bulletin Staff Writer

With 3,500 surveys returned to Henry County school officials, no clear consensus emerged on topics such as school consolidation and cuts to the budget.

Superintendent Sharon Dodson said many people had included comments with their surveys, and she had read them all.

Those were not available with the initial report on the results of the survey, although she said school board members will get a copy of all the comments as soon as they are compiled.

In being asked to choose an option, 72 percent of respondents identified themselves as a parent, 23 percent as a Henry County resident and 5 percent as a Henry County Schools employee.

On the question of whether the school system should look at reconfiguring the schools and perhaps closing a site --saving about $250,000 per school closed --about 47 percent agreed that the option should be considered.

About 37 percent disagreed with the plan, and 16 percent had no opinion.

Large majorities stated they did not want the school system to increase class sizes or to cut such programs as middle school athletics, elementary school art, music and physical education. Also, an overwhelming 69 percent of respondents agreed that teacher salaries should be increased, at a potential cost of $1.4 million. Only 19 percent disagreed and 12 percent had no opinion.

Results of the survey (in all cases, remaining results needed to add up to 100 percent were classified as "no opinion"):

* Drop the year-round schedule at Rich Acres Elementary School, which has operated on the alternative calendar for the past three years. Potential savings for this option is $53,000.
-- 67 percent agreed
--21 percent disagreed
* Restructure the Gifted and Talented program by shifting some of the responsibility for that to classroom teachers rather than hiring specialized teachers. Potential savings for this option is $85,000.
--59 percent agreed
--31 percent disagreed

* Eliminate the middle school athletic program. Eighth-graders can compete in junior varsity athletics, and other students could participate in the county's Parks and Recreation programs. Potential savings for this option is $34,000.
--41 percent agreed
--51 percent disagreed
* Decrease the number of field trips, substituting "virtual field trips" over the Internet and placing priority on trips that relate to the state and local curriculum. Potential savings for this option is $50,000.
--40 percent agreed
--53 percent disagreed
* Shift some of the cost of dual enrollment classes to students taking the classes. Students take the courses for high school and college credit, and it costs the school system about $30 per credit hour. Potential savings for this option is $121,000.
--63 percent agreed
--26 percent disagreed
* Discontinue the School of Practical Nursing as a school system operation, giving control to Patrick Henry Community College. Potential savings for this option is $80,000.
--70 percent agreed
--21 percent disagreed
* Restructure high school summer school so that students pay enough tuition to cover all costs. Potential revenue increase for this option is $71,000.
--65 percent agreed
--23 percent disagreed
* Decrease the use of substitute teachers by having teachers cover classes for absent colleagues, using volunteers and utilizing an incentive program for teacher attendance. Potential savings for this option is $100,000.
--51 percent agreed
--41 percent disagreed
* Eliminate teaching positions in the middle school alternative education program and folding the program into the Center for Community Learning. Potential savings for this option is $142,000.
--57 percent agreed
--30 percent disagreed
* Limit foreign language instruction at the middle-school level to one language instead of two. Potential savings for this option is $42,000.
--52 percent agreed
-- 40 percent disagreed
* Discontinue the school system's participation in the Regional Alternative Education Program, which includes Martinsville City and Patrick County schools. Potential savings for this option is $60,000.
--44 percent agreed
--44 percent disagreed
* Increase rental fees that outside groups pay to use school facilities. Potential revenue increase for this option is $10,000.
--71 percent agreed
--18 percent disagreed

