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Successful Reorganization Of Rural North Dakota Schools With Declining Enrollment

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SUCCESSFUL REORGANIZATION OF RURAL NORTH DAKOTA SCHOOLS
WITH DECLINING ENROLLMENT

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota

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2014

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This dissertation, submitted by Steven L. Johnson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.



Dr. Gary L. Schnellert, Chair



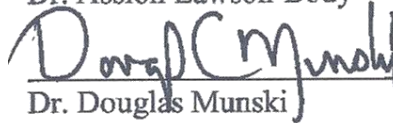
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Wayne Swisher
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

April 29, 2014
Date

PERMISSION

Title Successful Reorganization of Rural North Dakota Schools With Declining Enrollment

Department Educational Leadership

Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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Steven L. Johnson
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify perceptions of North Dakota leaders who had been involved in successfully reorganized school districts resulting from declining enrollments and reduced resources. All reorganized districts in this study were affected by serious declining enrollments in their respective rural communities. These successfully reorganized school districts developed reorganization plans and positive cultures within their communities that resulted in each plan being passed by a voting citizenship. The school districts studied laid the groundwork for reorganization with neighboring districts by forming cooperative agreements in athletics, shared staff, and shared special education services.

The researcher sought answers and perceptions from leaders of successfully reorganized school districts regarding the following:

1. What critical factors caused the beginning of the reorganization process?
2. What incentives were keys to the decision to reorganize?
3. What aspects of the reorganization process were positive or effective in terms of enhancing the process for all involved?
4. What aspects of the reorganization process were negative or ineffective strategies?

A mixed methods type of research was utilized. Board members, superintendents, principals, and business managers from 18 school districts were surveyed regarding their school's reorganization processes. Questions were designed to align with reorganization plans

and determine what effective contracts influenced decision makers while moving reorganization plans through the process. Research clearly indicated that the number one reason school districts developed a reorganization plan was due to declining enrollment. Key incentives to decisions to reorganize were strong desires to improve opportunities for students by pooling resources and joining two or more school districts together, thereby maximizing educational opportunity for students. The research revealed that the most significant part of a successful reorganization plan was representation from all former districts on the new school board. County committee reorganization hearing minutes and phone interviews found that many schools joined with neighboring districts in the reorganization efforts to prevent their school from closing. Many of the school districts school boards and administration were already considering closing using the dissolution process because of declining enrollment. By joining two or more school districts together, school leaders felt strongly that not only could they keep their schools open, but they could also provide greater opportunities for their students. Those opportunities were additional student services such as additional curricula and extracurricular offerings. Research clearly indicated rural school districts will continue to see either declining enrollment or very little growth. North Dakota enrollment increases will continue to shift from rural school districts to either larger, urban districts or those districts with a boom in the energy industry.

Keywords: school districts, North Dakota, successful reorganization, rural, declining enrollments

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The reorganization of rural school districts in the United States has been a controversial topic for school boards, state and local politicians, and rural communities since the late 1800s. The issues that have pushed this discussion include concerns about financial efficiency, student performance, school size, and community identity (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2005). Reorganization of small rural schools was thought to provide students with a better education by increasing the size of schools and educating students in larger schools. The industry model of the time was based on attempts to transform rural schools to look more like their urban counterparts. Larger schools were believed to be more economical and more efficient. There was also a belief that larger schools would offer more courses to prepare students for college or for the world of work in the new industrial age (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2005). Rural schools accomplished this transformation by reorganizing smaller elementary districts into larger more regional high school districts. This process was the beginning of reorganization of our nation's rural school districts.

States developed public school systems through an inherent responsibility to educate their populations. Because states were responsible to educate, they were also fiscally obligated to develop a public school system. Therefore, most states operated their schools like businesses. Rural school districts with only one school per township and with few students became targets to

reorganize into larger, more financially efficient districts by the early 1900s (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011).

The discussion to reorganize rural school districts because of declining enrollment was first examined in the middle to late 1980s. Many rural North Dakota school districts were losing students at such a high rate that it became more and more difficult to justify staffing for low teacher to student ratios. Rural school administrators and board members addressed such issues as budget deficits, staffing, transportation costs, and meeting standards when enrollments declined. Specific information on school districts considering reorganization as an alternative to closing because of a lack of students was not found; however, the researcher found evidence in hearing minutes that these small schools were in “survival mode.” They were looking for ways to keep their schools alive and functioning, for the good of their children and communities. Forming cooperative agreements with neighboring school districts to provide students with vocational education classes; sporting activities; technology; electives, such as foreign languages; special education services; and shared staff were discussed (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008). Due to future enrollment projections, school districts formed new partnerships with neighboring school districts for the purpose of reorganization.

Discussions have varied from state to state, but most conversations have focused on reorganization and consolidation. The dictionary defines reorganization as the “imposition of a new organization” or “an extensive alteration of the structure of a corporation or government” (Reorganization, n.d., p. 1). Consolidation is defined as the “combining into one solid mass” or “the act of combining into an integral whole” (Consolidation, n.d., p. 1). In the business world, consolidation was used to reduce costs and increase uniformity; but in education, it was used to

refer to the combining of school districts and closing of schools. Students who attended schools that were closed were either sent to other schools or a new larger school district was formed (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011). For the purpose of this study, the term reorganization was used to concur with North Dakota law. Therefore, how do we successfully reorganize small rural school districts with declining enrollments to meet the needs of the students and patrons they serve?

Statement of the Research Problem

The purpose of the study was to identify perceptions of school leaders involved in successfully reorganized school districts, reorganized due to declining enrollments and reduced resources. All the newly formed school districts in this study have witnessed serious declining enrollments in their respective rural communities, which have forced them to either reorganize or face permanent closure. Successfully reorganized school districts developed reorganization plans and positive cultures within their communities that resulted in their plans being passed by a voting citizenship. Most of these successfully reorganized school districts had already laid the groundwork for reorganization with neighboring districts by forming cooperative agreements in athletics, sharing of staff, and sharing of special education services. By studying the 21 successfully reorganized school districts in North Dakota from 2000 to 2010, the researcher examined previous processes used in reorganizations and attempted to ascertain perceptions of school leaders who were involved in past consolidations in an effort to accomplish future successfully reorganized districts (see Appendix A, *Successfully Reorganized ND School Districts, 2000-2010*).

Research Questions

The researcher sought answers from and perceptions of school leaders from successfully reorganized school districts as to why they felt their reorganization process was successful.

Specifically, the researcher asked the following:

1. What were the critical factors that caused the process of reorganization to begin?
2. What incentives were keys to the decision to reorganize?
3. What aspects of the reorganization process were positive or effective in terms of enhancing the process for all involved?
4. What aspects of the reorganization process were negative or ineffective strategies used in the process?

Scope of the Study

This study examined the reorganization process of school districts in the State of North Dakota. The knowledge gained from this study may assist rural school district administrators and school board members in the future to design a successful reorganization plan that would be passed by voting patrons.

In the early 1900s in North Dakota, educators began to realize that rural, one-room school houses could not offer the educational opportunities that town and city schools already provided. The disparity between rural educational opportunities and those afforded to town and city children was alarming (Quinnell, 2011). By 1916, in North Dakota, less than 25% of farm children finished the eighth grade while more than 75% of city children finished eighth grade. The disparity in finishing high school was even greater with more than 60% of city children enrolled in high school while less than 10% of farm children enrolled in high school. In 1916,

Neil C. MacDonald was elected North Dakota superintendent of public instruction under the campaign promise of “A Square Deal for the Country Boy.” MacDonald and other educators saw the consolidation of schools as the most important factor in providing better education for rural students (Quinnell, 2011). In 1918, there were 4,700 schools in North Dakota, many of those one-room school houses (Prairie Public Television, 1991). The population losses in North Dakota became less dramatic after the 1930s but continued to persist, in part because technology allowed farmers and ranchers to multiply their impacts on the land while employing fewer people (Popper & Popper, 2006).

By the 1930s, in North Dakota, 4,700 schools had been reduced to 2,200 school districts by means of “consolidation” (Prairie Public Television, 1991). In the United States in 1930, there were more than 262,000 public schools. Many of these schools had one school building within their district. By 2008-2009, the U.S. public school system operated 13,879 districts with 86,470 school buildings. Furthermore, the student population in the United States jumped to 49 million in 2005 compared to only 26 million students in 1929 (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011).

In the late 1950s, the political climate for rural school district reorganization became very strong due to international competitiveness. The Cold War and the launching of Sputnik created increased concerns that small high schools situated in rural parts of the United States were not producing the type of students needed to promote national security, especially in the areas of math and science (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2005). Figure 1 details the total number of public school districts in North Dakota beginning in the year 1918 and continuing to the year 2013. The

number of public school districts was reduced from 4,700 to 179 during this time (to see a map of school districts go to Appendix B).

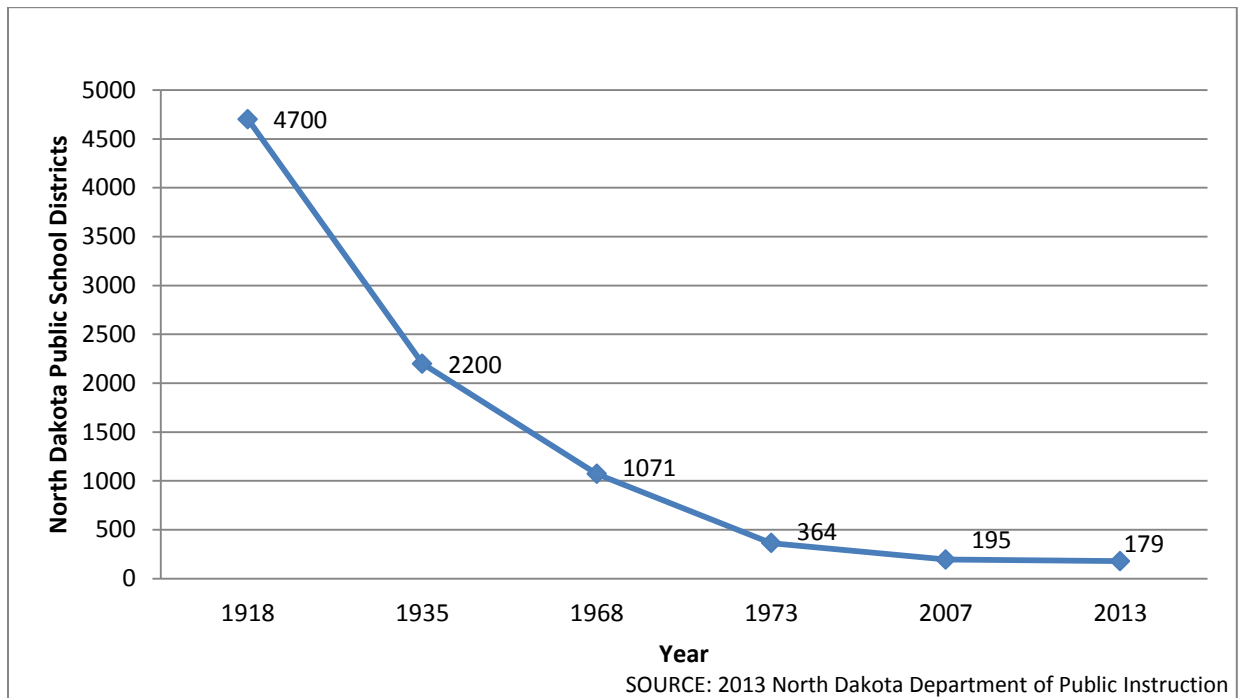


Figure 1. Number of Public School Districts in North Dakota, 1918-2013.

Consolidation in most rural areas came about by combining a few one-room school districts into a consolidated district. Sometimes, residents would physically move two to four one-room school houses to a central location joining walls and building a central roof. A surge of rural consolidated school buildings occurred after 1911 when North Dakota enacted a law giving state aid to elementary schools. Initially, it was limited to \$100 per consolidated school. It was increased to \$600 per school by 1913. With these matching state funds, new consolidated school districts could build substantial schools with classrooms, a library, a gymnasium, special rooms for vocational classes, and up-to-date heating systems. These new rural consolidated

districts could offer a range of studies, including music and competitive sports programs. They also became a place for social meetings for adults after school hours (Quinnell, 2011).

North Dakota's population decreased from 680,845 in 1930 to 636,677 in 2007 (Decker, 2007). During that same time period, the percentage of rural residents compared to urban residents in North Dakota shifted by 38% with the urban areas gaining the difference. North Dakota had 54.6% of its population living in urban areas in 2007 as compared to 16.6% in 1930 (Decker, 2007). There has been a major shift in ages of North Dakota's population in persons zero to nine years of age and persons aged 65 and older (Schwartzbeck, 2002). In 1930, North Dakota had nearly 30,000 people 65 years old and older; while at the same time, it had over 150,000 zero to nine years old. In 2000, North Dakota's population of people aged 65 and older was over 90,000, and the population of people zero to nine years of age dropped to about 80,000. In the height of the first strong movement to consolidate North Dakota school districts, which numbered approximately 1071 districts at the time, a number of laws were passed to promote reorganization.

There were many school districts that reorganized during the late 1950s and early 1960s thus further reducing the large number of township and rural schools. Each reorganized district was required to pass a reorganization plan by the patrons. This reorganization plan included provisions for transportation, curriculum, staffing, administration, school board membership, and budget projections. By 1973, the state of North Dakota had 364 school districts; and by 2007, that number further decreased to 195. During the time period between 1973 and 2007, total k-12 enrollment dropped from 136,404 students in 1973 to 95,600 students in 2007. Future projections for school enrollment in North Dakota predict only 86,406 students in the year 2018.

Most of that decline in student enrollment was projected to take place in districts that had fewer than 1,000 students at the time of this report. In fact, some models predicted that the largest eight school districts in the state of North Dakota would observe a leveling off of the decline in student numbers and would actually see a small increase (Decker, 2007). Fall public school enrollments for 2011-2012 showed that eight of 183 (a little over 4%) of school districts in the state (Bismarck, Fargo, West Fargo, Grand Forks, Mandan, Dickinson, Minot, and Williston), had a total k-12 student enrollment of 51,364 out of a total of 95,778 students, or 54% of North Dakota’s public school enrollment (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2012).

Figure 2 details the number of North Dakota public school students, k-12, in 1972-73, 1982-83, 1992-93, 1998-99, 2006-07 and 2012-13.

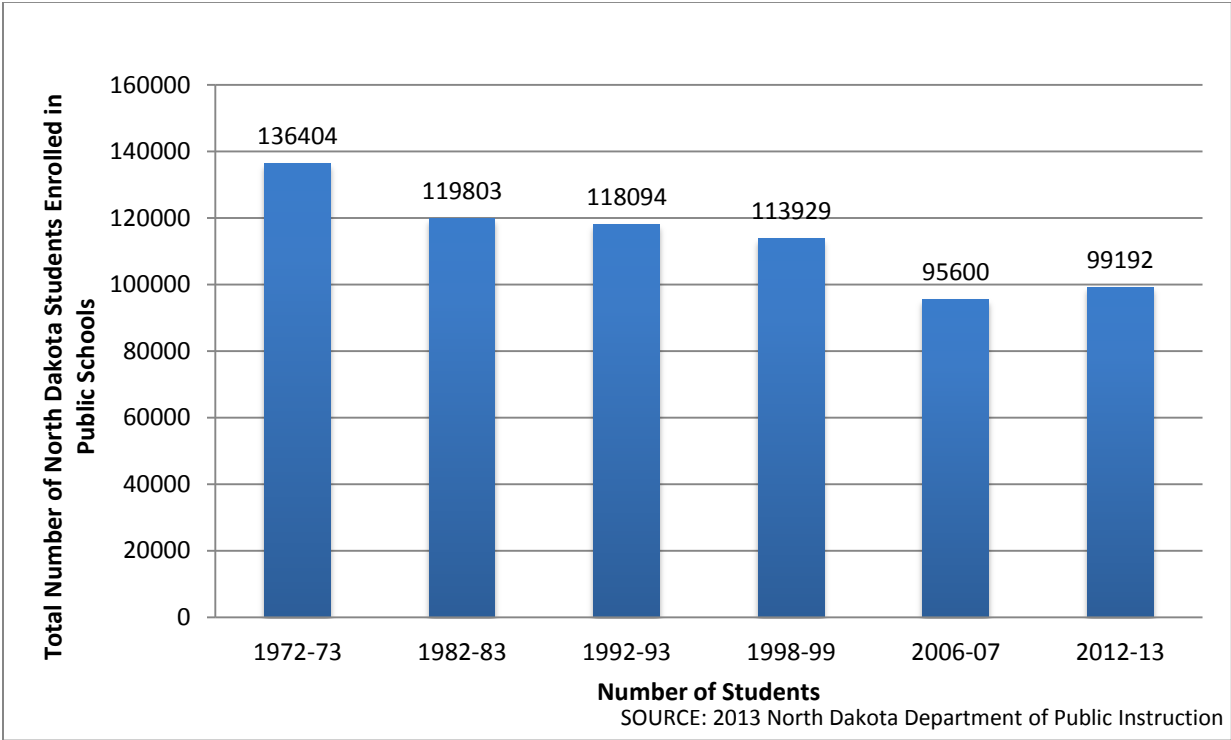


Figure 2. Number of North Dakota Students Enrolled in Public Schools for Selected Years.

In 2011, the North Dakota state legislature passed Section 34 of the school funding law entitled School District Rapid Enrollment Growth grant. The grant would distribute a total of \$5 million divided equally over a two-year biennium (\$2.5 million in 2011-12 and \$2.5 million in 2012-2013). To qualify for grant money school districts had to have at least 25 new students and at least a 7.5% increase in student enrollment (Coleman, 2013).

In the first year of the grant (2011-2012), only 10 school districts out of 183 school districts (5%) qualified for the grant money, a total of \$2,408,560 for 616 new students. The only large school district to receive grant money was Williston with 2,659 total students, 192 being new students to the district. South Prairie (an elementary district south of Minot) was the smallest district to receive grant funding for 174 students with 27 of them new students. The purpose of the grant money was to relieve school districts strapped by the “oil boom” phenomena in western North Dakota. South Prairie’s sudden increase in student enrollment may also have been caused by the devastating flood in Minot during the summer of 2011 that had a severe negative impact upon many of the schools situated along the river in Minot (Coleman, 2013).

In the second year of the grant (2012-2013), 21 school districts out of 183 (11%) received grant money. In the second year, \$2,591,440 was distributed to those 21 schools for 1,430 new students. The largest school district to receive grant money was West Fargo with 7,969 students; and the smallest, was Burke Central with 118 students (Coleman, 2013).

During the rapid enrollment grant period, student enrollment in the state of North Dakota grew a mere 1.1% in the 2011-12 school year with a total public school enrollment of 95,778, an increase of 1,049 students from the previous year. The eight largest school districts accounted

for 903 of those 1,049 students or 86%. The only large school districts to lose students in that year were Grand Forks with a loss of 61 students, Mandan with a loss of 28 students, and Minot with a loss of 167 students (Coleman, 2013).

The state of North Dakota had a 3.44% growth in total public school enrollments in 2012-2013 for a total of 3,414 new students. Total public school enrollment for the year was 99,192. The eight largest school districts gained 2,125 of those new students or 62%. Not one school of the eight largest school districts witnessed a decline in enrollment in 2012-2013. Eighty-six school districts or 47% of the state's school district had no growth or loss of students in 2011-2012. In 2012-2013, 71 school districts or 39% of the state's school districts had no growth or loss of students. This mirrored the overall state population as the state also saw a similar shift of residents from smaller rural counties to larger, more urban counties. Overall state population totals were misleading because they suggested that the entire state was growing. In fact, the majority of North Dakota counties realized a decline in population while a much smaller percentage of counties saw an increase in population (Coleman, 2013).

The Kids Count Data Center compared k-12 student enrollment based on average daily membership for all North Dakota Public Schools by county from 2008 to 2012. They found that 31 counties out of the 53 counties (58%) in the state of North Dakota lost enrollment during that time period. Cass County had the largest increase in enrollment with 1,593 new students. The largest percentage increase was in Sioux county with a 32% increase in student enrollment up 450 to 658 in 2012 compared to 208 students in 2008 (North Dakota KIDS COUNT, 2014).

