The School Climate in a K-12 Single-Campus School as Perceived by Students, Graduates, Parents, and Teachers

Albert P. Lindner
Andrews University

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ABSTRACT

THE SCHOOL CLIMATE IN A K-12 SINGLE-CAMPUS SCHOOL AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS, GRADUATES, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS

by

Albert P. Lindner

Chair: James A. Tucker
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

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Title: THE SCHOOL CLIMATE IN A K-12 SINGLE-CAMPUS SCHOOL AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS, GRADUATES, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS

Name of researcher: Albert P. Lindner

Name and degree of faculty chair: James A. Tucker, Ph.D.

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Problem

Pressures created by consistently higher expectations of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation are forcing school boards and professional educators to examine current practices and structures in an effort to reach Average Yearly Progress (AYP). The concept of a single-campus K-12 school may be a viable school structure that can provide an optimum learning climate while addressing academic needs to provide a well-rounded education for the children of America.
Purpose

The purpose of this study was to closely examine the school climate of a K-12 school that operated as a single entity for 20 years. The intent was to determine whether there were characteristics of the K-12 structure that were especially effective as perceived by individuals with firsthand knowledge of this structure.

Method

The method used in this research was a qualitative case study of a particular school in Pennsylvania. This school was operated as a single-campus K-12 school for many years, and was recently divided into the standard two-campus formats of elementary and secondary schools. Data for this study were obtained from three sources: interviews, a school survey, and an administrator’s reflections about the case-study school. Four distinct groups were interviewed: graduates of the case-study school, teachers of the case-study school who graduated from organizational structures other than a K-12 single-campus school, parents, and community members. A principal who served the school for 15 years provided reflective observations. Finally, results of a school- culture survey administered to sixth-graders, the class of 2011, and 12th-graders, the class of 2005, were analyzed prior to the separation of the case-study school into separate units. Common themes were identified that described the climate of the case-study school.

Results and Conclusions

Three key themes were identified. Participants agreed that cross-grade activities at the case-study school provided opportunities for extended learning, that student/teacher
relationships were close, personal, and long lasting, and that the peer-tutoring program present before the split benefited mentors and students. The data supporting these themes were compared to Marzano’s five factors of school climate that predict academic success.

Documentation, in the form of perceptions of students, parents, the community, teachers, and a former principal, indicate that the K-12 structure provided a nurturing, safe, and supportive educational climate for learning. In the words of a participant, “The K-12 structure provides for a continuous flow.”

Recommendations

The primary recommendation resulting from this study is that policy-makers (school boards, administrative groups, and communities) should examine the K-12 structure when they attempt to restructure their schools. As the literature review suggests, and this case study substantiates: the K-12 organizational structure provides a viable alternative to the current school organizational format, separate elementary, middle, and high schools. There are definite budgetary advantages provided by the K-12 organizational structure. In addition, students, especially those from distressed socio-economic backgrounds, perform academically as well as, or better than, students from current organizational structures. Further research should be conducted to examine the level of impact of those factors present in a K-12 organizational structure which yield student success.
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AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS, GRADUATES,
PARENTS, AND TEACHERS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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October 2009
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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

________________________________                 _____________________________
Chair: James A. Tucker                                      Dean, School of Education
                                                    James R. Jeffery

________________________________
Member: Shirley A. Freed

________________________________
Member: Gary Gifford

________________________________
External: Lyndon G. Furst                                      Date approved
I dedicate this research effort to my Mother, Rose M. Lindner, who provided a living model of a life-long learner, and to my children, grandchildren, and four decades of students who have filled my life with love, joy, and excitement. May they all embrace the tradition of learning as they travel through the twenty-first century.