* Cut spending for maintenance of facilities, with an undetermined savings.
--9 percent agreed
--75 percent disagreed
* Restructure transportation, resulting in a possible reduction of bus routes. Potential savings for this option is $33,000.
--41 percent agreed
--44 percent disagreed
* Eliminate bus transportation for high school students to take classes at other schools. Potential savings for this option is $49,000.
--37 percent agreed
--51 percent disagreed
* Eliminate bus transportation for high school students who stay after school to participate in extra-curricular activities. Potential savings for this option is $30,000.
-- 43 percent agreed
--48 percent disagreed
* Cut some or all of the 18 teaching positions of elementary school music, art and physical education. Potential savings for this option is $198,000 to $753,000.
--30 percent agreed
--62 percent disagreed
* Increase class sizes, with a potential savings of $452,000, mainly by cutting teaching positions.
--22 percent agreed
-- 68 percent disagreed
* Increase the minimum enrollment required to offer high school courses, causing some classes to be offered only every other semester. Potential savings is undetermined.
--48 percent agreed
--31 percent disagreed
* Restructure the JROTC program by decreasing staff levels. Potential savings for this option is $112,000 to $250,000.
--59 percent agreed
--26 percent disagreed
* Continue to control administrative costs, with no details or potential savings determined.
--60 percent agreed
--24 percent disagreed
* Continue giving staff development priority status, with an undetermined potential cost.
--74 percent agreed
--19 percent disagreed
* Utilize few, if any, local funds for technology-related expenses, with an undetermined potential savings.
--39 percent agreed
--37 percent disagreed

Appendix F

Article on Shift Attendance Zones

School plans shift attendance zones

Wednesday June 25, 2003

By LES TRACEY – Bulletin Staff Writer

Following is a description of the plans and their student makeup:

Plan One

This is a three-high-school proposal that would close three elementary schools, convert Carver and Axton middle schools to elementary schools and Fieldale-Collinsville High School to a middle school.

According to estimates developed by the school system staff, Bassett High School would enroll about 921 students; Laurel Park High, 904; and Magna Vista High, 855.

Students who attended pre-kindergarten through fifth grade at Stanleytown, Sanville or Campbell Court elementary schools would move to Bassett Middle School for grades six through eight and Bassett High School for nine through 12.

Fieldale and Spencer-Penn students would attend Carver Elementary for pre-kindergarten through grade five and then be split between Fieldale-Collinsville and Drewry Mason middle schools.

Then the Fieldale-Collinsville Middle students would be split between Bassett and Laurel Park for high school, and the Drewry Mason Middle students would attend either Laurel Park or Magna Vista.

Irisburg, Rich Acres and Ridgeway elementary schools also would enroll pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Those students would advance to Drewry Mason Middle and then either Laurel Park or Magna Vista.

Collinsville Primary School would remain a pre-kindergarten-through-second-grade campus, and those students would move to John Redd Smith Elementary for third through fifth grade. They would advance to Fieldale-Collinsville Middle and either Bassett or Laurel Park high schools.

Mount Olivet Elementary would become a primary school as well, housing pre-kindergarten through second grades. Those students would advance to Axton Elementary for grades three through five.

They then would be split between Fieldale-Collinsville or Drewry Mason middle schools. The Fieldale-Collinsville students would attend either Bassett or Laurel Park, and the Drewry Mason students would go to either Laurel Park or Magna Vista.

Plan Two

This proposal closes Fieldale, Figsboro, Ridgeway and Spencer-Penn elementary schools and keeps two high schools, Bassett and Magna Vista.

Estimates are that Bassett High would enroll about 1,400 students, while Magna Vista High would have 1,300 students.

The capacity of Bassett High is listed as 1,368, while the capacity at Magna Vista is 1,428.

Fieldale-Collinsville and Laurel Park high schools would become middle schools under this plan, while Axton, Carver and Drewry Mason middle schools would become elementary schools.

The Bassett Middle School building no longer would be used under this proposal.

Students who attend Carver Elementary for pre-kindergarten through grade five would attend either Fieldale-Collinsville or Laurel Park middle schools for grades six through eight.

All Fieldale-Collinsville Middle students would attend Bassett High, while all Laurel Park Middle students would go to Magna Vista High.

Students who go to Stanleytown, Sanville or Campbell Court elementary schools through fifth grade would attend Fieldale-Collinsville Middle, then Bassett High.

Also, students who attend Collinsville Primary for pre-kindergarten through grade two would move to John Redd Smith Elementary for grades three to five and then advance to Fieldale-Collinsville Middle and Bassett High.

Rich Acres, Drewry Mason and Irisburg all would enroll students through the fifth grade. Those students would move to Laurel Park Middle and Magna Vista High.

Mount Olivet would become a pre-kindergarten through second-grade school. Those students then would attend Axton Elementary for grades three though five and then Laurel Park Middle and Magna Vista High.