Further evidence of student enrollment shifts was found in the North Dakota Public Instruction's Public School District Fall Enrollment 2013-2014 (Coleman, 2013). Data collected

represented an increase in fall enrollment of 2,500 new public school students from 2012 to 2013. Of those 2,500 new students, 1,951 or 78% enrolled in either Bismarck (242), Dickinson (323), Fargo (92), Grand Forks (108), Mandan (126), Minot (227), West Fargo (492) or Williston (341). Based on these increases, the aforementioned school districts now controlled 55% of the total student enrollment. Fall enrollment data of 2013 revealed 80 of 179 North Dakota school districts either lost enrollment or stayed the same. The 549 new students who did not enroll in the “Big Eight” school districts were spread among the 91 remaining school districts that had an increase. McKenzie County #1 (Watford City) had the largest growth in student population with 162 students, up from 859 in the Fall of 2012 to 1,021 in the Fall of 2013 (Coleman, 2013). McKenzie County #1 School District was in the heart of the Bakken Oil Boom in Western North Dakota (Coleman, 2013). Figure 3 details number of k-12 students enrolled in North Dakota public school districts from 2011-12 to 2013-14. It shows 51,364 students were enrolled in 8 of the 183 districts in 2011-12, and 55,440 students were enrolled in those same 8 districts while the number of total school districts was reduced to 179 in 2013-14.

Figure 4 details enrollment of new students in North Dakota in the year 2013-2014. The majority, 1,951 students, of the 2,500 new students were enrolled in the Big Eight school districts. A total of 549 new students enrolled in 91 districts while 80 school districts saw no increase in number of students or showed a decline in total enrollment.

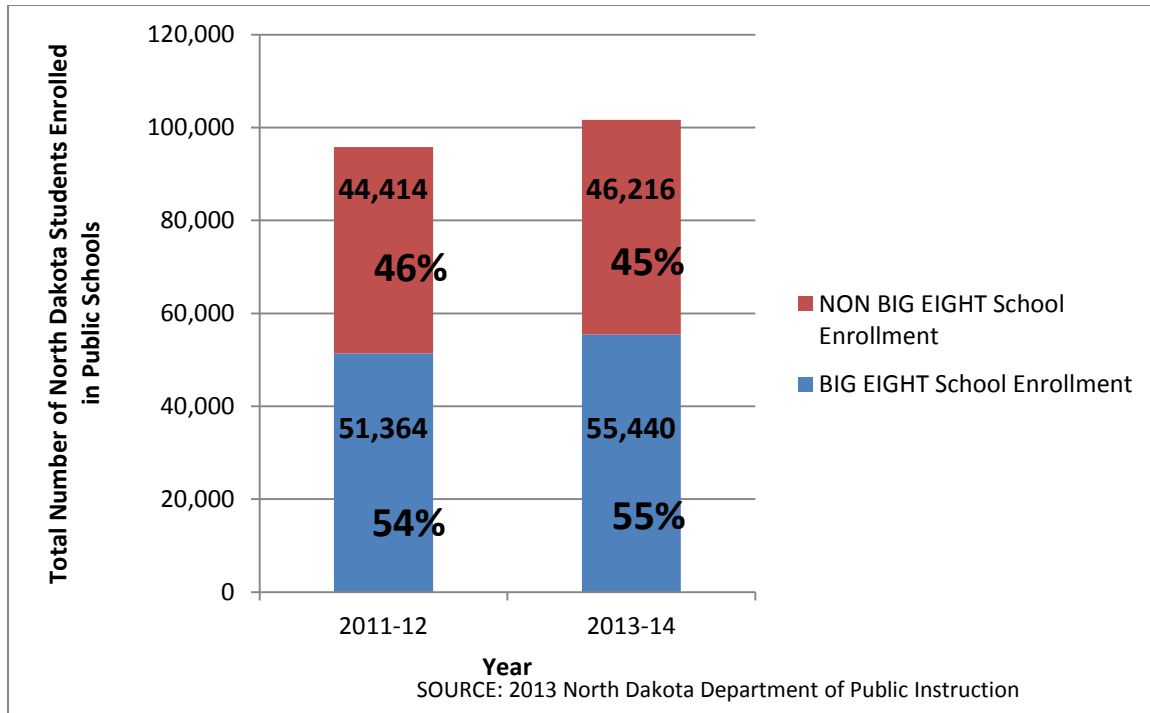


Figure 3. Number of Students in North Dakota Public Schools, 2011-2012 and 2013-2014.

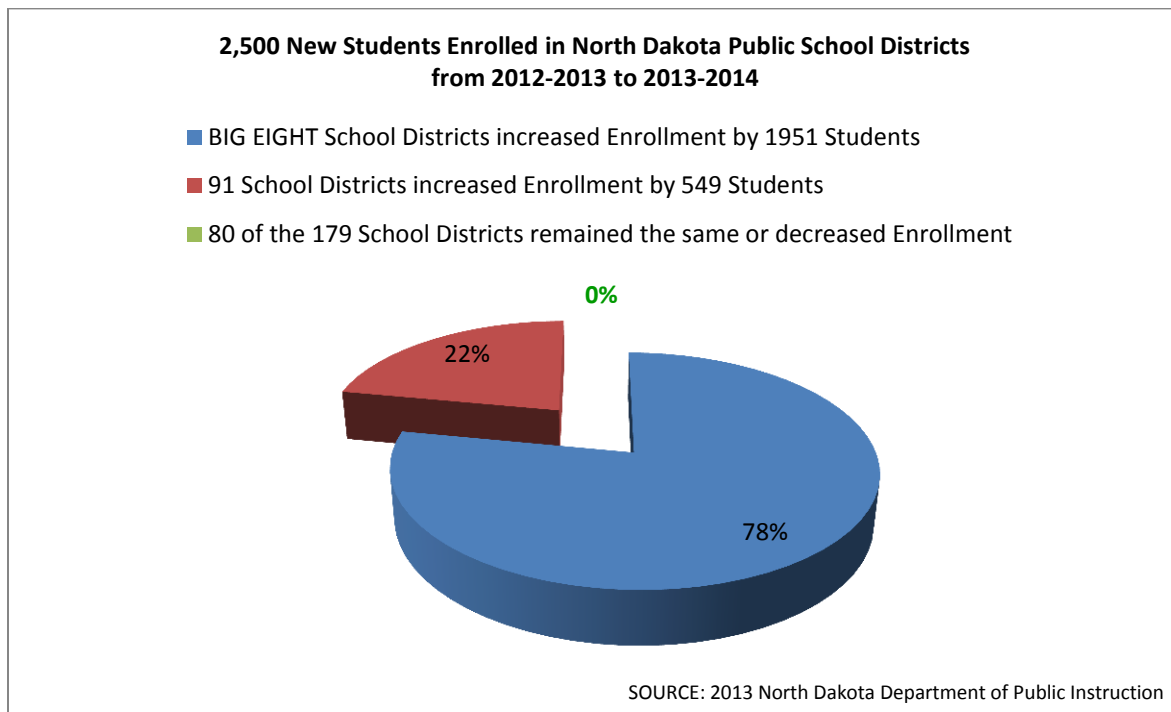


Figure 4. Enrollment of New Students in North Dakota, 2013-2014.

Population shifts have resulted in major increases in the number of elderly people in counties across North Dakota. These population shifts have occurred much faster than predicted. Many counties were predicted to have over 50% of their population over the age of 65 by the year 2020 (Keller, 2003b). Support for the elderly has cost communities money and has been economically tough on local schools, infrastructure, parks, and recreation and workforce development programs. It was predicted that by the year 2020, the United States would spend about \$529 billion on long term health care for persons over the age of 65 (Popper & Popper, 2006). Rural states and rural populations like North Dakota witnessed too many people in their 20s and 30s leaving states to pursue better economic opportunities (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). It was theorized that because of the increased size of farms and the loss of manufacturing jobs in rural states in the 1980s and early 1990s, most high school graduates determined that in order for them to succeed, they had to leave the community (Carr & Kefalas, 2009) (Sherman & Sage, 2011). For counties whose economies were agriculturally dependent, they were at a greater risk for persistent student enrollment decline (Bernstein, 2009). As agriculture became more technologically based with less dependence on labor and as farms became larger, rural populations continued to see a shift and a migration of young adults to metro counties (Bucholtz & Cromartie, 2008). The cumulative effect of agricultural restructuring had to be continually followed to meet the needs of residents who stayed (Rathge & Highman, 1998).

In Great Plains states like North Dakota, there has been a history of population shifts. Between 1950 and 1996, the Great Plains actually increased its population (Corn, 2009). However, in their research, Richard Rathge and Paula Highman (1998) found growth was basically in the “metro” counties of the Great Plains. When breaking down the population

growth, they found “nonmetro” counties had lost a large portion of their population (Rathge & Highman, 1998). The movement of residents from rural areas into metro areas in the plains states has been dramatic, and this migration was still occurring at the time of this study (Albrecht, 2010) (InForum, 2011a). As a result, the nonmetro population has declined significantly (Rathge & Highman, 1998). Furthermore, Rathge and Highman found that counties without a city larger than 2,500 residents have witnessed a staggering decline in population with a loss of more than a third of their population occurring between 1950 and 1996. In contrast, 40 metro counties within their study represented only 8.4 percent of all counties in the Great Plains region, but accounted for 93% of total residential growth (Rathge & Highman, 1998).

Transportation also has become a major issue for school districts. Rural school districts have witnessed longer bus rides with fewer students riding buses (Jimerson, 2007). Smaller districts have spent twice the amount of dollars to transport students as urban districts. Twenty-five percent of rural elementary schools in the United States bus their students more than one hour to school each day (Schwartzbeck, 2002). Most schools did not have the funds in their budgets to meet the costs of longer bus rides as a result of an increase in fuel prices that more than doubled in 2008 (Steiner, 2009). As early as the late 1800s, legislation provided free public transportation which allowed some rural schools to reorganize because with automobiles and with the paving of roadways students could travel longer distances in shorter amounts of time (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2005). International Harvester Company, a large farm implement manufacturer and promoter of school reorganization, produced sale catalogs promoting their manufactured International Harvester school buses (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2005). North Dakota school year data for 2009-2010 showed total state transportation funding at \$47,316,653

for 96,323 students. It was estimated that 38,065 students in grades k-12 were transported one-way daily at public expense. Total public school buses registered for that time period were 1,984 (Gray, 2014).

An analysis of minutes from county reorganization hearings from all 21 successful reorganization districts in North Dakota revealed that all of those who testified believed the reason they needed to reorganize their district was due to declining enrollment. All 21 plans to reorganize stated the reason for reorganization of two or more school districts into a new district was due to declining enrollments. Proponents of reorganization believed the solution to the problem of declining enrollment was pooling their resources with other school districts.

Talks were held about the future of our schools and what was going to happen because of declining enrollment and depletion of funds. . . . Nobody likes to lose their school. Nobody wants their school to close. If we had our choice we would chose [*sic*] to keep our schools in our community but we realize with dwindling school populations, with one and two kids per class in lower grades that we need to do something. (Lind, 2000, pp. 2-3)

Board members discussed issues in the best interest of students and determined that by forming a new school district they would be more competitive, improve opportunities for students, and provide economic development for the area. In Kidder County, people who spoke in support of reorganization believed it was a way to hold their communities together by increasing taxable value, pooling resources like students and staff, and by enhancing co-curricular and curricular opportunities for students. Nothing was more painful to a community than the realization that they did not have enough students to keep the local school open (Carr & Kefalas, 2010).

Assumptions of the Study

Various assumptions were made about successfully reorganized school districts in the study. The first assumption was that North Dakota school districts were faced with declining enrollment and looked for ways to provide the best opportunities possible for their students. The second assumption was that there were incentives for the voting public to approve reorganization plans. The third assumption was that by studying successfully reorganized schools, a determination would be made of positive and effective aspects of the process. The fourth assumption was the study would determine those ineffective aspects of the process of reorganization. It was also assumed that all survey respondents would respond and do so honestly.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study was that results would illustrate positive and negatives impacts of reorganization on school districts in a rural state like North Dakota.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are included in this report to support the reader in understanding the research and conclusions of the study:

Annexation: “The alteration of a school district’s boundaries through the removal of real property from one school district and its attachment to another contiguous school district” (Annexation, Reorganization, and Dissolution, 2014, p. 1).

Big Eight North Dakota School Districts: At the time of this study, the eight largest school districts in North Dakota including: Bismarck, Dickinson, Fargo, Grand Forks, Mandan, Minot, West Fargo, and Williston.

Consolidation: An old term used by North Dakota law that means to combine two or more school districts into one school district.

Consortium: The joining together of school districts and other subdivisions of government for purposes allowed by law.

Contiguous: “Two or more tracts of real property which share a common point or which would share a common point but for an intervening road or right of way”
(Annexation, Reorganization, and Dissolution, 2014, p. 1).

County Reorganization Board: Board appointed by the county commission of each county whose purpose is to hear the annexation, dissolution, or reorganization plan and vote on it. If approved, the plan moves to the State Public School Board.

County Reorganization Hearing: Public hearing by the county reorganization board to review a reorganization plan, accept testimony, and document evidence regarding the reorganization plan.

Declining Enrollment: The loss of students in grades k-12, consistent with reporting procedures required by the State of North Dakota.

Dissolution: “The process through which a school district ceases to function and the subsequent attachment of its real property to other school districts” (Annexation, Reorganization, and Dissolution, 2014, p. 1).

Evolutionary Change Theory: An organization’s process of finding new structure, stability, and activities when faced with gradual changes to their organization over time; like adopting to a decline in enrollment and shifts in a population within a community (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Frontier Counties: Phrase used by the U. S. Census Bureau when describing counties with six people or less per square mile (Wilson, 2009).

Large School District: School districts with k-12 enrollments in North Dakota of 1000 students or more as based on annual reporting by North Dakota's Department of Public Instruction.

Nonmetro County: Refers to counties in rural states without cities of 30,000 people or more (Rathge & Highman, 1998).

Regional Education Association: "A group of school districts that have entered a joint powers agreement that has been reviewed by the superintendent of public instruction and verified as meeting the requirements of section 15.1-09.1-02" (Regional Education Associations, 2014).

Reorganization: "The formation of a new school district through the combination, in whole or in part, of two or more school districts" (Annexation, Reorganization, and Dissolution, 2014, p. 1).

Reorganization Plan: A report addressing North Dakota Century Code, Section 15.1-12-10 requirements for the content of reorganization plans including: maps, student enrollments, student enrollment projections, condition of buildings, course offerings, administrative structure, transportation, taxable valuation, career and technology centers, multidistrict special education units, indebtedness, planned disposition of property, proposed budget, proposed name, and any other information participating districts wish to have the county committee or state board consider (Annexation, Reorganization, and Dissolution, 2014).

Restructuring: Term used by school districts to develop a plan for changing the structure of a district through development of a reorganization plan.

Rural School Districts: School districts with k-12 enrollments in North Dakota of less than 1000 based on annual reporting by North Dakota's Department of Public Instruction.

School District: By law, each school district is a body corporate governed by provisions in North Dakota Century Code 15.1-07-01. School districts may "sue and be sued, contract, and convey any real and personal property that comes into its possession" (School Districts, 2014, p. 1).

Delimitations of the Research

The population sample surveyed consisted of school leaders from 21 successfully reorganized school districts in North Dakota; reorganizations took place during the years 2000 to 2010 (see Appendix A). Original sample population included district school leaders such as superintendents, principals, business managers, and school board members.

Summary

Many of the 21 successfully reorganized school districts experienced no opposition to reorganization at county hearings. However, during a few hearings, some people who might have been called a mild opposition questioned the process of reorganization more than actually opposing the plan. Most questions about reorganization plans were centered on the following themes – what facilities or school buildings would be used for future educational facilities and what would be done with school buildings that were no longer needed? What would be the new makeup of the school board and would all previous school districts be represented on the board?

What would be done with openly enrolled students and how would property taxes of openly enrolled students/residents be impacted by reorganization?

From 2000 to 2010, North Dakota had 18 school districts that dissolved. A dissolution process is when a school district ceases to function and subsequently attaches their real property to other school districts. Districts who used the dissolution process were Reeder #3, Driscoll #36, McKenzie #34, Salund #10, Willow City #13, Regan #2, Butte #62, Union #12, Sheets #14, Verona #11, Bowline Butte #19, Border Central #14, Mantador #5, Golden Valley #20, Dodge #008, Wildrose/Alamo #91, Bell #10, and Nash #51. It was difficult to find information on reorganization plans that failed because many of those districts attempts to reorganize were never recorded or brought to a public vote.

How would these dramatic population shifts affect rural school districts across the state? What would the loss or reorganization of a community's school have on the economy of that community? How would school districts plan for population shifts? What issues concerning student learning and teaching would be affected? How would administrators and school boards meet challenges?

By examining and understanding the perceptions of decision makers in rural schools when faced with these issues, we can find ways of working towards a plan for the future of North Dakota education. Findings may impact how school administrators and board members address issues such as budget deficits, staffing, and meeting standards when enrollments decline.

In the late 1980s, in the state of North Dakota, many leaders attempted to entice school districts across the state to reorganize. It was thought reorganization was the best choice to address declining enrollment projections. The legislative assembly passed a law that encouraged

school districts to plan for reorganization with the use of per pupil payment incentives. In order to receive incentives, a consortium of three or more school districts had to be formed and was required to work toward development of a plan to reorganize into one district. The restructuring plan requirements were based on current state law for annexation, reorganization, and dissolution. One must remember that all school districts in North Dakota were and continue to be quasi-not-for-profit corporations which have been required by law to follow a standard template to operate. The restructuring plan voted on was required to include: district formation including a detailed map of all land included; effective date of formation; district name; governance, including terms of office and residence requirements of each board member; chief executive administration or superintendent; facilities; school district budget; mill rate; existing debt; teaching staff retention; student population; and, the organizational structure of student configuration within the district's buildings. During this time, most plans also included proposed school staffing, curriculum offerings, co-curricular offerings, proposed class sizes, programs and services, curriculum development, staff development, transportation, and open enrollment options.

After drafting and finalizing a restructuring plan, it was mandatory the plan be presented to the public for a vote. Information required to be presented to the public included: restructuring rationale including negative and positive consequences of restructuring; data presentation including enrollment, district size, finances, programs and services, staffing, transportation and facilities, and the proposed restructuring plan.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

North Dakota Reorganization Laws

In 1985, the North Dakota legislative assembly revised laws dealing with school district annexation, reorganization, and dissolution by repealing Chapter 15-53.1 of the North Dakota Century Code. This chapter of law was passed as an emergency measure so that school districts who were already working on the process would be covered by law. It was the first major revision of the laws dealing with school district annexation, reorganization, and dissolution laws since the late 1950s.

In 1989, the North Dakota legislative assembly passed another emergency measure to the North Dakota Century Code's School District Reorganization law. The purpose of the measure was to provide \$200,000 toward establishing planning grants, \$180,000 to help fund the cost of a state school district redistricting coordinator, and to fund supplemental pupil payments to school districts working on the reorganization process. Lastly, the law appropriated \$874,500 to the office of the superintendent of public instruction for the sole purpose of increasing planning grant supplemental payments from \$125 to \$165 per pupil. The payments went to projected redistricted districts that were approved by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and began July 1, 1989 and continued through June 30, 1991 (North Dakota 51st Legislative Assembly, 1989).

But the 1989 law had restrictions. It would not allow total 1989-1991 supplemental pupil payments to exceed \$1,074,500. The acceptance of planning grants by a school required that it study and complete an analysis of school facilities, student transportation, financial resources, personnel, and past and projected enrollment trends. The final report had to include a plan for the restructuring of participating school districts, a timetable for implementation of the plan, procedures for an interim district board to oversee implementation of the plan, an analysis of the data studied, and approval of the preliminary plan by participating school districts' school board members and the state board of public education (North Dakota 51st Legislative Assembly, 1989).