I also dedicate my efforts to my Committee Chair, mentor, and friend, King Arthur, Dr. James A. Tucker, who has supported me throughout this journey and continues to inspire me.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

Horace Mann, in his Twelfth Annual Report as the Secretary of Education of Massachusetts, spoke in 1848 of the power of education. It was his contention that education more than any social institution can level the conditions of mankind (Mann, 1848). In America, developing well-rounded citizens with a strong academic background was to be accomplished based on the manufacturing model of the last half of the 20th century (Callahan, 1962). Currently, driven by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, this goal has narrowed to the production of graduates who can meet a limited set of standards in math, reading, and science, to the exclusion of other subjects (Ward, 2004). Teachers, administrators, and school boards overwhelmed by the political environment have responded to the collective pressure to reach the artificial goals of AYP—average yearly progress. According to Paley (2007), reporting for The Washington Post, critics of the NCLB legislation understand that the 100% perfection standard is an impossible goal. By limiting educational goals to only math, reading, and science, much of the breadth of a well-rounded education has been lost. Ripley, Rubiner, and Thigpen (2004), writing for Time Magazine, echoed that sentiment when she reported comments from Iowa teacher, Shane Williams: “The causalities include social studies, creative
writing, and teacher autonomy. They’re not going to learn civics, history, geography—a lot of essential skills that they’re going to need to be good democratic citizens” (p. 52).

Four years after the school shootings at Columbine that created such emotional upheaval across the nation, reasons for the shootings were still not clear as reported by Cullen (2004). Did these teenage shooters feel disconnected to their schools? Is there a link between the current violence directed toward and within our schools and poor school climate?

Has the practice of consolidating community schools into mega systems had a deleterious effect on school climate? School consolidation, with all of the negatives accompanying that process, such as isolation of community, has become a common practice in the southern and Appalachian states. According to Marty Strange, program policy director for the Rural School and Community Trust, in western states school consolidation has become “epidemic” as school boards struggle to survive economically (Buchanan, 2004).

The decline of the local community school has been mirrored by the decline of organized religious institutions and the family. The church and the family, as major social institutions in America, wield less and less influence. Public schools have become the last social institutions by default. As Ness (2007) summarizes, schools are charged not only with responsibility for improving academics, but they are held accountable for the nutritional habits of children, vocational instruction and counseling, and technology awareness and proficiency; this without touching on the family responsibilities that have been assumed by the school. These duties include breakfast and lunch programs, latch-
key and nursery schools, and special education for children who were previously institutionalized or home schooled.

**Statement of the Problem**

Weaver (2003), speaking on behalf of the National Education Association (NEA), addressed some unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind Legislation (NCLB): higher dropout rates, a narrower curriculum, eliminating all but core courses, and a decrease in highly qualified teachers. The problem for educators, then, becomes a quest to identify tools, strategies, or structures that will allow educational institutions to maintain the richness of the educational fabric, while consistently raising academic standards; in short, public schools will have to change the way they do business (The Education Trust, 2004).

What factors of school climate affect student academic success? Studies by Eckman and Howley (1997) have demonstrated a strong correlation between a small school environment and academic achievement. Does the school climate of a K-12 single-campus school affect student success?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe a unique organizational school structure, the single-campus K-12 school. This structure strives to raise academic standards in an educational environment that is reminiscent of the one-room school, where developing citizenship, personal relationships, and character were as important as skill-development (Kruez, 2006).
This research addresses the need to balance the quest for academic excellence with the development of well-rounded global citizens; a goal which has been diminished because of the overemphasis of math and reading due to NCLB (Fugate, 2007). The single-campus K-12 educational administrative unit appears to provide a uniquely supportive educational climate that fosters a balance between social and academic goals and promotes a sense of community (Bickel, Howley, Williams, & Glascock, 2000) This research is aimed at professional educators, boards of education, and communities who are looking for opportunities to provide enriching educational possibilities for their students that foster academic proficiency while focusing on the development of the whole child.

**Context of the Study—The Single-Campus K-12 School**

The elementary and secondary components—curriculum, personnel, and management of a physically connected K-12 school—are inextricably woven together. Everything from personnel to programming is intertwined. For, example, a sixth-grade teacher may serve as the Athletic Director/Student Activities Director and Head Teacher of the elementary school. A secondary social studies teacher may collaborate with elementary teachers on special reading projects with her high-school classes. Elementary students often served as “guinea pigs” and as audiences for high-school classes. Varsity basketball players, boys and girls, coached recreational Saturday basketball for elementary fourth- through sixth-graders.