Plan Three

This plan is essentially the same as plan one, except that Fieldale-Collinsville remains as a high school and Laurel Park becomes a middle school.

Bassett High would have an estimated 921 students; Fieldale-Collinsville, 803; and Magna

Vista, 888.

Carver Elementary students would be split between Bassett and Drewry Mason middle schools for grades six through eight. Then all Bassett Middle students would attend Bassett High, while all Drewry Mason Middle students would go to Magna Vista High.

Campbell Court, Sanville and Stanleytown elementary schools would continue to enroll pre-kindergarten through fifth grades. Those students would advance to Bassett Middle and Bassett High.

Ridgeway and Rich Acres elementary schools also would be pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade campuses, with those students then attending Drewry Mason Middle and Magna Vista High.

Students who start at Collinsville or Mount Olivet would attend John Redd Smith and Axton, respectively, for grades three through five, and then Laurel Park Middle.

Irisburg would continue to enroll pre-kindergarten through fifth grades and those students would advance to Laurel Park Middle.

Some Laurel Park Middle students would attend Fieldale-Collinsville High, while some would attend Magna Vista High.

Plan Four

Under this plan, all four high schools would remain open as seventh- through 12th-grade campuses.

Bassett High would have an estimated 1,173 students; Fieldale-Collinsville, 923; Laurel Park, 799; and Magna Vista, 1,158.

The four middle schools would become intermediate schools and Fieldale, Figsboro, Ridgeway and Spencer-Penn elementary schools would close.

Campbell Court, Sanville and Stanleytown elementary schools would enroll students in pre-kindergarten through fourth grades.

Those students then would attend Bassett Intermediate through sixth grade and then attend Bassett High starting in the seventh grade.

Carver Elementary would house pre-kindergarten through grade six and then those students would be split among Fieldale-Collinsville and Magna Vista high schools.

Collinsville and Mount Olivet would be primary schools with pre-kindergarten through second-grade students, who then would attend John Redd Smith and Axton intermediates, respectively, for grades three through six.

John Redd Smith students would move to Fieldale-Collinsville High and Axton students would go to Laurel Park High.

Irisburg Elementary would become a pre-kindergarten through fourth-grade campus. Those students would go to Axton Intermediate for grades five and six and then move to Laurel Park. Rich Acres would house grades pre-kindergarten through five, while Drewry Mason would enroll grades pre-kindergarten through six.

All of Drewry Mason's students would move to Magna Vista High starting in the seventh grade.

After finishing at Rich Acres in the fifth grade, students would attend Drewry Mason for the sixth grade only and then go to Magna Vista High.

Appendix G

Steering Committee Report

Steering Committee Report

A steering committee was recently appointed by the Board to facilitate the reorganization of schools. The committee was charged with developing a reasonable plan of action and timelines for the major tasks to be achieved in the next year. The committee has scheduled its regular meetings on the second, third and fourth Thursdays of the month beginning at 10 a.m.

As chairman of the committee, Mr. House reported that the committee has identified areas of need for various subcommittees. When selecting subcommittee members, the steering committee strived for ethnic, gender and geographic diversity. Subcommittees will make recommendations to the steering committee. The steering committee will refer recommendations to the superintendent for presentation to the Board for approval.

Following is a list of subcommittees and their make up.

- **School Names and Mascot**
  Junior Student (4)
  Sophomore Student (4)
  Freshman Parent (4)
  Steering Committee Member (3)

- **Extra-Curricular Activities**
  Athletic Directors (4)
  Male Coaches (2)
  Female Coaches (2)
  Cheerleading Sponsor (1)

- **High School Curriculum and Instruction**
  Administrators (2)
  Guidance Counselors (2)
  Teachers (4)
  Students (4)

- **Middle School Curriculum and Instruction**
  Administrators (2)
  Guidance Counselors (2)
  Teachers (4)

- **Secondary Support Group**
  - Band Boosters
    Administrator (1)
    Presidents (2)
    Treasurers (2)
    Parent Representatives (2)
    Band Directors (2)

  - Athletics
    Administrator (1)
    Presidents (2)
    Treasurers (2)
    Parent Representatives (2)
    Athletic Directors (2)