In 1999, during the 56th Legislative Assembly, North Dakota once again passed legislation to deal with reorganized school districts and districts with declining enrollments. This legislation ensured school districts participating in reorganization efforts that per student payments would not be reduced during the reorganization process (North Dakota 56th Legislative Assembly, 1999a, pp. 74-75). In addition, the legislation added reorganization bonuses to school districts (North Dakota 56th Legislative Assembly, 1999b, p. 202) as well as provided language that if insufficient funds existed to fully pay all school districts eligible for reorganization bonuses, an emergency measure with money appropriated necessary to provide the full bonus payment would kick in (North Dakota 56th Legislative Assembly, 1999a, p. 83). The assembly also passed legislation worth \$2.75 million earmarked as supplemental per student payments (North Dakota 56th Legislative Assembly, 1999a, p. 82). A school district received money for students lost because of declining enrollment. The money was for those districts with a history of declining enrollments that had a 1999 fall enrollment which was fewer than their

1994 fall enrollment. This payment was to be based on total statewide decline during the five-year (1994-1999) period. The maximum payment received by any school district could not exceed the amount of money it would take to cover supplemental per student payments for 500 students (North Dakota 56th Legislative Assembly, 1999a, p. 82). So, if a school district lost 550 students, that district would only receive a sum of money equal to supplemental per student payments for 500 students.

Lastly, the 1999 Legislative Assembly passed Section 13 requiring the legislative council to study educational equity and educational delivery in both rural and urban school districts. The council was to report their findings and recommendations to the next legislative assembly in 2001 (North Dakota 56th Legislative Assembly, 1999a, p. 82).

The 2001 Legislative Assembly continued supplemental payments for declining enrollments but limited the maximum payment to \$150 per student over declines from reported fall enrollments in the school year 1997-98 to the school year 2000-01 (North Dakota 57th Legislative Assembly, 2001, pp. 68-69). Legislation passed during these sessions was engineered expressly to assist North Dakota school districts in adjusting to rapidly declining enrollments.

And so laws were passed and money spent; however, after infusing over \$1.4 million of state dollars into the planning stages of reorganization plans, most of those proposed plans were defeated by vote of the local citizens. What caused this lack of patron support at the polls? The failure to obtain North Dakota voter approval for the majority of these plans caused many school reformers in the state to re-evaluate the methods used to deal with impending declining enrollment.

The state of North Dakota has continued to look at ways to plan for impending shifts in population and the resultant decline in rural school enrollment. In the 2005 Legislative Assembly, North Dakota created Regional Education Associations or REAs. The purpose of these REAs was to provide services for all member schools through cooperation. The belief was that all students in North Dakota should have the same services available to them regardless of where they lived. According to enrollment trends, however, enrollment has continued to decline in rural schools (Decker, 2007).

Evolutionary Change Theory

School leaders faced with declining enrollments need to be very familiar with organizational change. School districts have been required to address change as a result of declining enrollments. Although school leaders cannot control change, some changes, such as declining enrollments and reductions in resources, can be difficult to predict (Van de Ven & Sun, 2011). Leaders who look ahead and create an atmosphere of expectation for what the future may hold are more likely to be successful dealing with declining enrollments (Pryor, Taneja, Humphreys, Anderson, & Singleton, 2008). School leaders, especially superintendents, and school boards need to be problem solvers to intervene and control change by diagnosing and correcting problems.

In the Evolutionary Change Theory of Economic Change, Nelson and Winter (1982) viewed an organization as combining ongoing behavior patterns, producing stability and continuity, with search activities for scouting new options. Their research looked at a wide range of questions that were associated with economic change. These economic changes ranged from product demand or supply to new innovations in production (Nelson & Winter, 1982). If an

organization finds new possibilities, it tries them out. Organizational change gradually happens over time as an organization incorporates new ideas to meet its environmental needs (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Organizations maintain themselves better in an environment that stays the same rather than an environment dealing with a major change or changes (Nelson & Winter, 1982). An organizational change process, which finds new structure, stability, and activities when faced with a gradual change in population, such as that caused by population shifts, can be called evolutionary change. The Evolutionary Change Theory can aid school leaders through the process of change when leaders are confronted with declining enrollments and shifts in the population make-up within their communities and schools.

While reviewing the literature, the researcher found two main types of evolutionary models including social evolutionary models and biological models. Because research on organizational change in schools was considered social evolutionary change, models studied focus on abilities of organizations to plan and respond to change (Kezar, 2001). Three concepts are central to the evolutionary change theory:

- **Routine:** A regular and predictable pattern of behavior, a way of doing something that a firm uses repeatedly.
- **Search:** The process of assessing current options, acquiring new information, and altering routines.
- **Selection environment:** The set of considerations determining whether an organization adopts an innovation and how an organization learns of an innovation from others. (Bolman & Deal, 2003, pp. 384-385).

Minutes from county reorganization hearings reflected that many of those who testified believed that if their school districts did not pass their plan to reorganize with neighboring school districts, they would not survive. Change happens because the environment demands change for survival (Kezar, 2001). When studying evolutionary change, no one knows if more intense reorganization efforts of organizations produce more successes than failures compared to halfhearted attempts at reorganization, but the percentage of failure has been high (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

It has been difficult to predict success of school reorganization efforts in North Dakota because many school districts never get to the point of developing a plan complete enough to be voted on. Between the years 2000 and 2010, 18 school districts in North Dakota chose to go through a dissolution process instead of reorganization. The researcher found only two reorganization plans that failed by a vote of citizens in the districts involved. How many informal discussions of reorganizations took place over those 10 years which never reached the level of a formal reorganization plan and a vote by the people is difficult to estimate. How many school districts have resolved their problem of declining student enrollment by sharing staff, sharing administration, joining an educational cooperative to give students alternative ways to receive classes, or establishing a sports cooperative? Evolutionary change process commonly breaks down because of a small number of similar reasons in various school districts and a lack of options due to limited resources (Van de Ven & Sun, 2011).

Schools in this research had the options of reorganization or dissolution to resolve their issues of declining enrollment and a declining tax base. Their resources were limited to local property taxes, federal entitlements, and state foundation aid. North Dakota's foundation aid was

based on a per pupil basis. In discussion of evolutionary economics, it has been argued that legal entities like banks can in fact merge to pool their resources to meet the needs of economic problems (Murmann, Aldrich, Levinthal, & Winter, 2003). It was believed these firms could come together even with their many differences because a merger would result in their making more money. If banking firms can put aside their differences to merge, then why can't school districts reorganize to maximize educational opportunities for their students?

Organizational efforts at evolutionary change have succeeded by following several basic principles of successful structural change:

1. First, planners need to develop a new concept of an organization's goals, objectives, and strategies.
2. Second, planners need to carefully study existing structure and process within their organizations so they understand how things have worked in the past. Many efforts at structural change fail because planners do not have a complete picture of current processes.
3. Next, planners need to design a new structure for their organization in light of proposed changes in goals, technology, and environment.
4. Finally, planners will experiment, retain strategies that work, and discard strategies that do not (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Restructuring has been a powerful, but high-risk tool for organizational change. Change does not occur successfully unless all people have been prepared for it (Kezar, 2001). In the short term, it almost invariably produces confusion, resistance, and even a decline in effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Any organizational change may be difficult for

individuals because they have to change their “current” approach (Kezar, 2001). Many times, school leaders identify their “current” approach with their strengths. In order for leaders to communicate change to their organization, they must first understand their own fears of change. Leaders are of paramount importance within any social change. When school leaders recognize the need for change through reorganization, they can be more successful implementing initiatives (Pryor, Taneja, Humphreys, Anderson, & Singleton, 2008).

Restructuring is a challenging process that consumes time and resources with no guarantee of success. Organizations typically embark on a path to reorganize when they feel compelled to respond to major problems or opportunities (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Human nature makes organizational change difficult because our culture conditions us to do things the same over time as we have in the past (Richerson, Collins, & Genet, 2006).

Organizational evolutionary change becomes difficult when resources are plentiful. Often times, people are not concerned with change or don’t want to cause conflict with others when resources are available. When resources are restricted, people are more likely to support change (Kezar, 2001). School leaders have limited impact on an organization’s culture, so it may be difficult to work within an existing school’s and community’s cultural norms (Richerson, Collins, & Genet, 2006).

The role of school leaders during reorganization efforts must be one of managers of language and the public (Weick & Quinn, 1999). School leaders, as change leaders within the organizational Evolutionary Change Theory should plan for success by developing strategies that promote action and reflection. They should expand their knowledge based on managing models of change. School leaders should diagnose weaknesses and breakdowns in models of change

because that allows them opportunities to fix issues during the process of reorganization. They should not allow problems to get so large they cannot be fixed. From this, they can build a contingency process for implementation of change (Van de Ven & Sun, 2011).

Population Shifts

Although incentive programs failed to create newly reorganized school districts across the state of North Dakota, the reality of declining enrollment continued to haunt the state. In 1987, two college professors from New Jersey who specialized in urban planning published their proposal for the Great Plains state (Popper & Popper, 1987). Deborah and Frank Popper wrote an article entitled “The Great Plains and the Buffalo Commons.” In this article, they described the Great Plains states as areas exhibiting large cycles in population, economic and environmental busts and booms. Moreover, the Poppers predicted additional future cycles of ups and downward trends in the economy, population, and environment. Their solution for the region was solely based upon what they perceived to be the best use of the land they termed the “Buffalo Commons.” They wrote that the land was better used with a defined purpose of traditional agricultural and pure wilderness. Although the plan has been debated and criticized, it has never been endorsed by any of the state governments within the Great Plains (Popper & Popper, 2004).

In the early 2000s, John W. Keller of Kansas State University was commissioned by the United Rural Schools Administrators through the American Association of School Administrators to conduct a study. Keller’s study was funded by a grant from the Johnson Foundation. Like the Poppers, Keller was a professor of planning and had completed extensive work in rural economic development and planning. He had also conducted extensive research in

sparsely populated areas of Australia using his studies to make comparisons between Australia and issues in rural America. His presentations include: “Vanishing Community on the Great Plains,” “The Countryside: U.S. and Australian Comparative Practices,” and “Rural Change and Structure – Economic Development in Country Towns.” In his presentation and study “Smart Decline: The Case of Vanishing Rural Schools,” Keller offered many comparisons between the future of rural schools and the need to have a plan for rural schools and plans and needs for entire rural communities. The plans and futures of rural schools paralleled plans and futures of rural communities (Keller, 2003a). The area that Keller defined in his prediction of population shifts covered prairie provinces of Canada to the north to West Texas to the south and from west of the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains.

Historically, the federal government has played an important role as a major source of income for states with a declining population like North Dakota. Many counties in North Dakota have received three to five times as much federal aid per capita, in the form of farm payments, as other much larger populated counties in the Great Plains region (Schwartzbeck, 2003). In 2011, the Grand Forks Herald reported that North Dakota farmers were getting older and their farms were getting larger. The report went on to describe that North Dakota farms were making more money and becoming a prosperous industry (InForum, 2011b). According to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service and the 2012 Census of Agriculture, North Dakota had 31,970 farms in 2007. The number of farms in 2012 was reduced by 1,009 farms to 30,961 total farms. The average acres per farm increased in 2012 to 1,268 acres up from 1,241 acres in 2007. The average age of a North Dakota farmer increased slightly to 57 years of age in 2012 up from 56.5 years of age in 2007 (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2014). In this five

year period (2007-2012), the number of North Dakota farms decreased, and because a shift in population occurred, average age of farmers increased, North Dakota saw a decrease in 0-18 year olds, and the direct result was a declining enrollment in rural school populations.

School Funding

Research completed in 1959 revealed that larger school districts and schools were financially more efficient than small districts and schools. The research led to a more aggressive movement to reorganize smaller school districts into larger districts with an ideal high school size of 400 students in order to save tax dollars (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011). James Streifel, George Foldesy and David Holman conducted a study in 1991 on the financial effects of consolidation of school districts. The study looked only at the cost to the district of consolidating. It did not examine the effects of reorganization on the community (Streifel, Foldesy, & Holman, 1991). As schools continued to experience rising per pupil costs and declining enrollments, school districts were forced to look at other options to educate the students in their communities (Anderson, 2009). Research into financial benefits of reorganization does not substantiate that reorganization results in cost savings as earlier believed from research in the 1950s through the 1970s (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011).

In 2008, *Funding Schools Adequately in North Dakota: Resources to Double Student Performance* was presented to the North Dakota Education Improvement Commission. This final report was presented and written by Lawrence O. Picus and Associates. The report studied North Dakota's school finance structure, student performance, and North Dakota schools that had improved student performance. Schools of various sizes were studied to determine steps that were successful in improving student performance (Odden, Picus, Goetz, Aportela, & Archibald,

2008). At the time, North Dakota did not have specific laws restricting school size or policies in place to financially support districts based on student performance. North Dakota statisticians used a weighted factor, based on size of school district, to determine the amount of a foundation payment per student. The state divided school districts into the following main categories: rural districts k-8 (considered small but necessary), graded elementary of less than 100 students, graded elementary of 100 to 999 students, graded elementary of more than 1,000 students, high school of less than 100 students, high school of 100 to 999 students, and high school of more than 1,000 students. Weighted factors were also based on special considerations given to vocational centers and special education multidistrict units, which were in turn multiplied with a base foundation payment to determine each district's per pupil payment (Odden, Picus, Goetz, Aportela, & Archibald, 2008).

Odden et al. (2008) focused a great deal of their research on class size and how it relates to student success, but research on school or district size was limited. Most of Odden et al.'s research on school size addressed the question of whether large schools were more financially efficient than smaller schools (Lawrence, et al., 2001) (Roellke, 2003). Odden et al. did not attempt to determine financial efficiency by school size but rather attempted to analyze the expenditures per pupil on student performance in North Dakota school districts (Cotton, 1996). Some of their research suggested that some smaller elementary schools did experience limited cost savings and more opportunities for students through consolidation; but for isolated rural schools, consolidation was not feasible (Duncombe & Yinger, 2010). Effects of modern day reorganization suggest that, in reorganized school districts, there has been little improvement in instructional or financial efficiency (Bickel, Howley, Williams, & Glascock, 2001). In fact,

forced reorganization of smaller rural schools by states has resulted in negative effects to efficiency and instructional outcomes (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011).

The data for secondary level schools was very mixed concerning mergers and size of school in regard to improving comprehensive programs so students could improve performance. There have been studies that suggested downsizing some of our country's very large, urban districts and schools to promote higher performing students, but very large urban districts and schools has not been an issue in North Dakota. Recommendations for adequate resources for prototypical North Dakota elementary, middle, and high schools have been based on 185 North Dakota public school districts by examining those schools that have shown proven student improvement. Odden et al. (2008) looked at those schools' programs, personnel, and per pupil resources. School characteristics were: configuration, school size, class size, presence or absence of a full-day kindergarten, number of teacher contract days, percentage of English Language Learners (ELL), percentage of students on free/reduced meals, number of core teachers, number of specialist teachers, number of instructional coaches, number of tutors, number of ELL teachers, presence of extended school days, availability of summer school, availability of alternative schools, number of learning and mildly disabled students, number of severely disabled students, services for gifted students, career/technical education, number of available substitutes, number of support staff, number of non-instructional aides, number of librarians/media specialists, principals, school site secretaries, and professional development. Odden et al. also looked at per pupil costs of technology, instructional materials, formative assessments, student activities, central administration, and operations and maintenance (Odden, Picus, Goetz, Aportela, & Archibald, 2008). Odden et al. did not study the cost of transportation,

which was a required service for all reorganized school districts. In a very rural state like North Dakota, the cost of transportation has been extremely expensive. North Dakota school districts were financially supported by the state for transportation of students based on miles traveled and size of the school bus used to transport students.

Odden et al. (2008) recommendations were based on three prototypical districts with 3,828 students, 600 students, and 185 students. The prototypical school district consisted of four 432-student elementary schools, two 450-student middle schools and two 600-student high schools. Because the purchasing price of education dollars varied across districts, Odden et al.'s report suggested that the formula could be adjusted by an index that computes these geographic price differences (Odden, Picus, Goetz, Aportela, & Archibald, 2008).

Odden et al.'s report was extremely significant because it was used by the North Dakota State Legislative Assembly and the Governor's Office during the 2013 session to pass a new funding formula for the state. The State of North Dakota's new funding formula was to begin the Fall of 2013, including many other recommendations suggested in Odden et al.'s report. State aid in 2013-14 was based on average daily membership from the previous school term. The average daily membership was calculated by number of days each student attended school in the previous year. The formula also included an additional weighted factor for alternative high school, special education, ELL, At Risk (free/reduced lunches), summer school, and isolated school districts. In addition, the formula made adjustments for contributions from property taxes, contributions from other local revenues, and maximum and minimum payments were based on per student rates determined to be 80% of the average cost per student to educate. The

per student payment rate for 2013-2014 was \$8,810, which was nearly 2.5 times higher than the rate in 2012-2013 (Appendix C, *ND State Aid to Schools Payment Worksheet, 2013-14*).

Reorganization in Other States

In his dissertation, *School District Reorganization in Iowa: Considerations for Administrators, School Boards, and Communities*, Christopher Anderson found that reorganization in Iowa was prompted by declining enrollment, state incentives, financial pressures, and the desire to increase opportunities for students (Anderson, 2009). The state of Iowa has seen a similar trend in student enrollment as the state of North Dakota where fewer students have been attending rural school districts and greater numbers of students have been attending the larger school districts. “Seventy-two percent of Iowa’s k-12 children attend schools in districts with 1,000 or more students, up from 67% fifteen years ago. Enrollment in districts with fewer than 1,000 children has decreased from 158,000 to 142,000 during the same period” (Anderson, 2009).

Making decisions about school district reorganization has historically been a sensitive subject (Voll, 2011). School district reorganization and problems associated with successfully completing the process have not been unique to North Dakota. The potential for reorganization due to declining enrollment has varied greatly from state to state (Ballin, 2010). Declining enrollment has appeared to be most severe in the Midwest region of the country – states like North Dakota and Montana, which border the Canadian provinces, to the southern regions of West Texas and New Mexico (Schwartzbeck, 2003). Nebraska looked for ways to deal with declining enrollment in their rural schools. In 2004, Nebraska state lawmakers considered a bill that would force school districts to merge. Nebraska had nearly 500 school districts (Funk &

Bailey, 1999). Proponents of the bill argued that by consolidating many of their school districts numerous school budget and administrative issues would be solved. They believed that the state of Nebraska could save over \$4 million as well as create more effective schools. Those opposed to school districts reorganizing argued that the state of Nebraska had no business forcing schools to close or merge, and it should be left up to the local school board to decide (Richard, 2004).

In Maine and Arkansas, legislative assemblies mandated in 2004 that districts with fewer than 350 students be consolidated (Tonn, 2007) (Ward, 2010). In Maine, it was found that the state had an average of 393 students for every full-time school district administrator, which was less than half the national average of 816 students per administrator. The governor of Maine put in place a plan that projected savings of \$124 million in the following three years by replacing the state's 152 superintendents and 290 locally elected school boards with regional educational associations. The governor's plan sought to save an additional \$139 million by reorganizing the management of facilities and streamlining special education and transportation services. The governor's plan did not call for the closure of any schools. The governor of Maine believed that decision would be best made by local communities, not school boards (Tonn, 2007). States often looked to consolidation when faced with long-term declining enrollment and rising per-pupil costs. They also saw consolidation as a way to address funding inequities (Cook, 2008).

Emotional Aspects of Issues

In his book, *Survival of Rural America: Small Victories and Bitter Harvests*, Richard E. Wood reflected on emotional issues that result from discussion about closing a rural school. Small rural schools reflect the extent to which communities identify with culture and traditions (Brooks, Lee, Berry, & Toney, 2010). Nothing reflects more on a community's traditions than

its schools and their programs, like school sports (Graves, 2010b) (Wood, 2008). Most residents in small rural communities have believed that the key to their survival or maybe growth lays in their schools' ability to survive (Erhardt, 2007). Testimony from minutes of county reorganization hearings showed how citizens repeatedly stated that their reason for developing a school reorganization plan was due to declining enrollment; and by pooling their resources with other communities near to them, they could offer more opportunities for their students. Proponents made their pleas during these hearings and warned that if the reorganization plan was defeated their school and community may not survive.