Efforts to find literature on current K-12 single-campus school structures, as they are defined later in this chapter in the “Definition of Terms,” yielded only scattered references to a handful of such structures in rural school districts particularly in western
and southern states. Other references to K-12 single-campus schools focus on experimental schools such as Agassi’s private K-12 school (Smith, 2007) in Las Vegas or to on-line curriculums that could be used for home-schooling. Paglin and Fager (1997) of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Information Services indicate that “research has not provided definitive answers to the myriad possible questions about grade span, (the configuration of grades in a given school like a middle school housing grades 6, 7, and 8) but the questions have never gone away” (p. 4).

Research by Bickel et al. (2000) does provide some insight into the academic success of K-12 single-campus schools. They studied 1,001 rural Texas schools of which 116 were single-campus schools. Their study replicated studies completed in six states: in California (Friedkin & Neccohea, 1988), Ohio (Howley, 1989), West Virginia (Howley, 1995, 1996), Alaska (Huang & Howley, 1993), Montana (Howley, 1989), and in Georgia (Bickel & Howley, 1999). In each study, results indicated that students attending K-12 schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas do as well as or better academically than their counterparts who attend separate school entities such as an elementary school, middle school, and a high school.

Additional research on the K-8 organizational structure supports expanded grade spans; that is, more grade levels in one school entity. The Office of Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, an office of the Florida Legislature, cites available data on K-8 school structures. Del Monte and Sikes (2005) provide an overview of school structures from the K-8 organizational structure which preceded the movement toward the establishment of separate high schools at the beginning of the 20th century through the current pattern of elementary, junior high, and high school. This was followed by
substituting middle schools for the junior highs. Most recently some districts are returning to the K-8 structural design. Del Monte and Sikes (2005), who directed a project to review alternative school structures, indicate that there are several reasons for this shift back to the K-8 structure. Some of the reasons include low academic performance of middle-school students, high absenteeism, dropout rates, and parental dissatisfaction with current structures. Del Monte and Sikes relate that students in a K-8 structure tend to score higher on standardized tests than students in a middle-school structure. Can these assumptions hold true for a K-12 school structure also? That is one of the questions, which, by extension, I hope to address with this case study.

The school climate in the case-study school was different. It was not that neon lights flashed when one entered the building, yet the “tone” spoke of it. Visitors frequently mentioned how welcome they felt there. Initial observations of the case-study school in the spring of 1991 and informal discussions with staff reflected that there was a web connecting the members of this school community that tended to catch those students who would typically “fall through the cracks” in a more traditional setting.

Delisio (2005) reports that in an era when summative assessments seem to define the success of public schools, many parents are more interested in having their children be exposed to a greater variety of enriching experiences and subjects than having them excel as test-takers. Given the possibility exemplified by the case-study school, school climate is perhaps a more critical piece of the educational puzzle than ever before.

**Research Questions**

The broad overarching research question was: What are some of the unique characteristics of a K-12 single-campus school? Other questions addressed, relative to
the K-12 single-campus school, were: Is there a curriculum flow, connections that link content across grade levels? How do teachers and students live their lives in this type of school? What accounts for the school climate—a sense of belonging, level of safety and comfort, peer interactions, and relations between students and teachers? What are the social and/or academic benefits or deficits of attending this type of school structure? Does the K-12 school format foster an extended sense of security?

**Methodology**

The methodology used to produce the kind of data needed to address the research questions was a single case study. According to Creswell (1998), the case study is one of the five traditional approaches to qualitative research. Glesne and Peshkin (1992), in discussing the differences between quantitative and qualitative research, indicate that researchers tend to use a methodology that is consistent with their worldview. They base this on the assumption that reality is socially constructed and that understanding the actors’ perspectives provides for a depth of understanding. The single case study is an ideal venue for this study. One entity, a K-12 single-campus school, was examined.