- **Middle School Support Groups**
  Administrators (2)
  PTO/Booster Presidents (4)

- **Elementary Support Groups**
  Current PTO/PTA presidents of elementary schools that will close or change locations (Ridgeway, Spencer-Penn, Fieldale, Figsboro, Collinsville Primary, and John Redd Smith) (6)
  Administrators (3)

- **Special Education Reorganization**
  Administrators (2)
  Teachers (4)
  Special Education Advisory Council Representative (1)

- **Secondary Student Transition**
  2 Juniors (4)
  2 Sophomores (4)
  2 Freshmen (4)
  2 Eighth Graders (4)
  2 Faculty Sponsors (4)

- **Elementary Student Transition**
  Current principals of elementary schools that will close or change locations (Ridgeway, Spencer-Penn, Fieldale, Figsboro, Collinsville Primary, and John Redd Smith)

Appendix H

Resolution R 04-12

SCHOOL BOARD OF HENRY COUNTY
RESOLUTION R 04-12
April 8, 2004

WHEREAS, Dr. Sharon D. Dodson was appointed Division Superintendent of Schools for a four year term commencing July 1, 2002, and ending June 30, 2006; and

WHEREAS, the School Board and Dr. Dodson wish to terminate that appointment effective June 30, 2004; and

WHEREAS, the School Board desires to appoint Dr. Dodson for a four-year term commencing July 1, 2004, and ending June 30, 2008.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Dr. Dodson's appointment as Division Superintendent for a term commencing July 1, 2002, and ending June 30, 2006, and her employment agreement are hereby terminated by mutual consent effective June 30, 2004; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Dr. Dodson is appointed Division Superintendent for a term commencing July 1, 2004, and ending June 30, 2008; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Chairman and Deputy Clerk are authorized to execute an employment agreement with Dr. Dodson, a draft of which has been reviewed by the Board.

PASSED AND ADOPTED this 8th day of April 2004.

Appendix I

School Board of Henry County

Resolution R 05-04

August 5, 2004

WHEREAS, Henry County and the City of Martinsville coexist as independent political subdivisions of the Commonwealth of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Martinsville and Henry County have, since their creations, operated public schools for the education of the children residing in their respective communities; and

WHEREAS, the residents of Martinsville and Henry County live lives that cross political boundaries by living in one locality while working in another, shopping in one locality while recreating in the other, owning businesses that depend on the patronage of customers regardless of where they live; and

WHEREAS, a strong, effective public school operation is an important component in the quality of life for our community and the success of our economy; and

WHEREAS, a steady decline in student populations in both Martinsville and Henry County has caused the per-pupil cost of education to rise over many years; and

WHEREAS, Henry County's school enrollment is projected to decline by 41% between 1976 and 2007 and Martinsville's school enrollment is projected to decline by 29% between 1976 and 2007; and

WHEREAS, there is the possibility of expanding and enhancing the curriculum offered to students by the Henry County Schools and Martinsville City Schools by operating jointly; and

WHEREAS, the School Board acknowledges the recommendation submitted by the Subcommittee of the Joint School Boards of Martinsville and Henry County to Study the Feasibility of Merging School Systems on June 10, 2004; and

WHEREAS, public school bodies have worked together successfully in such Virginia localities as Bedford City and Bedford County; Fairfax City and Fairfax County; Covington City and Alleghany County; And

WHEREAS the County of Henry and City of Martinsville have worked together successfully on such public services as a regional public library system, solid waste disposal, public water, wastewater treatment, regional law enforcement training, public safety training, an emergency communications center, the development of an industrial park, economic development recruiting and many other services;

NOW THEREFORE be it resolved that the Henry County School Board believes that the students of Martinsville and Henry County and the community at large can be best served by one regional public school entity providing educational services to the students of Martinsville and Henry County.

BE IT FURTHUR RESOLVED that the Henry County School Board will commit, if available, the necessary resources of time, expertise and money toward researching, coordinating and other necessary participation with Martinsville City officials in a collaborative effort designed to achieve a unified, coordinated public school system that provides the highest quality education available to all students of our two political subdivisions.