Research on West Virginia students and their families who had gone through the process of closing their school through reorganizations found that their experiences resulted in considerable harm (The Rural School and Community Trust, 2002). These students felt that by attending a larger school they received less individual attention, had longer bus rides, and had fewer opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. Their families reported they had fewer opportunities to participate in school governance and experienced increased barriers to participating in their children's education (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011). Efforts to keep school districts operating through collaboration of staff and administration were found to be very difficult (Graves, 2010a). Even with the use of distance learning technologies, relocation of some teachers, and teachers and administrators serving two or more schools expressed that efforts were not in their best interest (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008). Although administrators and teachers reported positive remarks about those efforts; students viewed the efforts as not in their best interest, but rather in the best interest of preserving a community (Howley, Howley, Hendrickson, Belcher, & Howley, 2012).

Sports teams have many times been argued as a reason for districts not to reorganize. High school athletics have been perceived by people opposed to reorganization to be the key identity of a school with its surrounding community (Kalahar, 2010). However, more and more rural school districts have found that due to declining enrollment, it has become more and more difficult to field full athletic teams. Many communities have asked themselves if a winning team (in a reorganized school district with more students) is more important than a losing sports teams that can no longer field a team. In his dissertation *School District Reorganization in Iowa: Consideration for Administrators, School Boards, and Communities*, Christopher Anderson found that successfully reorganized school districts were more likely to have plans approved by their voters because the districts had a history of sharing. Cooperation with athletic teams has played a major role in successful reorganization. Many times, cooperating school districts in a newly reorganized district have already had a history of sharing coaches, students, facilities, and fans in order for extracurricular activities to survive long before a vote on a reorganization plan became necessary. Many have believed that a history of cooperation in extracurricular activities has played a major role in the success of getting a reorganization plan passed (Anderson, 2009, p. 47).

In the article, "What mandated consolidation could mean for your district," Buchanan reviewed reorganization attempts in the states of Arkansas, Kansas, Nebraska, and West Virginia. His findings from those states showed that reorganization attempts, in most cases, take place despite strong opposition from rural residents. Rural residents of these districts argued that small, tight knit community schools were the best environment for children (Buchanan, 2004). Buchanan's research found that administrators of small rural schools looked upon their small

rural schools as positive assets for their districts. He determined that in order to keep small rural districts operating, residents needed to recognize the benefits of their schools (Jimerson, 2006). He believed that the benefits of small rural schools outweighed disadvantages and arguments of proponents of reorganization regarding how much money people could save. The high cost per pupil of operating small rural school districts was worth the investment (Ehrenberg, 2010).

Another study, conducted by Pascopella, also found that a community should recognize the value of rural schools to the economy of an entire community, and in turn, the survival of a community (Pascopella, 2004). In 1996, Vito Perrone started work on the “Rural Challenge.” Rural Challenge was a \$3.1 million research project that had Perrone track the progress of reinventing rural schooling. Perrone had 18 years of experience working with rural schools in North Dakota. He believed that small country schools were not supported properly. Under his evaluation of rural schools, Perrone wanted to understand what works in rural schools and why; develop public policy to support rural communities; and help improve the national understanding of issues facing rural schools (President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1996).

One of the greatest myths of rural town life has been that nothing bad ever happens in a small community. Unfortunately, according to Carr and Kefalas, rural kids have had very high rates of suicide, experience “earlier age” childbearing, and have had alcohol abuse rates many times higher than their urban counterparts (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). The *2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results* for North Dakota High Schools and North Dakota Middle Schools supported this assumption.

In the past, high school students in North Dakota have experienced a high rate of health-risk behaviors including violence-related behaviors like suicide, alcohol and other drug use, and

sexually risky behaviors. According to the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, at the time of the survey, the percentage of students receiving D's or F's in school who had seriously considered an attempt at suicide during the past 12 months was a little over 31%. The percentage of students who had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more of the past 30 days was over 45% for all high school students. Students with D's or F's who engaged in risky behavior was around 60%. Students who agreed that their community accepted drinking among teenagers was nearly 55% (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). The use of marijuana, inhalants, and prescription drugs without prescriptions was reported to be higher for mainly rural students in North Dakota than their urban counterparts in other states. High school students who engaged in sexual intercourse were reported at 52% (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). The total number of students in North Dakota involved in violent and drug-related incidents resulting in suspension or expulsion in 2012-2013 was 1,832. The largest incidents involving fighting and mutual altercations increased from the previous year to 759, resulting in removal of students from school a total of 2,502 days (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2012-2013).

Was it time for rural administrators and legislators to look at the failures of large schools before they decided to close small ones? For the most part, small rural schools functioned as centers of their communities and even considering the high costs to the district and the communities, it was a price that communities were willing to pay to keep their schools open. It was felt that closing a school would kill a community (Lawrence, 2007). In addition, studies in Wyoming found that social impacts of small rural schools have a lasting effect on the economy.

Small, rural schools have fewer transient students, higher graduation rates, and more parental support than their urban counterparts (Glomb, et al., 2008).

Educational services are essential to the economy of any community. In rural America, it has not always been clear just how much a good school can improve a local economy. In the past, lack of an educated workforce and limited infrastructures has proven to be obstacles to economic development. School districts that reduced high school dropout rates were expected to improve local labor quality. It was thought the school consolidation movement would undermine the economy of small rural communities by elimination of schools that were social and cultural centers of most rural communities (Stover, 2007).

In the past, whether or not a school district was rural or urban had little impact on perceived performance of its students (Bouck, 2004). Before the implementation of NCLB, emphasis on test scores was not so intense. Since NCLB, rural schools have been impacted by many of the same variables as urban schools with little impact on student performance (Reeves, 2003). Most testing results have showed little differences in student future success based on location of school – urban or rural (Byun, Meece, & Irvin, 2010). Poverty level measured by students who qualified for the USDA Child Nutrition program’s free and reduced meals was the only common variable in predicting the success of a child (Byun, Meece, & Irvin, 2010).

In a report entitled *College Readiness Percent by Common Course Patterns*, Dr. Alan J. Peterson, State Director of the North Dakota Center for Distance Education, found that students in North Dakota taking the ACT college readiness exam in school districts with an enrollment of 1,000 students or more had an average composite ACT score of 21. In North Dakota school districts with less than 250 students in grades k-12, the average composite ACT score was 19.

Dr. Peterson concluded that there was a significant performance difference between North Dakota's largest schools and North Dakota's smallest schools in composite ACT scores. Furthermore, he believed that the difference in performance was variations in the differing curricula throughout North Dakota's schools. Large schools had three times as many course offerings for high school students than small schools. Course offering differences came in number of advanced courses and elective courses (Peterson, 2012). Also, North Dakota was the only state that required all juniors to take the ACT test regardless of their high school curriculum.

Federal and State Standards

As we look forward to a new era of school accountability in our North Dakota k-12 schools, how will small rural schools meet federal and state mandates? Besides meeting funding needs, schools must meet federal and state standards (Hill, 2008). Federal mandates required in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) have been tough to meet without considering necessary funding to provide required services. Needs of special education students in a "low-incidence population" may be missed because trained staff members and many necessary materials may not be available in rural school districts (Szymanski, Lutz, Shahan, & Gala, 2013). Nationally, as a result of an economic recession, many states have been cutting funding to schools. Cuts in funding have been causing many schools to reduce personnel. Lack of qualified staffs has caused many rural districts to experience difficulty in meeting the needs of children with special needs (Glomb, et al., 2008). Because of federal mandates such as the NCLB Act, all schools have been judged by their student performance.

With a lack of funding and resources, how then can our schools and states be able to meet federal and state demands? It has been estimated that over twenty-five states have been engaged in a discussion about reducing number of school districts through the means of consolidation or reorganizing in order to meet budget constraints (Cook, 2008) (Cronin, 2010). It has been important that those in charge of decision making in North Dakota understand all issues involved so that needs of our students be met in the future.

Educational challenges for rural schools with declining enrollments to meet requirements of NCLB must be scrutinized. All schools under NCLB must meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is a measurement found in NCLB which determines how public schools and districts are performing academically according to results on standardized tests. According to Terri Schwartzbeck and a research analysis by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), rural states have been challenged in the areas of highly qualified teachers, school choice, and supplemental educational services (Schwartzbeck, 2003).

The federal government has developed competitive grants entitled “Race to the Top.” The state of North Dakota did not qualify for the first round of grants because it had no Magnet or Charter Schools. In 2004-2005, North Dakota had 181 school districts that met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). By 2011-2012, North Dakota had only 67 school districts that met AYP (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). North Dakota parents and students had very little school “choice” and access to supplemental services under the NCLB Act. In 2010-2011, North Dakota had 7,645 students eligible for school choice but schools to choose from in rural districts were extremely limited. Most of the 181 school districts had only one school. Increase in travel and open enrollment did not make school choice a viable option for most rural parents (U.S.

Department of Education, 2014). In 2011-2012, North Dakota had 8,676 students that were eligible for supplemental educational services but only 1,153 actually received supplemental services (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The reasons for only 13% taking advantage of supplemental services were hard to determine. The only positive statistic for North Dakota School Districts under the NCLB Act was data on “highly qualified teachers.” In 2004-2005, including all secondary and elementary schools in North Dakota, 89% of core academic classes were taught by highly qualified teachers. By 2011-2012, including all secondary and elementary schools in North Dakota, 99.94% of core academic classes were taught by highly qualified teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

This study examined perceptions of school administrators and school board members of those successful North Dakota School Districts who passed a reorganization plan over the last 10 years. Perceptions of policy makers, as they related to cognitive factors required in law – like budget, staffing, standards, and enrollment projections – while considering reorganization of their school district, were examined. Likewise, perceptions of these same policy makers, as they related to affective areas where emotions determined whether or not a reorganization plan was passed by voters, were also examined. Affective issues were concerns with openly enrolled students, location of new and existing school buildings, and make-up of the new school board and how were athletic teams going to practice and play games. Both cognitive and affective issues were addressed by policy makers with success of reorganization in mind. Because declining enrollments in rural North Dakota school districts were key to reorganizing a school district, declining enrollments and the resulting losses in resources and state and federal funding

that accompany declining enrollments were given great consideration in any decision to reorganize.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This study examined the process of reorganization of school districts in the State of North Dakota. The knowledge gained from this study may help future rural school district administrators and school board members design successful reorganization plans for consideration by their voting patrons.

Research methods employed in this study were designed to capture perceptions of North Dakota school leaders in successfully reorganized school districts between the years 2000 to 2010 in order to determine what made reorganization plans successful. All 21 successfully reorganized school districts in this study developed a plan for reorganization as a response to declining enrollment.

Mixed methods using quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data, including county committee hearing minutes and follow up phone interviews of school leaders who completed the survey, were used (Biklen, 2007). Much of the data for this research came directly from the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and from minutes from various county reorganization boards' scheduled hearings. Survey responses came from school leaders including school board members, principals, business managers, superintendents, and others who were associated with sample districts.

The researcher reviewed county committee hearing minutes of each reorganization plan and all 21 school districts cited the reason for reorganization was due to declining enrollment.

The solution was to reorganize with two or more school districts so that they could pool their resources. Resources included taxes set aside for education based on the taxable value of properties in a school district, per pupil foundation payments, professional staff, and students. The joining of schools would allow more opportunities for high school class electives and keep sport teams competitive. It was felt that pooling resources was better than closing a school. County reorganization hearing minutes also addressed negative issues associated with reorganization. A common theme for negative opinions or issues toward reorganization included use of current school buildings, make-up of the reorganized school board, and open enrolled students who attended districts outside reorganization boundaries.

A phone interview with ten school leaders was also conducted. The researcher asked each to respond to four research questions:

1. What were the critical factors that caused the process of reorganization to begin?
2. What incentives were keys to the decision to reorganize?
3. What aspects of the reorganization process were positive or effective in terms of enhancing the process for all involved?
4. What aspects of the reorganization process were negative or ineffective strategies used in the process?

By using both quantitative and qualitative data, the researcher determined the key factors of a successful reorganization.

Sample Population

The population sample surveyed included leaders of successfully reorganized school districts in North Dakota from the years 2000 to 2010. The sample population was comprised of

superintendents, principals, business managers, and school board members. School districts successfully reorganized during this time period were: Bowman County 1, reorganized in 2005; North Star 10, reorganized in 2007; Carrington #49, reorganized in 2003; Center-Stanton 1, reorganized in 2003; Valley-Edinburg 118, reorganized in 2009; Enderlin Area 24, reorganized in 2006; Fessendon-Bowdon 25, reorganized in 2000; Fordville-Lankin 5, reorganized in 2004; Langdon Area 23, reorganized in 2000; Litchville-Marion 46, reorganized in 2002; Mohall-Lansford-Sherwood 1, reorganized in 2003; Mott-Regent 1, reorganized in 2000; New Rockford-Sheyenne 2, reorganized in 2005; New Salem-Almont 49, reorganized in 2008; North Border 100, reorganized in 2004; Richardton-Taylor 34, reorganized in 2000; Barnes County North 7, reorganized in 2006; Kidder County 1, reorganized in 2007; Maple Valley 4, reorganized in 2002; TGU 60, reorganized in 2000; and, Lewis and Clark 161, reorganized in 2002 (see Appendix A).

Instrument Design

All study participants were adults, either elected school board members, school administrators, or public figures. Superintendents received an email (Appendix D) asking for permission to survey their administration and school board members. The email requested names and email addresses of the district's school board members, school administrators, and public figures. Several successfully reorganized schools formally voted at a school district meeting on whether or not to participate in the survey as required by each individual district's survey policy. After permission was granted by each school district, an email (Appendix E) was sent to potential participants with instructions on how to complete the survey instrument on a secured website, SurveyMonkey® (SurveyMonkey®, 1999-2014). Survey instructions included

the purpose of the study, a statement that survey participation was completely voluntary, and information on how to connect to a link on the secured SurveyMonkey® website. Instructions also included information about the researcher, the purpose of the research, and directions on how to call or email the researcher for assistance in completing the survey instrument. The survey instrument included demographic questions dealing with position, gender, education background, and size of district at the time of reorganization. Respondents rated fourteen (14) additional statements regarding their specific school district. The survey instrument presented a series of statements related to both affective and cognitive frameworks and/or constructs. In total, the survey contained 18 questions and was designed to be completed in less than five minutes (Appendix F).

The survey instrument was developed after the researcher reviewed successful reorganization plans. The researcher studied plans and read minutes of district participants. The researcher reviewed documents at the office of the Department of Public Instruction in Bismarck, North Dakota, on April 23-24, 2010. The researcher determined from studying minutes of county reorganization board hearings that a number of major tendencies were evident and used them to shape the survey instrument in both affective and cognitive constructs.

The researcher also interviewed Kent Hjelmstad, EdD, and Larry Klundt, EdD. Both had extensive experience with North Dakota school districts as consultants in developing reorganization plans. Their experience was that cognitive constructs must include legal requirements of a plan such as demographic information, boundaries, transportation, budget, enrollments, curriculum, and administrative structure of a new district. Both Hjelmstad and Klundt expected affective constructs to include considerations such as which community

buildings were to be located in, what teachers would be hired back, financial incentives, how representatives from each old school would hold positions on a new school board, and new school colors and a new mascot for extra-curricular activities. Further, they were of the opinion that a successful reorganization plan must have school leaders that dealt effectively with affective constructs.

The importance of the effect of each question on an individual respondent's perception to reorganize their school district was based on constructs developed in the areas of cognition and affectivity. The researcher conducted a pilot survey to test the survey instrument by asking students enrolled in the class, *Educational Foundation and Research 516 Statistics II*, at the University of North Dakota, to complete the survey instrument.

Follow up phone interviews were conducted. Ten school leaders were called and asked if they were willing to answer four questions. School leaders in the district included board members, business managers, principals, and superintendents. Those called were not required to answer questions and a few leaders refused. It was explained to those who accepted to be interviewed that they would be identified by name and date but that their position and district would not be identified in any way.

A mean and standard deviation was run on each question. A correlation of subscale constructs that measures internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha was completed. A *t*-test was run to compare respondent's positions, genders, and education backgrounds with the constructs. It was expected that successfully reorganized school districts plans addressed affective issues integral to the reorganization process.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted to the researcher to conduct the survey described earlier in this chapter. IRB approval is required by the IRB and the University of North Dakota whenever research involving human subjects is proposed. The IRB approval number was IRB-201311-184 (Appendix G).

Data Collection

On March 22-23, 2010, the researcher reviewed all reorganization plans and dissolutions on file at the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction in Bismarck, North Dakota. Reorganization minutes from 21 county committees holding hearings on their school district reorganization plans were obtained. The researcher determined key themes in the issue of reorganization during his review. The researcher took field notes which disclosed common themes. Those common themes were used to determine assumptions of this study.

The review of county committee minutes of hearings on each reorganization plan indicated that all 21 school districts noted their reason for reorganizing was due to declining enrollment. Minutes revealed a solution to declining enrollment was to reorganize with two or more school districts so that resources could be pooled. Resources were taxes set aside for education based on the taxable value of properties, per pupil foundation payments, professional staff, and students. The joining of schools would allow students more opportunities for high school class electives and keep sport teams competitive. It was felt that pooling resources was better than closing a school.

Minutes of hearings on county reorganizations also addressed negative issues with reorganization. The common theme for negative opinions or difficulties toward reorganization dealt with what to do with current school buildings, determining the make-up of a reorganized

school board, and the issue of open enrolled students attending districts outside the reorganization boundaries.

Email letters were sent to 21 school districts that successfully reorganized due to declining enrollment in the years 2000 to 2010. Letters requested permission to survey business managers, principals, school board members, and superintendents (Appendix D). The researcher received permission from 18 out of 21 school districts. Copies of those permissions were filed with the University of North Dakota's IRB office.

On January 13, 2014, the researcher sent 170 emails (Appendix E) to business managers, principals, school board members and superintendents with instructions on how to complete a survey on SurveyMonkey®. Instructions included the purpose of the study, a statement that the survey was voluntary, and a link to the survey instrument located online at a secure SurveyMonkey® site. Instructions included a statement that the secure link for the survey would close on January 27, 2014. A statement was included that no compensation was provided for completing the survey. Survey results were confidential and no schools were named in data results. All results were to remain strictly confidential in accordance with IRB requirements. Data collected remains in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. The data was stored on a password protected computer.

The researcher sent a second reminder email (Appendix H) one week after the invitation to participate with a request to complete the survey. Of the 170 emails sent, the researcher received 8 that were returned for incorrect email addresses.

At the end of the data collection window, out of 172 surveys sent, 77 surveys were returned for a 48% return rate. The researcher was pleased with the return rate. In a review of

returned surveys, it was noted that nine survey respondents completed only the first four questions, which were demographic questions including questions of current position, education level, size of district at the time of reorganization, and gender. Sixty-eight (68) completed the entire survey instrument for a 42% completion rate.

On April 8-9, 2014, phone interviews were conducted with 10 school leaders that had also completed the online survey on Survey Monkey[®]. The researcher requested permission to interview each leader. They were identified by first name, middle name initial, last name, and date. Each interviewee was asked four questions:

1. What critical factors caused the beginning of the reorganization process?
2. What incentives were keys to the decision to reorganize?
3. What aspects of the reorganization process were positive or effective in terms of enhancing the process for all involved?
4. What aspects of the reorganization process were negative or ineffective strategies?

Notes were taken on their answers.

Data Analysis

Results were analyzed for mean, standard deviations, and correlation of subscale constructs that measures internal consistency. A *t*-test was run to compare position, gender, and education background of respondents with the constructs.

Tables with narratives were included to illustrate data analyzed from data collected. Chapter III discussed research methods used in this study, population researched, the survey instrument, data collection procedures, and how data were analyzed. Chapter IV will address

data collected, and Chapter V will summarize the research. Chapter V will include a summary, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations for educators and further research.

CHAPTER IV

REVIEW OF THE DATA

The purpose of this research was to identify perceptions of participants of successfully reorganized school districts in North Dakota due to declining enrollments and reduced resources. All reorganized school districts in this study had serious problems with declining enrollments in their respective rural schools, which forced them to move forward with a reorganization process.