I hope that I have meshed a variety of artifacts, including records of direct observations, themes developed from a school climate survey, and other context-rich data, including interviews of the histories of people who have experienced these educational structures. These data were analyzed and interpreted, searching for patterns and themes that might characterize the K-12 single-campus format, keeping in mind that such characteristics may or may not generalize to other settings. Findings of this analysis are reported in a narrative model. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) indicate that narrative research is built on “multiple, fluid foundations and formed into ambiguous shapes that
may ring more or less, crisp and clear as one thing from one vantage point and another from another vantage point” (p. 154). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also speak of multiple realities and the variety of data to be collected addressing this attempt to portray a holistic view of the entity being studied.

**Conceptual Framework**

The most recent teacher-evaluation forms adopted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania showed a focus on the classroom climate. One-quarter of the evaluation document, Domain Two, focused on “The Classroom Environment” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2005). These forms were adapted from Charlotte Danielson’s framework for teaching model: Pennsylvania Department of Education forms 426, 427, and 428 (Danielson, 1996). The selection of this content, classroom environment, for a state evaluation document provided added testimony to the importance of school climate. In *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, Danielson focuses on the following:

1. Component 2a: Creating an environment of respect and rapport
2. Component 2b: Establishing a culture of learning
3. Component 2c: Managing classroom procedures
4. Component 2d: Managing student behavior

These components played a major role in the state’s evaluation of the teaching process. Yet, the media reflected the desperate attempts by local school boards, teachers, and administrators to reach the artificial benchmarks of AYP. The work of the 1980s to improve school climate and the research-based techniques such as cooperative learning

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that grew out of those efforts have faded into the background (Gauld, 1993). Where are the discussions of a decade ago that examined the growth of character and initiated the adoption of a whole curriculum named character education?

**Significance of Study**

The significance of this study is the opportunity to share a venue, a way of integrating the myriad goals dumped on the school in a structure that can mesh these goals and help to make them possible to achieve. In some ways, this study will cast a vision for a different kind of school—a school that is not just an elementary school, nor just a junior/senior high school, but an educational continuum, a growing environment that allows children to draw on their past while stretching into their futures safe, secure, and nurtured.

**Basic Assumptions**

Boards of Education and state legislatures are struggling to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Legislation. A plethora of strategies have been used across the nation in attempts to reach the goals of this legislation. Based on the fear of not reaching Average Yearly Progress (AYP), curriculum is being narrowed to only those core subjects that are assessed by the high stakes tests. According to Neill and Guisbond (2007), narrowing of the curriculum and the impossible demands of NCLB are demoralizing American educators and exacerbating the challenges for students of color. In this NCLB-focused climate, educators and parents interviewed for this case study spoke of the K-12 single-campus school as a structure where enriching activities, safety, and a sense of belongingness and community were the primary foci of their overall
experiences. Academic success of graduates was addressed, but seldom did participants mention NCLB. My expectation, given the profound impact of NCLB, would have been to find that thread of influence running throughout participants’ interviews. The fact that the power and influence of NCLB as a federal and local force was ignored by participants adds emphasis to the strength of their responses about the positive climate of a K-12 single-campus school.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined as they are used in this study:

*Administrative unit:* A school structure under the management of a lead administrator with or without subordinates.

*APL Training:* A professional development program, developed by APL Associates, that focuses on research-based classroom management strategies such as “wait time,” allowing students ample time to respond in class.

*Artifacts:* Items collected such as photos, news articles, observations and reflections, and records of activities that reflect interactive threads within the K-12 school structure.

*Average Yearly Progress (AYP):* The measure of academic growth of a student, cohort, or school as measured by a summative standardized assessments.

*Character education:* A curriculum designed to focus attention on the development of positive character attributes such as honesty, respect, and co-operation.

*Educational balance:* Curriculum design that stresses both academic excellence and the development of a socially responsible citizen.
Individual Educational Plan (IEP): A legal document developed by a team to provide for the educational needs of an identified youngster.

Flow: A continuous/seamless movement of people, curriculum, and structure from grade level to grade level without stress. Transition between grade levels is an example of flow.

Grade Span: The number of grade levels in a given school such as a primary school spanning grades K through 2.

Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI): An instructional design developed by Research for Better Schools in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh.