This study was designed to assess attitudes of school leaders on the impact of cognitive constructs, which included North Dakota state law requirements of reorganization plans, such as demographic information, boundaries, transportation, budget, enrollments, curriculum, and administrative structure of new districts. The study was also designed to assess the attitudes of school leaders on the impact of affective constructs, which included identifying a community where buildings of a newly formed school district would be located, what teachers would be hired back, new school colors, and a mascot for extra-curricular activities of newly formed school districts. Questions in the research survey were designed to align with reorganization plans and determine what affective constructs influenced decision makers while moving a reorganization plan through the process required. All districts studied had developed a reorganization plan as required by North Dakota law. Reorganization continued as each school district was required to have their reorganization plan heard at the county level in front of a county school reorganization board. After holding the required county hearing, the

reorganization process required a simple majority approval of a reorganization plan by the voting residents and subsequent approval by the State Board of Public Education.

Research conducted as a part of this study included gathering data from school leaders of districts including board members, superintendents, principals, and business managers.

Permission to conduct the study was sought from 21 school districts in North Dakota that had undergone successful reorganization between the years 2000 and 2010 (see Appendix A).

Permission to survey potential participants was received from 18 of 21 school districts. The researcher did not receive permission from three schools: Fordville-Lankin 5; New Rockford-Sheyenne 2; and TGU 60. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to 170 email addresses of leaders from those 18 school districts that gave permission to the researcher to conduct his study. Eight email addresses were incorrect and were returned to the researcher. Of the 162 invitations to potential participants to participate in the survey, 77 completed at least a portion of the survey, a 48% return rate. Survey results can be viewed in Appendix I.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1

What were the critical factors that caused the process of reorganization to begin?

In reading the minutes of county reorganization boards from all 21 successfully reorganized school districts in North Dakota between the years 2000 and 2010, it was clearly stated that the number one reason school boards presented a reorganization plan to citizens for approval was “due to declining enrollments.” Nearly all minutes of reorganization hearings detailed that members felt that pooling their resources by joining two or more school districts together could provide better opportunities for their students. It was stated many times that if a

reorganization plan was not passed, the school and community would not “survive.” Pooling resources included students, teachers, tax bases, facilities, administration, and extra-curricular activities for students.

Phone interviews resulted in data similar to data from hearing minutes. One respondent stated a critical factor causing their school district to reorganize was the opportunity to provide additional services to students for both curriculum and extracurricular activities (B. D. Duchscherer, personal communication, April 8, 2014). P. R. Stremick (personal communication, April 8, 2014) believed the critical fact that caused his school district to reorganize was athletics. According to Miller, two schools approached his school for reorganization because they were in the dissolution process and did not want to lose their school. The fear of losing their school in their community was plenty of reason for them to start the reorganization process (K. L. Miller, personal communication, April 8, 2014). A neighboring district, a k-6 elementary district, was going to start the dissolution process. They believed it was critical for them to attempt to reorganize with a neighbor district instead of losing their school (B. S. Nelson, personal communication, April 9, 2014).

Research Question 2

What incentives were keys to the decision to reorganization?

The research showed that opportunity to maximize educational opportunities was a prime consideration. Both the research and personal testimonies showed that pooling of resources was instrumental to initiating reorganization and to the plan. Although financial incentives were important to the decision to reorganize; money was not as strong an incentive as pooling resources to maximize educational opportunities for students. Research indicated that the

financial pressures caused by declining enrollments and a strong desire to improve opportunities for students forced many rural school districts to explore opportunities of joining with neighboring districts to provide services they wanted for their students.

A key incentive to reorganization was North Dakota's \$500,000 bonus to be paid to reorganized districts when a district served a physical area of at least 800 square miles. This was stated by both B. S. Nelson (personal communication, April 9, 2014) and P. R. Stremick (personal communication, April 8, 2014). One key incentive to reorganize was the state monetary incentive (B. D. Duchscherer, personal communication, April 8, 2014). Another financial incentive key to the decision to reorganize was the willingness of each district to take funds out of their ending fund balance and place those funds, which totaled over \$1.8 million on one occasion, into a new school district. Another incentive was that North Dakota had a small grant available to cover the cost of reorganization consultants hired, this was according to K. L. Miller (personal communication, April 8, 2014).

Research Question 3

What aspects of the reorganization process were positive or effective in terms of enhancing the process for all involved?

The research strongly revealed that the most important part of a successful reorganization plan was to have representation on a new school board from all former school districts with all but one respondent agreeing to that statement (20 agreed, 29.4%) or strongly agreeing (47 strongly agreed, 69.1%). The second most important effective part of a successful reorganization plan was that the plan included retention of teaching staff (see Appendix I, *Survey Results – Successfully Reorganized Districts*). The research indicated that school districts with a history of sharing services such as extra-curricular activities, special education service cooperatives,

teachers in shortage areas, transportation, technology cooperatives, and facilities would more likely have their reorganization plan pass a vote rather than fail.

Positive aspects of the process were the overwhelming number of positive votes for a plan. Another positive impact was improved efficiency in the way a school operated according to P. R. Stremick (personal communication, April 8, 2014). The provision that one school was allowed to remain open for five years after its reorganization plan was approved was extremely positive said K. L. Miller (personal communication, April 8, 2014). Positive communication and positive community meetings with patrons was key to the success of a reorganization. Support received from communities involved was also important (B. S. Nelson, personal communication, April 9, 2014).

Research Question 4

What aspects of the reorganization process were negative or ineffective strategies used in the process?

Open enrollment of students was not a key factor in the success of a reorganization plan according to the research. Neither was a new district's choice of mascot. As far as school buildings and how a reorganization plan addressed existing buildings, the research did not find retention of all school buildings to be important in effecting success of a plan; and results were split on whether or not all buildings should be assessed for meeting state and federal building codes. Respondents were split in their perceptions of importance of location of a new district's high school with 51% perceiving this as not important and 49% perceiving the location of a high school as a positive aspect of the successful reorganized plan. The research indicated that mandated reorganization by states, as necessary for the purpose of reducing administrative costs, created strong opposition. Rural residents recognized positive benefits of school districts being

small with small class sizes giving more opportunities to their students as more important than negative financial arguments used in support of reorganization, such as the high cost per pupil necessary to operate these smaller districts.

Negative or ineffective strategies used in a reorganization process included lack of utilization of old school buildings after the vote to reorganize passed said B. S. Nelson (personal communication, April 9, 2014). Trying to serve such a large geographical area made it tougher to organize transportation and administration and this was viewed as a negative and ineffective according to P. R. Stremick (personal communication, April 8, 2014). Duchscherer agreed with Stremick. Negative results of reorganization were service to a significantly larger area, which made it tougher to transport students. In addition, a new funding formula penalized Duchscherer's school giving the school a high per student taxable valuation because of the larger land mass included in the school district (B. D. Duchscherer, personal communication, April 8, 2014).

Methods

Mixed methods of research were used. Quantitative data from surveys was collected and analysis was used to compare with research results. Qualitative data included county committee hearing minutes and follow up phone interviews of school leaders who had completed the online survey. A comparison of survey results with the analysis of hearing minutes and phone interviews was used to form conclusions.

The data gathered from the online survey was quantified in the following manner: Questions 1 through 4 were demographic questions dealing with position, gender, education background, and size of new district at time of reorganization; Questions 5 through 18 were

statements to which respondents ranked their opinions using a scale of strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, agree and strongly agree. The survey responses were awarded a numerical value of 1 for *strongly disagree*, 2 for *disagree*, 3 for *slightly disagree*, 4 for *slightly agree*, 5 for *agree* and 6 for *strongly agree*. A mean score of less than 4.00 was considered “disagreed” and mean score of 4.00 or greater was considered “agreed.”

Utilizing SPSS software, an analysis was run on Questions 5 through 18 to determine a mean and standard deviation. A correlation of the subscale constructs that measured internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha was run. Cronbach’s alpha is typically used as a coefficient of internal consistency and as an estimate of reliability in surveys. An analysis of variance or ANOVA is used in designs that involve two or more groups to compare groups’ means. Pearson correlation describes relationships between variables. The *t*-test was used to assess whether the means of two groups were statistically different from each other. An analysis by ANOVA, a one-way Pearson correlation, and *t*-test was run to compare the respondent’s position, gender, education background, and size of district at the time of reorganizations with the affective constructs of Questions 5 through 18.

Survey Results

In the survey population, 30.3% of respondents were school board members, 21.1% of respondents were principals, and 14.5% of respondents were superintendents. The lowest numbers of respondents were staff members at 3.9% and business managers at 7.9% of respondents (see Appendix I for a summary of survey results).

Table 1 summarizes demographic information obtained from participant responses to Questions 1-4 of the online survey.

Table 1. Summary of Demographic Information ($N = 77$).

	Count	Mean
<i>Position</i>		
Business Manager	6	7.79
School Board Member	23	29.87
Superintendent	12	15.58
Principal	16	20.78
Staff Member	3	3.90
Community Member	8	10.39
Other:	10	12.99
<i>Educational Background</i>		
High School	17	22.08
Post-Secondary – 2yr	11	14.29
Post-Secondary – 4yr	12	15.58
Master’s Degree	32	41.56
Doctorate Degree	6	7.79
<i>District Enrollment</i>		
Less than 50	0	0
51-100	6	7.79
101-200	13	16.88
201-300	21	27.27
301-400	27	35.06
401-500	6	7.79
More than 500	4	5.19
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	27	35.06
Male	50	64.94

The “position” represented most frequently was school board members; 29.87% of respondents were school board members. For educational background, 41.56% of respondents indicated they had a master’s degree; the next most frequently represented degree respondents had attained was a high school diploma, with some respondents showing postsecondary education at two years (14.29%) and four years (15.58%). For size of school district, 35.06% of respondents were from school districts with enrollments of 301-400 students (Grades k-12) at the time of reorganization. When it came to gender, 64.94% of respondents were male.

Table 2 shows a summary of means and standard deviations of survey Questions 5 through 18. Mean and standard deviation was based upon survey responses to a scale of: *strongly disagree* equals a value of 1, *disagree* equals a value of 2, *slightly disagree* equals a value of 3, *slightly agree* equals a value 4, *agree* equals a value of 5 and *strongly agree* equals a value of 6. In Table 2, nine respondents did not answer, so $N = 68$.

Table 2. Summary – Means and Standard Deviations, Online Survey Questions 5-18 ($N = 68$).

Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q5. A critical factor in the purpose of the reorganization plan was to keep the school open rather than closing it.	3.72	1.75
Q6. Financial incentives were key to the decision to reorganize.	4.19	1.51
Q7. The pooling of resources was instrumental to the plan.	4.68	1.20
Q8. The opportunity to maximize educational opportunities was a prime consideration for the reorganization.	5.31	.78
Q9. The fact that the schools involved in the reorganization had cooperated for athletics was a positive influence on the vote.	4.01	1.62
Q10. The reduction in district enrollment was a prime reason for the reorganization effort.	4.28	1.48

Table 2. cont.

Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q11. Open enrollment by students was a key factor in the reorganization.	2.66	1.43
Q12. The choice of the new district's mascot (existing or newly created) was an important factor in the reorganization.	2.62	1.62
Q13. The location of the new district's high school was one of the most important factors in the reorganization.	3.22	1.66
Q14. It was important to retain the buildings of each of the districts within the reorganized district.	3.94	1.85
Q15. It was important to have a building assessment of each of the former district's buildings to determine if each met state and federal building codes.	3.57	1.56
Q16. It was important to have representation on the new school board from all former districts within the organized district.	5.66	.56
Q17. It was important that the reorganization plan include retention of teaching staff.	5.07	.82
Q18. It was important that the reorganization plan include retention of administrative staff.	4.46	1.21

The data depicted strong support for maximizing educational opportunities as a critical factor in the process of reorganization as shown in Question 8 with mean score of 5.31, strongly agree, and a standard deviation of .78 (see Table 3).

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of Online Survey Question 8 ($N = 68$).

Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q8. The opportunity to maximize educational opportunities was a prime consideration for the reorganization.	5.31	.78

Note: Mean and standard deviation was based upon a ranking where respondents chose to *strongly disagree*, value of 1; *disagree*, value of 2; *slightly disagree*, value of 3; *slightly agree*, value 4; *agree*, value of 5; and *strongly agree*, value of 6.

The research showed that availability of financial incentives was important to the decision to reorganize. Question 6 asked respondents to rate the statement, “Financial incentives were key to the decision to reorganize.” The mean answer (4.19) showed respondents slightly agreed with this statement (see Table 4).

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation of Online Survey Question 6 ($N = 68$).

Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q6. Financial incentives were keys to the decision to reorganize.	4.19	1.51

Note: Mean and standard deviation was based upon a ranking where respondents chose to *strongly disagree*, value of 1; *disagree*, value of 2; *slightly disagree*, value of 3; *slightly agree*, value 4; *agree*, value of 5; and *strongly agree*, value of 6.

Data strongly revealed that the most important part of a successful reorganization plan was to have representation on a new school board from all former districts with all but one respondent “agreeing” (29.4% agreed) to that statement or “strongly agreeing” (69.1% strongly agreed). The second most important effective part of a successful reorganization plan was that the plan included retention of teaching staff (see Table 5). These questions asked respondents about the positive aspect or effective aspects of the reorganization process.

Table 5. Mean and Standard Deviation of Online Survey Questions 16 and 17 ($N = 68$).

Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q16. It was important to have representation on the new school board from all former districts within the organized district.	5.66	.56
Q17. It was important that the reorganization plan include retention of teaching staff.	5.07	.82

Note: Mean and standard deviation was based upon a ranking where respondents chose to *strongly disagree*, value of 1; *disagree*, value of 2; *slightly disagree*, value of 3; *slightly agree*, value 4; *agree*, value of 5; and *strongly agree*, value of 6.

Open enrollment by students was not a key factor in the success of a reorganization plan according to data results. That was closely followed by a new district’s choice of mascot (see Table 6). Table 6 shows mean and standard deviation of responses to Questions 11 and 12 from the online survey suggesting that respondents did not believe that these aspects of the reorganization plan were positive aspects of the process. Question 11 resulted in respondents disagreeing that open enrollment was a key factor in the reorganization plan.

Table 6. Mean and Standard Deviation of Online Survey Questions 11 and 12 ($N = 68$).

Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q11. Open enrollment by students was a key factor in the reorganization.	2.66	1.43
Q12. The choice of the new district’s mascot (existing or newly created) was an important factor in the reorganization.	2.62	1.62

Note: Mean and standard deviation was based upon a ranking where respondents chose to *strongly disagree*, value of 1; *disagree*, value of 2; *slightly disagree*, value of 3; *slightly agree*, value 4; *agree*, value of 5; and *strongly agree*, value of 6.

Independent Samples *t*-Test

In Table 7, an independent *t*-test was used to compare the means of two different groups – females and males – to determine if there was a correlation between gender and the constructs in the survey. Table 7 pertains to Question 16, and there was a significance level (p) assumed in Question 16. Question 16 stated, “It was important to have representation on the school board from all former districts within the reorganized district.”

Table 7. Equality of Variances Comparing Gender.

	Levene S Test for Equality of Variances		<i>t</i> -test for Equality of means						
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Male	18.27	.00	2.39	66	.020	.33	.14	.05	.095
Females	18.27	.00	2.81	66	.006*	.33	.12	.05	.095

Note: Table 7 pertains to Question 16, “It was important to have representation on the school board from all former districts within the reorganized district.”

N = 77; female = 27, male = 50

*correlation was significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) *F*-test was used to compare mean answers of groups of respondents. An analysis of variance was used to show comparison between group means of respondents holding different job positions, having different educational backgrounds, coming from different size school districts, and gender. Results indicated a strong significance existed in how all demographic groups answered Question 11, “Open enrollment by students was a key factor in reorganization” (see Table 8).

Table 8. Results of ANOVA Test on Question 11 of the Online Survey.

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between groups	36.50	7	5.21	3.11	.007*
Within groups	100.72	60	1.68		
Total	137.22	67			

*correlation was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level

An analysis of variance was used to show comparison between group means of respondents holding different job positions, having different educational backgrounds, coming

from different size school districts, and gender. Results indicated a strong significance existed in how all demographic groups answered Question 9, “The fact that the schools involved in the reorganization had co-oped for athletics was a positive influence on the vote” (see Table 9).

Table 9. Results of ANOVA Test on Question 9 of the Online Survey.

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between groups	34.55	5	6.91	3.05	.016*
Within groups	140.442	62	2.27		
Total	174.99	67			

*correlation was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level

An analysis of variance was used to show comparison between group means of respondents holding different job positions, having different educational backgrounds, coming from different size school districts, and gender. Results indicated a strong significance existed in how all demographic groups answered Question 8, “The opportunity to maximize educational opportunities was a prime consideration for the reorganization” (see Table 10).

Table 10. Results of ANOVA Test on Question 8 of the Online Survey.

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between groups	6.87	5	1.37	2.53	.038*
Within groups	33.65	62	0.54		
Total	40.52	67			

*correlation was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level

Cronbach's Alpha (α)

Cronbach's α is a measure of internal consistency. In this test of internal consistency, 68 respondents completed the survey so 68 cases were valid for the test. Nine respondents started to complete the survey, but did not finish, so nine cases were excluded from the test (see Table 11).

Table 11. Number of Valid Cases Used in Cronbach's Alpha Test.

Agreeableness	<i>N</i>	%
Valid	68	88.3
Cases Excluded	9	11.7
Total	77	100.0

Theoretically, α values can vary between zero and 1. Higher values are more reliable and indicate greater internal consistency (or reliability) in a survey instrument. Table 12 shows results of a Cronbach's alpha test for internal consistency on the "agreeableness" subscale of the online survey. The agreeableness subscale consisted of 14 items (Questions 5-18). The alpha value was 0.635 (see Table 12).

Table 12. Cronbach's Alpha Value for Agreeableness Subscale of Online Survey.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.635	.642	14

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This research attempted to identify perceptions of school leaders who were involved in successfully reorganized school districts. All newly formed school districts in this study had been affected by serious declining student enrollments in their respective rural areas that forced them to either reorganize or dissolve their schools. The knowledge gained from this study may help future rural school district administrators and school board members design successful reorganization plans that will be approved by the voting patrons in their respective communities. This research may also be used by the North Dakota Legislative Assembly as they review state laws dealing with reorganization of North Dakota school districts.

This research focused on perceptions of school leaders from successfully reorganized rural school districts in North Dakota that underwent reorganization due to declining student enrollment. This research was not meant to characterize the quality of education received by students of rural school districts; rather, it was meant to determine the perceptions of school leaders who have successfully passed reorganization plans approved by their voting patrons, the county's reorganization boards, and by the North Dakota Board of Public Education.

Qualitative data collected from hearing minutes of each reorganization plan from all 21 successfully reorganized districts and from follow up phone conversations with leaders of reorganized districts concluded that the main reason for reorganization was declining enrollments. The solution to declining enrollments was for school districts to pool their

resources including students, tax bases, professional staff, and facilities with neighboring schools to provide future opportunities for students and communities. The option of reorganization was a much better option than closing a school.

While it must be noted this research compared demographic information of respondents such as job position, educational background, size of newly reorganized district, and gender of respondents, the final analysis did not illustrate how successful districts were at educating students after a reorganization plan was approved. Research was not conducted on perceptions of students, parents, or community members regarding quality of school districts' programs.

A critical factor that caused school districts to begin the process of reorganization was strong support of school leaders to maximize educational opportunities for their students. Data from the online survey conducted in this study indicated school leaders felt declining enrollment and financial incentives were key factors in reorganizing their school district. Examination of county reorganization hearing minutes indicated a very strong factor to reorganization efforts was due to declining enrollments. Testimony given during those hearings indicated that pooling resources by joining two or more school districts together could provide better opportunities for their students.

Incentives for school districts to decide to develop a reorganization plan included maximizing educational opportunities for students as well as financial incentives of joining with other school districts. The pooling of resources including students, teachers, tax bases, facilities, administration, and extra-curricular activities for students was critical for many a region's survival as a school district and a community.

According to respondents, positive or effective aspects of a reorganization plan that improved chances for the plan to be approved by voters was that it must contain provisions which ensured the new school board consisted of representation from every former school district. Overwhelmingly, school leaders indicated a new board must have representation on it from all former districts. Also important was retention of teaching staff.

Factors lacking importance in the reorganization process included consideration of open enrolled students, school mascot, and existing buildings. Data indicated that while cooperating with neighboring school districts was important in establishing a good working relationship, little time should be spent choosing a mascot. Research found retention of all school buildings was not a key factor in the reorganization process. Research also showed the importance of location of a new district's high school to respondents was split with 51% perceiving this as not important and 49% perceiving location of school as a positive aspect of a successful reorganization plan.

Qualitative data collected by phone interviews of school leaders who had taken the online survey at SurveyMonkey[®] concluded that reorganization efforts were successful because there was a history of schools working together developing sports teams before a reorganization plan was accepted. School leaders believed that reorganization prevented them from closing any schools, which would have been a disaster for their communities. Financial incentives to reorganize in the form of large payments or bonuses offered by the state of North Dakota were very important.

Limitations of the Research

This research intended to determine positive and negative perceptions of business managers, principals, school board members, and superintendents of successfully reorganized

North Dakota school districts and how those perceptions impacted the passage of reorganization plans voted on by patrons of a school district. The researcher studied only North Dakota school districts. Results may or may not be generalizable to other states. The research surveyed school leaders from successfully reorganized school districts and did not survey leaders of a school whose reorganization plan was rejected by patrons. There were a number of successful reorganization plans in the study which included only two districts, one district being an elementary district of k-6 grades or k-8 grades attaching to a larger high school district. In those cases, questions about extra-curriculum activities, location of high school building, or questions that were unique to high school districts may not have been relevant.

Conclusions

While significant time and energy were expended in preparing and implementing this research, the voluntary manner of reporting by only 18 of 21 school districts, the small sample size of school districts, and 52% of the sample being non-respondents may have limited results. The research was also limited in types of successfully reorganized school districts studied. Seven of the successfully reorganized school districts in the study or 33% of the 21 reorganized school districts were formed by one large school district joining with a smaller elementary school district. The research was also limited by period of time examined as many of the survey sample group of business managers, principals, school board members, and superintendents may not have been in the community at the time of the reorganization process; and therefore, may not have had any direct knowledge of what happened during reorganization, or they may not have held a position in the school during the years of reorganization.

However, official data found at the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction along with results of the researcher's surveys helped the researcher draw strong conclusions from data gathered and enabled the researcher to answer research questions. Key assumptions and findings include the following:

1. There was a clear indication rural school districts, with many community characteristics described in the literature, have and will continue to see declining enrollments. These projections were supported by data and a literature review.
2. As North Dakota's population increases, due in part to a very strong economy resulting from a boom in the oil industry and to a strong agriculture economy, the enrollment of students in North Dakota schools will also increase. Student enrollment increases will continue to shift from rural school districts to either larger, urban school districts or those districts with a boom in the energy industry in their region.
3. In 2013-2014, eight school districts including Bismarck, Dickinson, Fargo, Grand Forks, Mandan, Minot, West Fargo, and Williston (which was only 4% of 179 school districts in North Dakota) enrolled 55% of the total number of students enrolled in public schools. This trend will likely continue. North Dakota had an increase of 2,500 students enrolled in grades k-12 from the Fall of 2012 to the Fall of 2013. This was an increase in student population of nearly 3% to over 100,000 students. However, of the 2,500 new students, 1,951 of those students were enrolled in Bismarck, Dickinson, Fargo, Grand Forks, Mandan, Minot, West Fargo, or Williston. This accounts for 78% of the state of North Dakota's increase in

student enrollment for the 2012-2013 school year. These patterns of student enrollment growth were supported by data gathered in this study and a literature review.

4. North Dakota lost 39 school districts from 2000 to 2010 through dissolution and reorganization. In 2013, North Dakota had 179 school districts. But, North Dakota had lost 43 school districts since 2000. Figure 1 on Page 6 of this report illustrates North Dakota had 4,700 school districts in 1918 and graphically details the decline to date of this report.
5. The researcher concluded that of 53 counties in North Dakota, 31 lost k-12 student enrollment in the years 2008-2012. Nearly all counties that had increased k-12 enrollment during that time period were either impacted by the energy industry, were one of the eight largest communities in the state, or were located within one of the Indian reservations in North Dakota. Rural North Dakota counties dependent on an agricultural economy showed decreases in k-12 student enrollment from 2008-2012. Data from surveys, a study of reorganization hearings, and a literature review show that these patterns of student enrollment shifts will continue. Data indicated that farms were getting larger, and farmers that own those farms were getting older. Student enrollment shifts resulting from trends described in this paragraph will force additional rural school districts to explore reorganization options.
6. The researcher found that the most important part of a successful reorganization plan was making sure each former school district was represented on the board of a reorganized district. School leaders considering writing successful reorganization

plans must consider including representation from each former school district within their plan on the reorganized board.

7. Research results indicated that retention of teaching staff from former school districts was also a highly effective part of a successful reorganization plan. School leaders writing reorganization plans should strongly consider a solid focus on retention of teaching staff from all school districts.
8. The research results indicated that successful reorganization plans were often developed after two or more schools already had a history of cooperation. Sharing of athletic teams, coaches, students, facilities, and fans had developed a strong bond between communities working together, rather than competing against each other. Successful reorganization plans had already established cooperation between schools with the use of technology, sharing teaching and administration staff, and by being members of the same special education multi-district unit and regional educational association.
9. Research indicated educational leaders who developed successful reorganization plan demonstrated traits of the Evolutionary Change Theory. Restructuring was a major component to accomplishing evolutionary change for an organization. Success or failure of a new organization was dependent on its ability to align with an existing environment while putting a new structure in place. Minutes from county reorganization hearings of these 21 successful reorganization plans contained multiple testimonies from individuals who testified that if school districts did not pass a reorganization plan, a school and a community would not survive.

Both new data from this study and a literature review indicated that leaders felt strongly that without joined communities, pooled resources, and the passing of a reorganization plan, their communities would not survive. Educational leaders communicated powerfully to their public that the opportunity to maximize educational opportunities for their students **MUST** be the prime consideration when voting on a plan to reorganize.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends future research include school districts that have experienced failed reorganization attempts and districts that have gone through dissolution. Their input into the research will create a larger body of knowledge for those rural school districts faced with declining student enrollment.

The researcher recommends that additional research be conducted on other organizations in communities facing population shifts. Communities facing shifts in populations were losing more than simply student enrollments.

North Dakota policy makers should evaluate state policies being used to deal with reorganizations, dissolutions, and annexations of our public school districts. Policies and laws should: (a) require all reorganization plans contain provisions for including representatives of all former school districts on newly reorganized school boards, and (b) include retention of teaching staff from all affected school districts.

Student enrollment trends should be continually monitored, reported, and communicated to the public. North Dakota student enrollment trends show over 40% of school districts have been losing students while only a few districts have realized significant increases in number of

students, which could cause financial equity issues for North Dakota schools. Educational leaders must communicate to their voting public that opportunities to maximize educational opportunities for their students must be a prime consideration when voting on a reorganization plan.

North Dakota population will continue to shift. School leaders will need to make decisions to assist schools with declining enrollments to either come together and provide a monetary incentive or have all school districts struggling because of monetary constraints.

Careful consideration must be given not only to our rapidly growing school districts in the state but also to providing similar financial incentives to that school district with a declining student enrollment.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SUCCESSFULLY REORGANIZED ND SCHOOL DISTRICTS, 2000-2010

Plan Year:	Reorganized School District Name
2005	Bowman Country 1 Drawer H Bowman, ND 58623-0128 701-523-3283 701-523-3849 Superintendent: Tony Dutetski President: Kevin Buchholz
2007	North Star 10 PO Box 489 Cando, ND 58324 701-968-4416 701-968-4418 Superintendent: Mark Lindahl President: Julie Star
2003	Carrington 19 PO Box 48 Carrington, ND 58421 701-652-3136 701-652-1243 Superintendent: Brian Duchscherer President: Scott Fetch
2003	Center- Stanton 1 PO Box 248 Center, ND 58530 701-794-8778 701-794-3659 Superintendent: Curt Pierce President: Nathan Henke

Appendix A. cont.

Plan Year:	Reorganized School District Name
2009	Valley - Edinburg 118 PO Box 6 Edinburg, ND 58227 701-993-8312 701-993-8313 Superintendent: John Oistad President: Fred Hall
2006	Enderlin Area 24 410 Bluff Street Enderlin, ND 58027 701-437-2240 701-437-2242 Superintendent: Tom Redding President: Cyndee Chesley
2000	Fessendon - Bowdon 25 PO Box 67 Fessendon, ND 58438 701-547-3296 701-547-3125 Superintendent: Terry Olschlager President: Mary Hoff
2004	Fordville - Lankin 5 PO Box 127 Fordville, ND 58231 701-229-3297 701-229-3231 Superintendent: Michael O'Brien President: Clint Sticha

Appendix A. cont.

Plan Year:	Reorganized School District Name
2000	Langdon Area 23 715 14th Ave Langdon, ND 58249 701-256-5291 701-256-2606 Superintendent: Richard Rogers President: Warren Jonasson
2002	Litchville-Marion 46 PO Box 159 Marion, ND 58466 701-669-2261 701-669-2316 Superintendent: Steve Larson President: Laurie Miedema
2003	Mohall-Lansford-Sherwood 1 PO Box 187 Mohall, ND 58761 701-756-6660 701-756-6549 Superintendent: Kelly Taylor President: Jim Vedsel
2000	Mott-Regent 1 205 Dakota Ave Mott, ND 58646 701-824-2795 701-824-2249 Superintendent: Myron Schweitzer President: William Gion

Appendix A. cont.

Plan Year:	Reorganized School District Name
2005	New Rockford-Sheyenne 2 437 1st Ave N New Rockford, ND 58356 701-947-5036 701-947-2195 Superintendent: Jill Lousters President: Lisa Longnecker
2008	New Salem-Almont 49 PO Box 378 New Salem, ND 58563 701-843-7610 701-843-7011 Superintendent: Michael Severson President: Gaylen Lennick
2004	North Border 100 155 S 3rd Street Pembina, ND 58271 701-825-6261 701-825-6645 Superintendent: Dr. Stremick President: Mike Gapp
2000	Richardton-Taylor 34 PO Box 289 Richardton, ND 58652 701-974-2111 701-974-2161 Superintendent: Brent Bautz President: Jerome Messer

Appendix A. cont.

Plan Year:	Reorganized School District Name
2006	Barnes County North 7 110 Hamlin Avenue Spiritwood, ND 58481 701-646-6202 701-646-6566 Superintendent: Doug Jacobson President: Lori Carlson
2007	Kidder County 1 PO Box 380 Steele, ND 58482 701-475-2243 701-475-2737 Superintendent: Ken Miller President: Brent Stroh
2002	Maple Valley 4 PO Box 168 Tower City, ND 58071 701-749-2570 701-749-2313 Superintendent: Roger Molvaney President: Marlyn Maasjo
2000	TGU 60 PO Box 270 Towner, ND 58788 701-537-5414 701-537-5413 Superintendent: Debby Marshall President: Gary Erickson

Appendix A. cont.

Plan Year:	Reorganized School District Name
2002	Lewis and Clark 161 PO Box 185 Berthold, ND 58718 701-453-3484 701-453-3488 Superintendent: Brian Nelson President: Michael Lautenschlager

APPENDIX C

ND STATE AID TO SCHOOLS PAYMENT WORKSHEET, 2013-2014



STATE AID TO SCHOOLS PAYMENT WORKSHEET

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
Office of School Finance and Organization

District Name	County District Number	School Year
#N/A		2013-2014

A STATE SOURCES:

Student membership includes regular school year average daily membership (ADM). ADM for students attending school in Montana and Minnesota (NDCC 15.1-29.01), South Dakota students attending school in North Dakota (NDCC 15.1-29-02.1) under cross border attendance agreements, and students in private or out-of-state placements for purposes other than education (NDCC 15.1-29-14) are also included.

	ADM	Weighting Factor	Weighted ADM
Student Membership			
1 Pk Special Education		1.000	#N/A
2 Kindergarten		1.000	#N/A
3 Grade 1-6		1.000	#N/A
4 Grade 7-8		1.000	#N/A
5 Grade 9-12		1.000	#N/A
6 Alternative High School		1.000	#N/A
7 Total Average Daily Membership (ADM)			#N/A
Other Program Membership			
8 Alt High School (from line 6)	#N/A	0.250	#N/A
9 Special Ed ADM (from line 7)	#N/A	0.082	#N/A
10 PK Special Ed ADM (from line 1)	#N/A	0.170	#N/A
11 Data Collection (if PowerSchool from line 7)	#N/A	0.003	#N/A
12 Regional Education Association (if member from line 7)	#N/A	0.002	#N/A
13 ELL Level 1		0.300	#N/A
14 ELL Level 2		0.200	#N/A
15 ELL Level 3		0.070	#N/A
16 At Risk	#N/A	0.025	#N/A
17 Home-Education (district supervised)		0.200	#N/A
18 Cross Border Attendance (MN, MT)		0.200	#N/A
Summer Programs			
19 Summer School		0.600	#N/A
20 Migrant Summer		1.000	#N/A
21 Special Ed ESY		1.000	#N/A
Isolated School District			
22 >275 sq miles and <100 ADM	#N/A	0.100	#N/A
23 >600 sq miles and <50 ADM	#N/A	1.100	#N/A
24 Total Weighted Average Daily Membership (add lines 7 through 23)			#N/A
25 School Size Adjustment Factor			#N/A
26 Total Weighted Student Units			#N/A
27 Per Student Payment Rate			\$8,810.00
28 Total Formula Amount			#N/A

- 29 Transition Maximum Adjustment (from line 68)
- 30 Transition Minimum Adjustment (from line 73)
- 31 Total Adjusted Formula Amount (total lines 28, 29 and 30)
- 32 Contribution from Property Tax (from line 48)
- 33 Contribution from Other Local Revenue (from line 41)
- 34 State Aid Payment (line 31 minus lines 32 and 33)

#N/A	#N/A
#N/A	#N/A
	#N/A
	#N/A
	#N/A
	#N/A

State School Aid Summary

- 1 State Aid Payment (from line 34)
 - 2 Transportation (from line 64)
 - 3 State Child Placement
 - 4 Special Education Contracts - Agency
 - 5 Special Education Contracts - School Placed
 - 6 Special Education Contracts - Boarding
 - 7
 - 8
- Department of Public Instruction

Entitlement	EFB Offset	Net Entitlement
#N/A	#N/A	#N/A
-	#N/A	#N/A
	#N/A	#N/A
	#N/A	#N/A
	#N/A	#N/A
	#N/A	#N/A

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Total State Aid

#N/A	#N/A	#N/A
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SUPPORTING CALCULATIONS

2013-2014

B CONTRIBUTION FROM OTHER LOCAL REVENUE	Total Revenue	Percent	
35 1300 Tuition		75%	-
36 2999 County		75%	-
37 US Flood		75%	-
38 REC Gross Receipts		75%	-
39 Mobile Home and Other In-Lieu Taxes		100%	-
40 Telecommunications		100%	-
41 Contribution from Other Local			-

C CONTRIBUTION FROM PROPERTY TAX	
42 District Taxable Valuation	#N/A
43 Weighted Student Units	#N/A
44 District Taxable Valuation per Weighted Student Unit	#N/A
45 Statewide Average Taxable Valuation Per Student	23,544.89
46 Formula Taxable Valuation per Weighted Student Unit	#N/A
47 Contribution Mill Rate	60
48 Contribution from Property Tax	#N/A

D EXCESS FUND BALANCE OFFSET	
49 General Fund Ending Balance	
50 General Fund Expenditures	
51 45% of General Fund Expenditures + \$20,000	20,000.00
52 Excess Fund Balance Offset (line 49 minus line 51, if less than zero enter zero)	-

E TRANSPORTATION WORKSHEET

Transportation Statistics	Rate	Miles	Rides	Total
53 Small Bus Miles	0.520		xxxxx	-
54 Large Bus Miles	1.130		xxxxx	-
55 Rural Rides	0.300	xxxxx		-
56 Small In-City Miles	0.520		xxxxx	-
57 Large In-City Miles	1.130		xxxxx	-
58 In-City Rides	0.300	xxxxx		-
59 Family - To School	0.250		xxxxx	-
60 Family - To Bus	0.250		xxxxx	-
61 Not Reimbursable	-			-
62 Total Transportation Reimbursement				-
63 Reimbursement Cap --- 90% of transportation expenditures				-
64 Block Grant Total (lesser of 90% cap or total)				-

F BASELINE FUNDING - MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM PAYMENTS

65 Baseline Funding (2012-13 State Aid Formula Payment, MLRG, GF levies and 75%-100% In-lieu)	#N/A
66 Weighted Student Units (2012-13)	#N/A
67 Baseline Rate	#N/A

Adjustment for Maximum	Baseline Rate	Factor	wsu
68 Maximum Increase Amount	#N/A	1.100	#N/A

Adjustment for Minimum	Baseline Rate	Factor	wsu
69 Minimum Increase per student	#N/A	1.020	#N/A
70 Baseline Funding (from line 65)			#N/A
71 Minimum Funding Percentage			100%
72 Minimum Funding Amount			#N/A

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73 Minimum Increase Amount	#N/A
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District Data
School Year Set-up

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION TO SURVEY – EMAIL LETTER

December 16, 2013

(Address)

Dear Superintendent:

I am writing to request permission to use information regarding your school in my graduate level independent study. If permission is granted, the administration and school board involved in your school will be sent a survey. I am requesting your school's participation for a study, which will examine the perceptions of North Dakota school leaders of successfully reorganized school districts within the years of 2000-2010. With your permission, the data gathered will be analyzed together with data from other schools that agree to participate. All information specific to your school will be kept anonymous. No individual names of administrators or school board members will be published in the final product of this study.

I am a graduate student at the University of North Dakota. I have spent the past thirty-six years working in the field of k-12 education in North Dakota. I have experience in three different North Dakota schools as a teacher, coach, and administrator. I have served the last twenty-one years as the Superintendent of the Lisbon School District #19.

Should members of your board and/or superintendent choose to participate, please complete reply to this email stating that you have granted me permission to survey the administration and school board members of your school board. Please note that my IRB #201311-184 was approved by UND Institutional Review Board on November 25, 2013. I would also like the email addresses of your board members and administration so that I can forward the survey to their email address.

The knowledge gained from this study may help future rural school districts' administrators and school board members design a successful reorganization plan that will be passed by the voting patrons. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me at (701) 683-4106. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Steven L. Johnson, UND Educational Leadership
Lisbon Public Schools #19
PO Box 593
Lisbon, ND 58054
Work (701) 683-4106 Cell (701) 678-3099 Fax (701) 683-4414
Email steven.johnson@sendit.nodak.edu

APPENDIX E

INVITE TO PARTICIPATE IN SURVEY – EMAIL LETTER

January 13, 2014

Dear Survey Participant:

I am a graduate student at the University of North Dakota. I have spent the past thirty-six years working in the field of k-12 education in North Dakota. I have experience in three different North Dakota schools as a teacher, coach, and administrator. I have served the last twenty-one years as the Superintendent of the Lisbon School District #19.

For my final project, I am examining the perceptions of North Dakota school leaders of successfully reorganized school districts within the years of 2000-2010. Because you are a school board member or an administrator of one of those twenty-one successful reorganized school districts, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the online survey. This online survey asks a variety of questions about the way you perceived the reorganization process. The survey should take five minutes or less to complete. Participation is voluntary and your response will be anonymous. No individual names or administrators or school board members will be published in the final product of study. My research has been approved by the UND Institutional Review Board with Project Number: IRB-201311-184.

The survey is available online now until January 27, 2014 at
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NDSuccessfulReorganizedSchools>

To participate in the research, please click on the survey link above. You may need to push your Ctrl key while clicking the link. All participants will be receiving one reminder before the survey is closed.

The knowledge gained from this study may help future rural school districts' administrators and school board members design a successful reorganization plan that will be passed by the voting patrons. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me or email me (701) 683-4106 or steven.johnson@sendit.nodak.edu. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Steven L. Johnson, UND Educational Leadership
Lisbon Public Schools #19
PO Box 593
Lisbon, ND 58054
Work (701) 683-4106 Cell (701) 678-3099 Fax (701) 683-4414
Email steven.johnson@sendit.nodak.edu

APPENDIX F

ONLINE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

SurveyMonkey - Question Builder Page 1 of 7

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Successful Reorganized Districts Survey Design Survey Collect Responses Analyze Results

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Aqua

TITLE & LOGO

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

PAGE 1 Show this page only

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Please take a minute to complete the survey below. The survey is being sent to North Dakota school board members and administrators. The purpose of this survey is to assess and improve the current reorganization process in the State of North Dakota. Any participation is voluntary and the survey data is confidential. If you decide, your completed survey will indicate your consent to participate. We appreciate your time and willingness to help make the reorganization process better.