Institutions: The family unit, organized religion, and public schools.


National Education Association (NEA): A professional teachers’ association.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Federal legislation whose intent is to require districts to assure that all children reach academic proficiency as defined by benchmarks.

Opportunity to Learn (OTL): A term used by researcher Robert Marzano that refers to the practice of providing equitable opportunities for all students to acquire competence with a core curriculum.


School climate: Also referred to as school environment; is the composite of individuals’ perceptions relating to social comfort, academics, activities, relationships, athletics, and organizational goals.
School violence: Any and all acts of aggression with the intent to bring harm to students or school personnel.

Single-campus school: An educational administrative unit servicing Grades Kindergarten through 12 in one building or at one campus site.

Summative assessments: Tests and other forms of assessment used by educators to assess student, cohort, and/or school academic progress at the conclusion of instruction.

Teacher collaboration: A teaching strategy in which two or more professional educators work together to accomplish common educational goals.

Teacher evaluation: A formalized process for judging the competence of practicing teachers.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature as it relates to this study. Chapter 3 delineates the methodology, a single case study. Chapter 4 presents the results of the collected and analyzed data. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations including themes that decision makers may want to examine as they structure their public schools’ recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review began with an overview of the purpose of schools or public education in the United States. Due largely to societal changes and the effect of federal legislation (e.g., No Child Left Behind—NCLB), the purpose of public schools has radically changed from providing a broad-based general education to focusing on three core subject areas: math, reading, and science (McKenzie, 2005). In addition, public schools have taken on many of the responsibilities that were traditionally borne by parents (Ness, 2007).

It continued with a look at school climate. This review focused on key elements of school climate named by Marzano (2003) and how they impact on student performance. My study then examined a school structure, the K-12 single-campus school, to determine if such a structure can provide a rich, broad-based education and a supportive, nurturing environment for students in American education in the 21st century.

The Purpose of Schools

The purpose of public education in America has changed through the decades, largely as the result of socio-economic conditions in a given era. According to Noah Webster, early New England schools were created to provide an understanding of
Christian principles (Shenandoah, 2002). As communities and towns sprouted across the new nation, one-room schools with a culture of their own became a predominant part of the landscape. They taught traditional reading, writing, and arithmetic to provide children of the local populace with enough basic skills to allow them to prosper in their communities. According to Ness (2007), for the first 260 years of public education in America, teaching these three core subjects and history made up the curriculum of schools. As the nation continued to grow, schools also grew in size, especially with the establishment of the first high schools. The programs of these high schools replicated the manufacturing model of the early 20th-century productivity based on clock hours. The purpose of these early high schools was to provide an efficient work force (Orr, 1992).

Then along came Horace Mann with the noble idea that the purpose of public schools should be to produce good citizens (Mann, 1848). This philosophy of producing worthy citizens later took root with John Dewy (Dewey, 1975). Dewey believed that good education should have a purpose for both the individual and for society. He encouraged educators to focus on content and process rather than just content. His belief that prior personal experience plays a role in current learning continues to guide educational practices.

According to Vollmer (2000), during the course of the 20th century, public schools took on the burdens of society reflected in an ever-expanding curriculum, and are currently responding to the need to develop our children into citizens who can compete in a global marketplace. Added to societal pressures were the results of “A Nation at Risk,” a report on public education completed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 (Steadman, 1983). Key concerns of the report included a need to
return rigor to the academic curriculum of high schools. To this end high schools
increased graduation requirements, added rigor to content courses, increased the use of
standardized tests, and began the search for research-based curricula and teaching
strategies (Steadman, 1983).

The combination of societal pressures and high stakes, standardized tests driven
by NCLB, federal legislation aimed at assuring that all children reach high academic
standards, has narrowed the purpose of public schools. McKenzie (2005) asserts that
long-term damage to our children and democratic society will be the result of this
funneling of curriculum into a slim diet with its focus on reading and math.