Q1

*** 1. What was your position at the time of your district's successful reorganization?**

- Business Manager
- School Board Member
- Superintendent
- Principal
- Staff Member
- Community Member
- Other: (i.e. not employed by the district or not resident of district)

Q2

*** 2. Your Level of Education:**

- High School
- Post Secondary -- 2-year degree
- Post Secondary -- 4-year degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate Degree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q3 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

***3. District Enrollment (k-12) size at time of reorganization:**

- Less than 50
- 51-100
- 101-200
- 201-300
- 301-400
- 401-500
- More than 500

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q4 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

***4. Gender (Check one)**

- Female
- Male

+ Add Question ▼

+ Add Page

PAGE 2 Edit Page Options ▼ Move Copy Delete

Show this page only

Please rate each of the statements below by marking the appropriate response

It is my perception that our reorganization efforts were successful based upon the following issues:

+ Add Question ▼

Q5 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

***5. A critical factor in the purpose of the reorganization plan was to keep the school open rather than closing it.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q6 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

***6. Financial incentives were key to the decision to reorganize.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q7 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

***7. The pooling of resources was instrumental to the plan.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q8 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

***8. The opportunity to maximize educational opportunities was a prime consideration for the reorganization.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q9 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

***9. The fact that the schools involved in the reorganization had cooped for athletics was a positive influence on the vote.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
-

- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q10 [Edit Question](#) ▼ [Add Question Logic](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)

***10. The reduction in district enrollment was a prime reason for the reorganization effort.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q11 [Edit Question](#) ▼ [Add Question Logic](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)

***11. Open enrollment by students was a key factor in the reorganization.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q12 [Edit Question](#) ▼ [Add Question Logic](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)

***12. The choice of the new district's mascot (existing or newly created) was an important factor in the reorganization.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q13 [Edit Question](#) [Add Question Logic](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)***13. The location of the new district's high school was one of the most important factors in the reorganization. .**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

[+ Add Question](#) [Split Page Here](#)Q14 [Edit Question](#) [Add Question Logic](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)***14. It was important to retain the buildings of each of the districts within the reorganized district.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

[+ Add Question](#) [Split Page Here](#)Q15 [Edit Question](#) [Add Question Logic](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)***15. It was important to have a building assessment of each of the former district's buildings to determine if each met state and federal building codes.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

[+ Add Question](#) [Split Page Here](#)Q16 [Edit Question](#) [Add Question Logic](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)***16. It was important to have representation on the new school board from all former districts within the reorganized district.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q17 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

***17. It was important that the reorganization plan include retention of teaching staff.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q18 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

***18. It was important that the reorganization plan include retention of administrative staff.**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Edit Question ▼ Move Copy Delete

Thank you for participating in this survey.

+ Add Question ▼

+ Add Page

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APPENDIX G

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

U N I V E R S I T Y O F  N O R T H D A K O T A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
c/o RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND COMPLIANCE
DIVISION OF RESEARCH
TWAMLEY HALL ROOM 106
264 CENTENNIAL DRIVE STOP 7134
GRAND FORKS ND 58202-7134
(701) 777-4279
FAX (701) 777-6708

November 27, 2013

Steven L. Johnson
P. O. Box 754
Lisbon, ND 58054

Dear Mr. Johnson:

We are pleased to inform you that your project titled, "The Perceptions of North Dakota School Administrators and School Board Members of Successfully Rural Reorganized Districts from 2000 to 2010 Due to Declining Enrollment" (IRB-201311-184) has been reviewed and approved by the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board (IRB). The expiration date of this approval is August 15, 2014.

As principal investigator for a study involving human participants, you assume certain responsibilities to the University of North Dakota and the UND IRB. Specifically, any adverse events or departures from the protocol that occur must be reported to the IRB immediately. It is your obligation to inform the IRB in writing if you would like to change aspects of your approved project, prior to implementing such changes.

When your research, including data analysis, is completed, you must submit a Research Project Termination form to the IRB office so your file can be closed. A Termination Form has been enclosed and is also available on the IRB website.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me at (701) 777-4279 or e-mail michelle.bowles@research.und.edu.

Sincerely,



Michelle L. Bowles, M.P.A., CIP
IRB Coordinator

MLB/jle

Enclosures

REPORT OF ACTION: EXEMPT/EXPEDITED REVIEW
University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board

Date: 10/17/2013

Project Number: IRB-201311-184

Principal Investigator: Johnson, Steven

Department: Educational Leadership

Project Title: The Perceptions of North Dakota School Administrators and School Board Members of Successfully Rural Reorganized Districts from 2000 to 2010 Due to Declining Enrollment

The above referenced project was reviewed by a designated member for the University's Institutional Review Board on 11/25/2013 and the following action was taken:

- Project approved. **Expedited Review** Category No. Next scheduled review must be before:
- Copies of the attached consent form with the IRB approval stamp dated must be used in obtaining consent for this study.
- Project approved. **Exempt Review** Category No. 2
 This approval is valid until AUG 15 2014 as long as approved procedures are followed. No periodic review scheduled unless so stated in the Remarks Section.
- Copies of the attached consent form with the IRB approval stamp dated must be used in obtaining consent for this study. N/A
- Minor modifications required. The required corrections/additions must be submitted to RDC for review and approval. **This study may NOT be started UNTIL final IRB approval has been received.**
- Project approval **deferred**. **This study may not be started until final IRB approval has been received.** (See Remarks Section for further information.)
- Disapproved claim of exemption. This project requires Expedited or Full Board review. The Human Subjects Review Form must be filled out and submitted to the IRB for review.
- Proposed project is not human subjects research as defined under Federal regulations 45 CFR 46 or 21 CFR 50 and does not require IRB review.
 - Not Research
 - Not Human Subject

PLEASE NOTE: Requested revisions for student proposals **MUST** include adviser's signature. All revisions **MUST** be highlighted and submitted to the IRB within 90 days of the above review date.

- Education Requirements Completed. (Project cannot be started until IRB education requirements are met.)

Letters of approval from individual school districts must be sent to the UND IRB office prior to beginning any research in those districts.

cc: Dr. Gary Schnellert

Michelle R. Berke 11/25/2013
Signature of Designated IRB Member Date
UND's Institutional Review Board

If the proposed project (clinical medical) is to be part of a research activity funded by a Federal Agency, a special assurance statement or a completed 310 Form may be required. Contact RDC to obtain the required documents.

APPENDIX H

SECOND NOTICE TO PARTICIPATE IN SURVEY (EMAIL)

January 20, 2014

Dear Survey Participant:

This is a friendly reminder inviting you to participate in my survey for my graduate research project. If you choose to participate, please do so by January 27, 2014 by midnight. The survey is available online now until January 27, 2014 at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NDSuccessfulReorganizedSchools>

To participate in the research, please click on the survey link above. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time. I value your input.

Thanks! If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me or email me (701) 683-4106 or steven.johnson@sendit.nodak.edu.

January 13, 2014

Dear Survey Participant:

I am a graduate student at the University of North Dakota. I have spent the past thirty-six years working in the field of k-12 education in North Dakota. I have experience in three different North Dakota schools as a teacher, coach, and administrator. I have served the last twenty-one years as the Superintendent of the Lisbon School District #19.

For my final project, I am examining the perceptions of North Dakota school leaders of successfully reorganized school districts within the years of 2000-2010. Because you are a school board member or an administrator of one of those twenty-one successful reorganized school districts, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the online survey. This online survey asks a variety of questions about the way you perceived the reorganization process. The survey should take five minutes or less to complete. Participation is voluntary and your response will be anonymous. No individual names or administrators or school board members will be published in the final product of study. My research has been approved by the UND Institutional Review Board with Project Number: IRB-201311-184.

The survey is available online now until January 27, 2014 at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NDSuccessfulReorganizedSchools>

To participate in the research, please click on the survey link above. You may need to push your Ctrl key while clicking the link. All participants will be receiving one reminder before the survey is closed.

The knowledge gained from this study may help future rural school districts' administrators and school board members design a successful reorganization plan that will be passed by the voting patrons. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me or email me (701) 683-4106 or steven.johnson@sendit.nodak.edu. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Steven L. Johnson, UND Educational Leadership
Lisbon Public Schools #19
PO Box 593
Lisbon, ND 58054
Work (701)683-4106 Cell (701)678-3099 Fax (701)683-4414
Email steven.johnson@sendit.nodak.edu

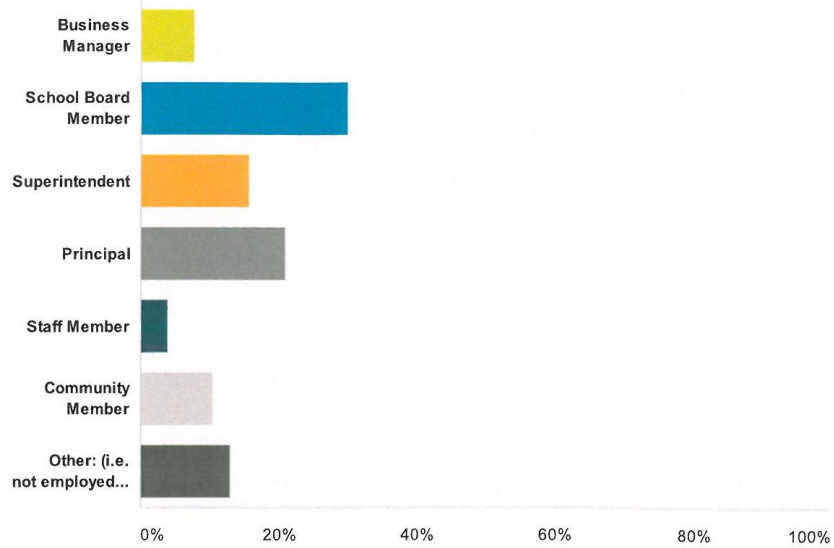
APPENDIX I

SURVEY RESULTS – SUCCESSFULLY REORGANIZED DISTRICTS

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q1 What was your position at the time of your district's successful reorganization?

Answered: 77 Skipped: 0

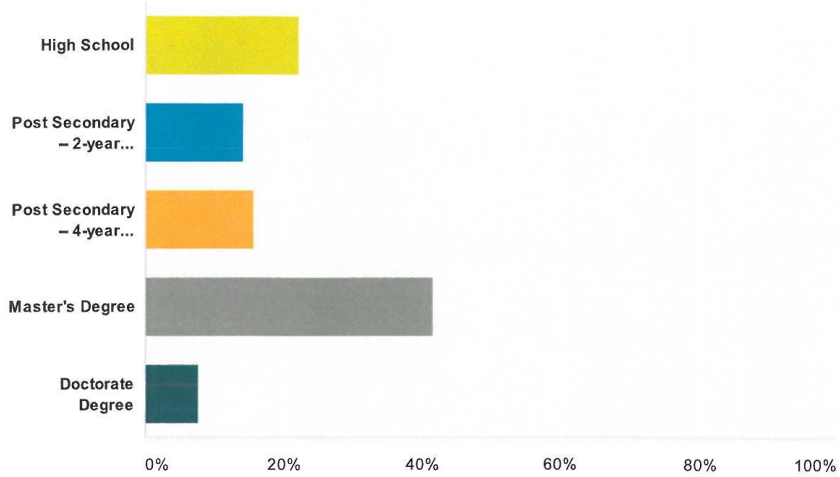


Answer Choices	Responses	
Business Manager	7.79%	6
School Board Member	29.87%	23
Superintendent	15.58%	12
Principal	20.78%	16
Staff Member	3.90%	3
Community Member	10.39%	8
Other: (i.e. not employed by the district or not resident of district)	12.99%	10
Total Respondents: 77		

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q2 Your Level of Education:

Answered: 77 Skipped: 0

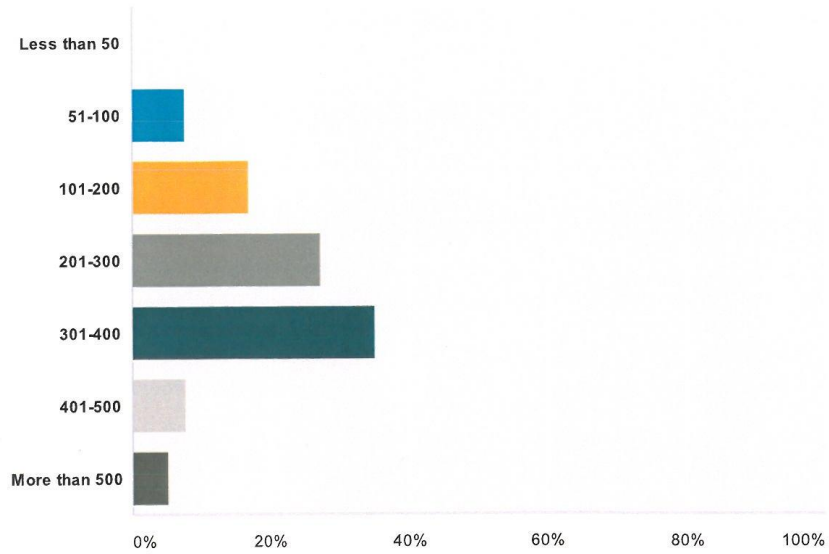


Answer Choices	Responses	Count
High School	22.08%	17
Post Secondary – 2-year degree	14.29%	11
Post Secondary – 4-year degree	15.58%	12
Master's Degree	41.56%	32
Doctorate Degree	7.79%	6
Total Respondents: 77		

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q3 District Enrollment (k-12) size at time of reorganization:

Answered: 77 Skipped: 0

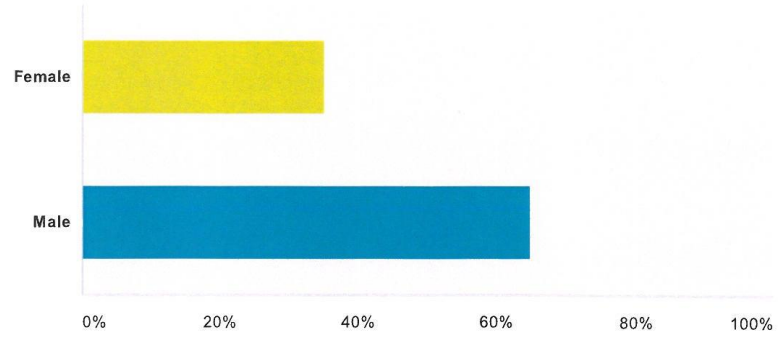


Answer Choices	Responses	
Less than 50	0%	0
51-100	7.79%	6
101-200	16.88%	13
201-300	27.27%	21
301-400	35.06%	27
401-500	7.79%	6
More than 500	5.19%	4
Total		77

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q4 Gender (Check one)

Answered: 77 Skipped: 0

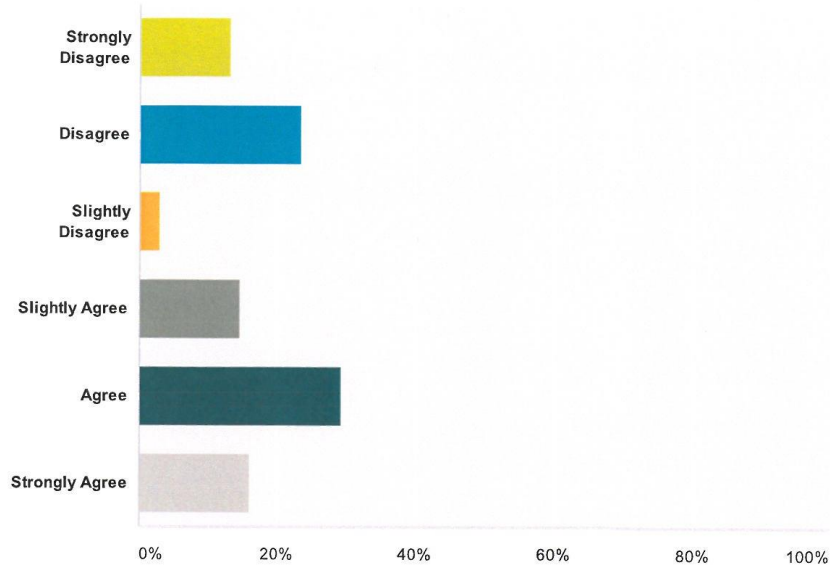


Answer Choices	Responses	
Female	35.06%	27
Male	64.94%	50
Total		77

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q5 A critical factor in the purpose of the reorganization plan was to keep the school open rather than closing it.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

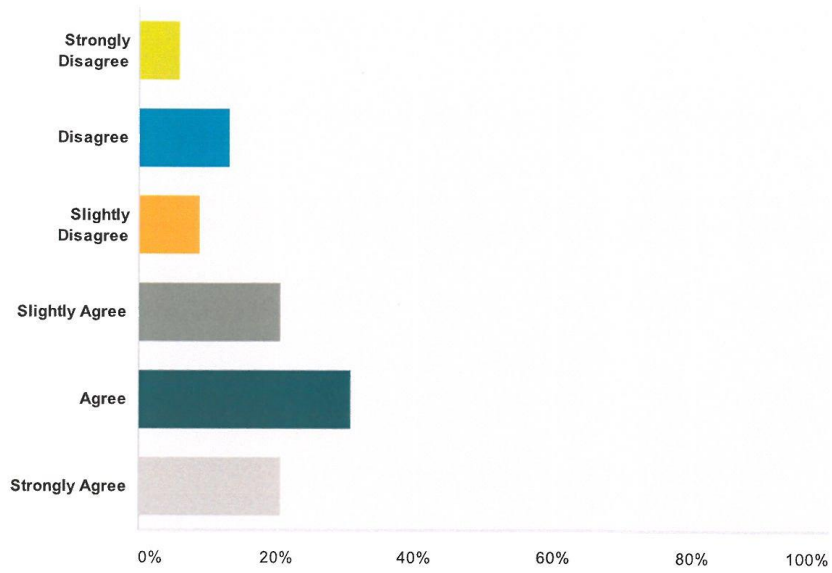


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	13.24%	9
Disagree	23.53%	16
Slightly Disagree	2.94%	2
Slightly Agree	14.71%	10
Agree	29.41%	20
Strongly Agree	16.18%	11
Total		68

Succesful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q6 Financial incentives were key to the decision to reorganize.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

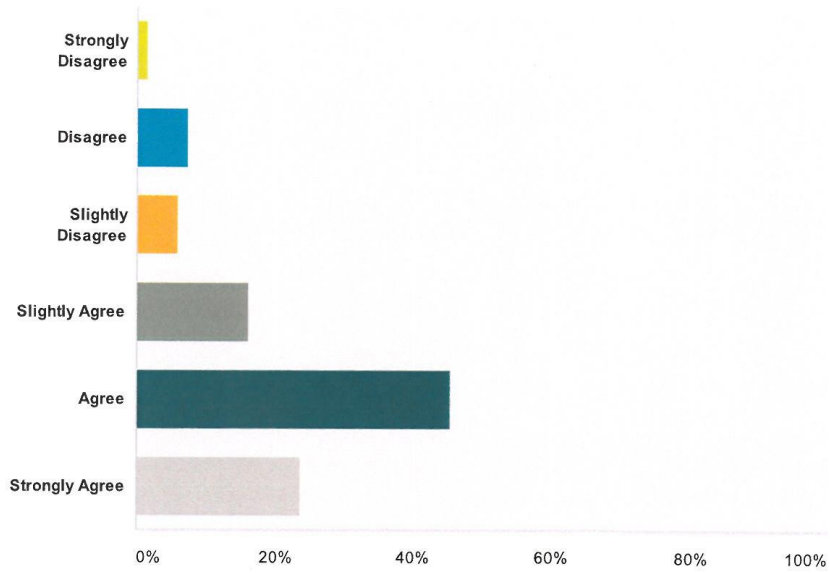


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	5.88%	4
Disagree	13.24%	9
Slightly Disagree	8.82%	6
Slightly Agree	20.59%	14
Agree	30.88%	21
Strongly Agree	20.59%	14
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q7 The pooling of resources was instrumental to the plan.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

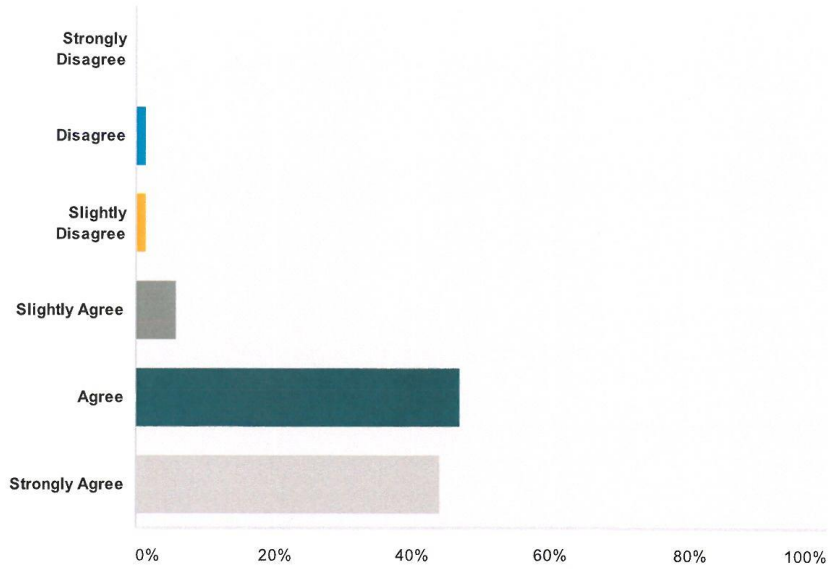


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	1.47%	1
Disagree	7.35%	5
Slightly Disagree	5.88%	4
Slightly Agree	16.18%	11
Agree	45.59%	31
Strongly Agree	23.53%	16
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q8 The opportunity to maximize educational opportunities was a prime consideration for the reorganization.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

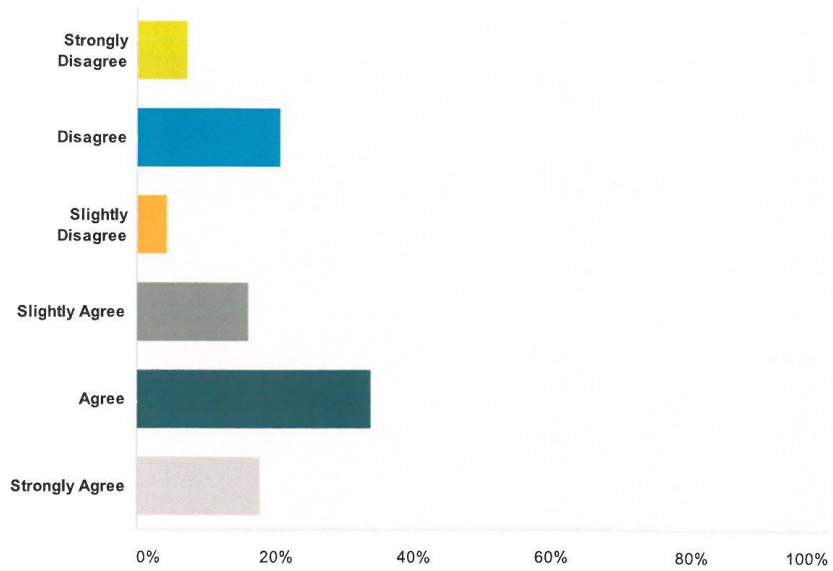


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	0%	0
Disagree	1.47%	1
Slightly Disagree	1.47%	1
Slightly Agree	5.88%	4
Agree	47.06%	32
Strongly Agree	44.12%	30
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q9 The fact that the schools involved in the reorganization had cooperated for athletics was a positive influence on the vote.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

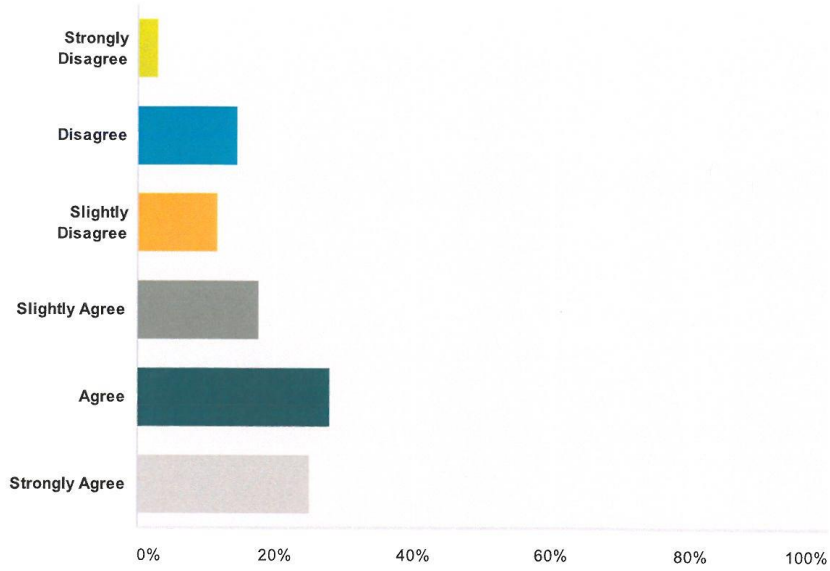


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	7.35%	5
Disagree	20.59%	14
Slightly Disagree	4.41%	3
Slightly Agree	16.18%	11
Agree	33.82%	23
Strongly Agree	17.65%	12
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q10 The reduction in district enrollment was a prime reason for the reorganization effort.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

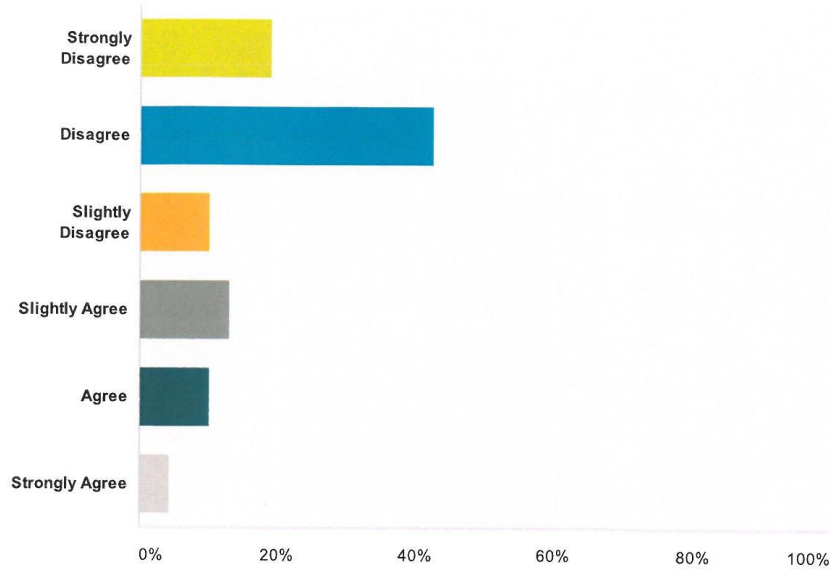


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	2.94%	2
Disagree	14.71%	10
Slightly Disagree	11.76%	8
Slightly Agree	17.65%	12
Agree	27.94%	19
Strongly Agree	25%	17
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q11 Open enrollment by students was a key factor in the reorganization.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

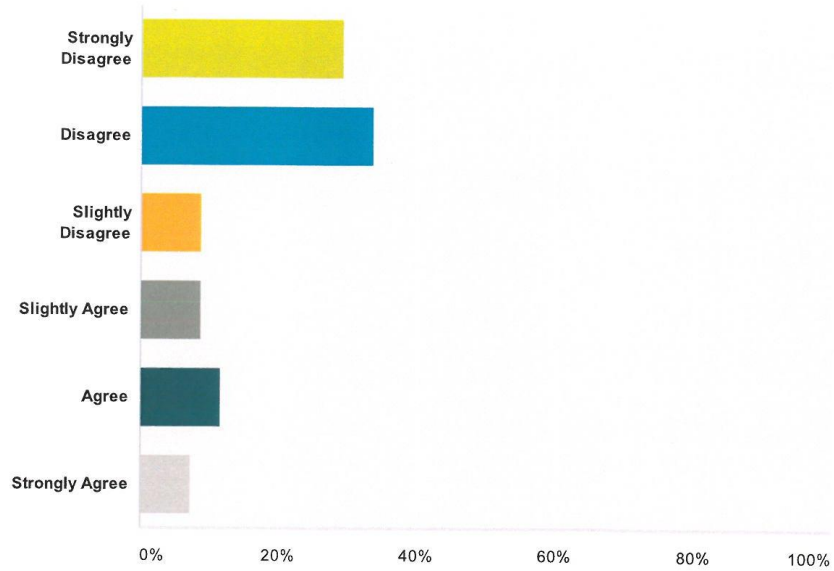


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	19.12%	13
Disagree	42.65%	29
Slightly Disagree	10.29%	7
Slightly Agree	13.24%	9
Agree	10.29%	7
Strongly Agree	4.41%	3
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q12 The choice of the new district's mascot (existing or newly created) was an important factor in the reorganization.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

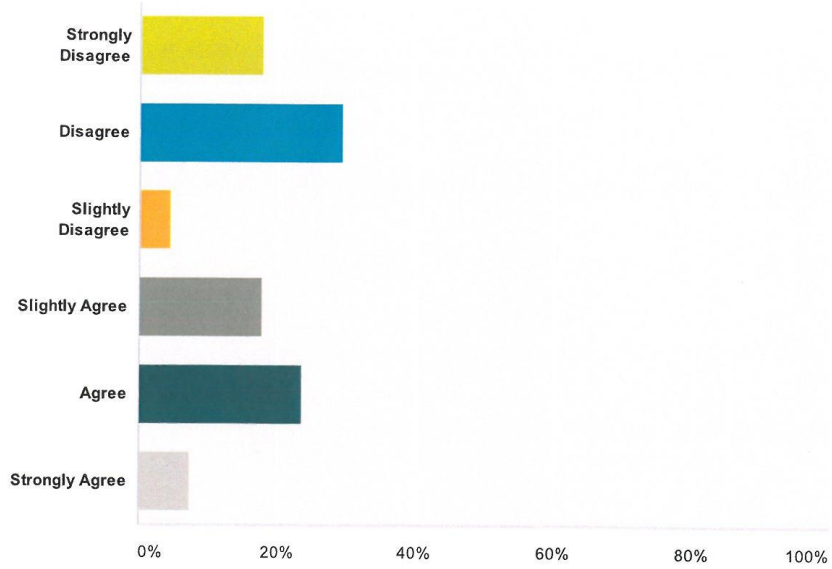


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	29.41%	20
Disagree	33.82%	23
Slightly Disagree	8.82%	6
Slightly Agree	8.82%	6
Agree	11.76%	8
Strongly Agree	7.35%	5
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q13 The location of the new district's high school was one of the most important factors in the reorganization. .

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

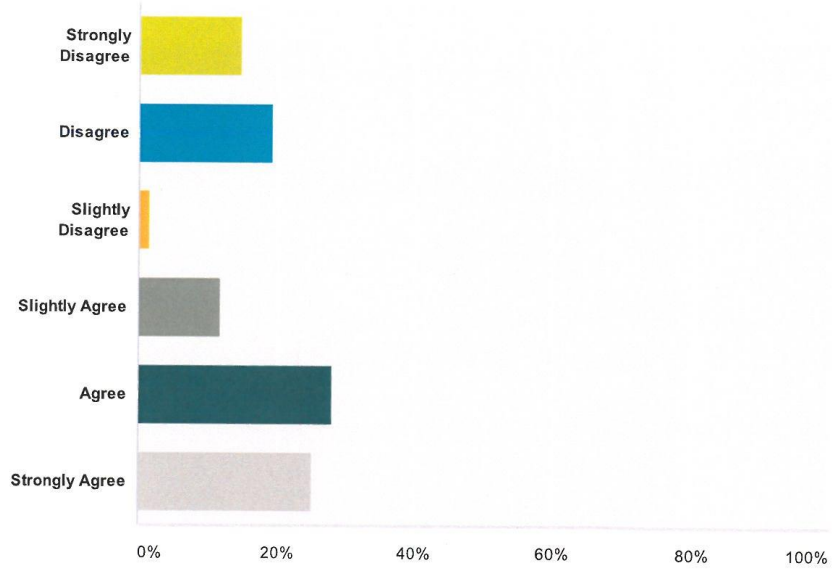


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	17.65%	12
Disagree	29.41%	20
Slightly Disagree	4.41%	3
Slightly Agree	17.65%	12
Agree	23.53%	16
Strongly Agree	7.35%	5
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q14 It was important to retain the buildings of each of the districts within the reorganized district.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

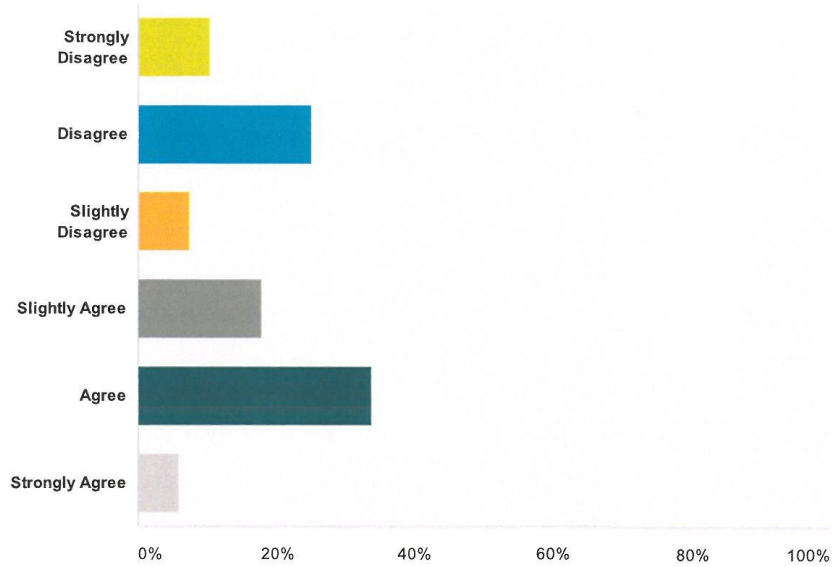


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	14.71%	10
Disagree	19.12%	13
Slightly Disagree	1.47%	1
Slightly Agree	11.76%	8
Agree	27.94%	19
Strongly Agree	25%	17
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q15 It was important to have a building assessment of each of the former district's buildings to determine if each met state and federal building codes.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

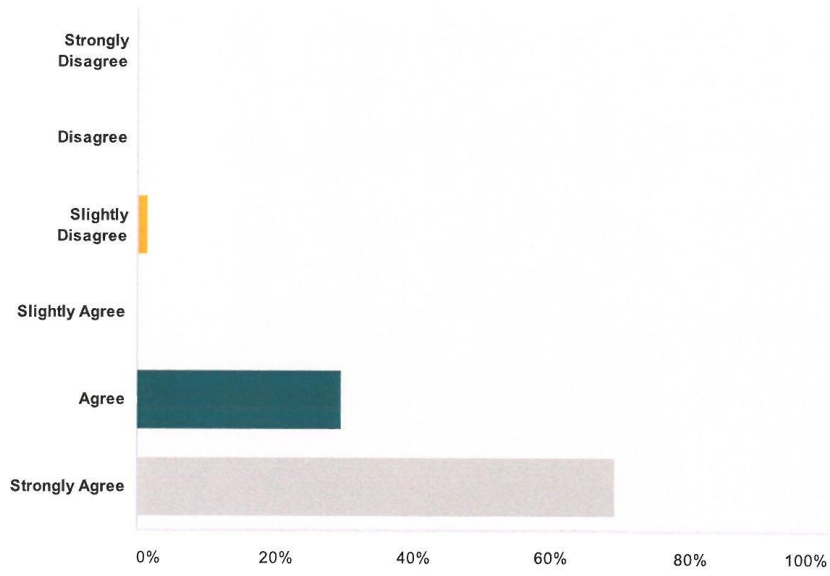


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	10.29%	7
Disagree	25%	17
Slightly Disagree	7.35%	5
Slightly Agree	17.65%	12
Agree	33.82%	23
Strongly Agree	5.88%	4
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q16 It was important to have representation on the new school board from all former districts within the reorganized district.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

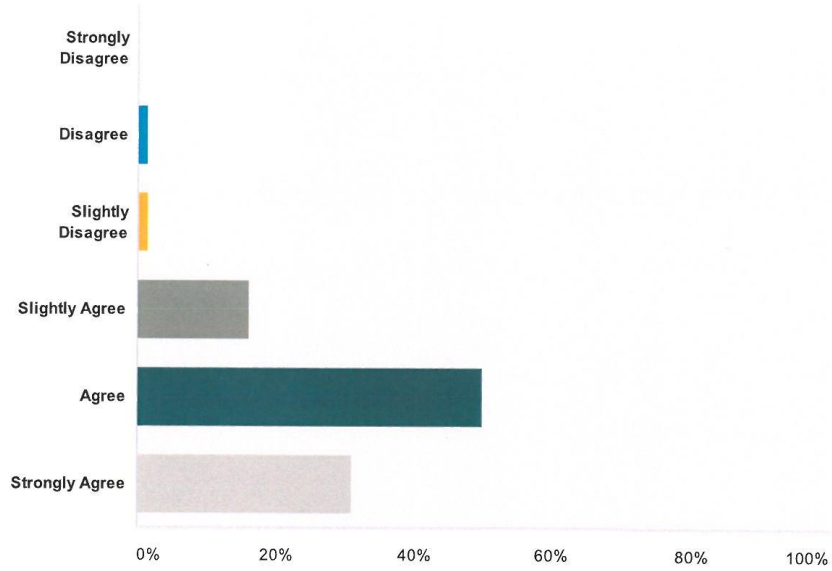


Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	0% 0
Disagree	0% 0
Slightly Disagree	1.47% 1
Slightly Agree	0% 0
Agree	29.41% 20
Strongly Agree	69.12% 47
Total	68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q17 It was important that the reorganization plan include retention of teaching staff.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9

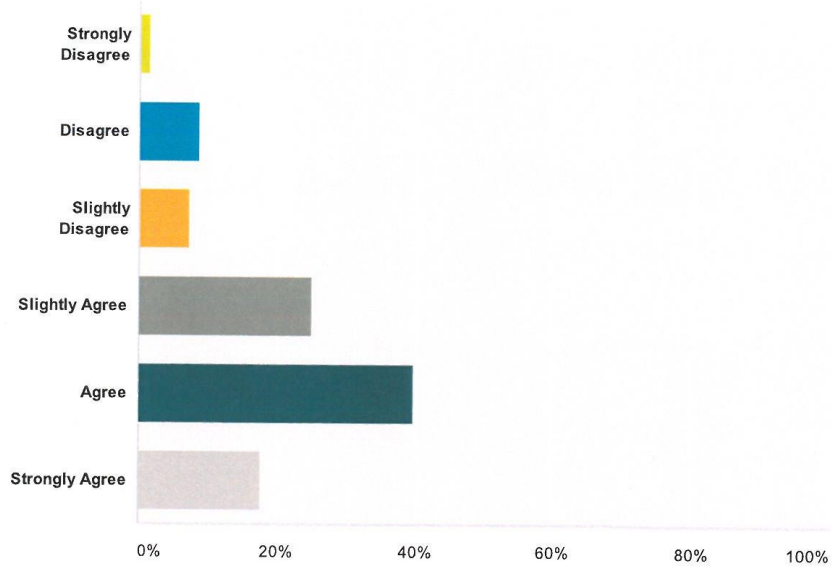


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	0%	0
Disagree	1.47%	1
Slightly Disagree	1.47%	1
Slightly Agree	16.18%	11
Agree	50%	34
Strongly Agree	30.88%	21
Total		68

Successful Reorganized Districts Survey

Q18 It was important that the reorganization plan include retention of administrative staff.

Answered: 68 Skipped: 9



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Disagree	1.47%	1
Disagree	8.82%	6
Slightly Disagree	7.35%	5
Slightly Agree	25%	17
Agree	39.71%	27
Strongly Agree	17.65%	12
Total		68

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