At the same time as school curriculum is being narrowed, schools are being
challenged by economic restraints. This challenge has resulted in the wholesale
abandonment of the community school and has resulted in super-sized consolidated
mega-schools. As Purcell and Shackleford (2005) reported to the National Rural School
Association’s Executive Committee, these large schools provide a target-rich
environment for terrorists. They also point out that although consolidation claims to save
taxpayers’ dollars, the inverse has been true in West Virginia where over $1 billion has
been spent in the efforts to consolidate West Virginia’s schools.

Large single- and multiple-level grade schools have been developed that isolate
children by age. The middle-school structure, a product of such thought, is being
questioned as Viadero (2004) summarizes in a Report from the Rand Corporation. If, as
cited, teachers have been forced to narrow the focus of curriculum, and mega schools
provide expensive, less-safe alternative organizational structures, what options are
available to educators concerned about preserving a positive school climate?
School Climate

What is school climate? Sometimes referred to as school culture, school climate has been extensively researched for decades. Entering the term *school climate* into the digital search engine Google.com resulted in 52,400,000 hits on November 16, 2006. Marshall (2004) points out that although school climate has been the subject of long-term school research, there does not seem to be a clear definition. In fact, most researchers define the term broadly and in terms of its characteristics. Individuals’ subjective perceptions of their school experiences is how Cohen (2006) defines school climate. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), citing the research of Keefe, Kelley, and Miller (1985), defines climate as “the relatively enduring pattern of shared perceptions about the characteristics of an organization and its members” (p. 70).

These shared perceptions form a standardized picture of the school organization. For example, McBrein and Brandt (1997) suggest that schools come to be identified as nurturing schools when they are known to support children as individuals, or authoritarian schools when they focus on order, control, and structure. McBrein and Brandt also differentiate between school culture and school climate, indicating that climate deals more with the school’s impact on students whereas culture deals more with the interactions between school personnel. School culture, according to Tableman and Herron (2004), refers to the deep ideas that are commonly shared by the members of an organization. These values and beliefs provide the organization’s identity. This culture helps to set expected behaviors and sets boundaries for the members of the organization. Tableman and Herron refer to school climate as the feel of a school. School climate, as they define it, refers to the physical and psychological characteristics of the school.
Tableman and Herron add that school climate is more susceptible to change, whereas school culture is imbedded in the belief system of members of a given school.

Dietrich (1996) suggests that school climate is fluid, and that factors such as societal forces outside the school, as well as the emotions of staff and students, are other conditions that have an effect on school climate. In short, individuals’ collective perceptions about the organization to which they belong, be it a business or a school, have a significant effect on the organization’s productivity or academic success (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Further, McEvoy and Welker (2000) indicate that a review of the literature on school climate suggests that student-learning opportunities and positive interpersonal relationships can increase achievement and reduce antisocial behavior in any school environment.

Factors of School Climate and Their Effect on Student Performance

Several factors seem to affect our perceptions about the climate of our organizations. Marzano (2003), in examining over 35 years of research on school effectiveness, has listed five factors that affect school climate and ultimately student performance. He lists them in the following order:

1. Guaranteed and viable curriculum
2. Challenging goals and effective feedback
3. Parent and community involvement
4. Safe and orderly environment
5. Collegiality and professionalism.

According to Marzano’s synthesis of the research, the list ordered first to fifth states the most significant factors with the first being most significant and the fifth being the least.
Marzano hastens to point out that there may be a break-even point. That is to say that a given factor such as a guaranteed and viable curriculum has a major impact up to a certain level, and then the effect of that factor diminishes as other factors become more powerful.

Other researchers have focused their efforts on some of the same areas as Marzano. Feelings of safety and school size, as they relate to school climate, have been examined by Freiburg (1998). The importance of a positive school climate on collaboration has been examined by Chauncey (2005). Linked to this is Fulton, Yoon, and Lee’s (2005) research on learning communities and teacher induction programs. The research of Johnson and Johnson (1993) addresses school climate as it relates to academic performance. The following paragraphs will address each of Marzano’s characteristics of school climate and related research.

The first characteristic identified by Marzano (2003) is a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Marzano refers to a guaranteed and viable curriculum as having two factors: the opportunity to learn and time. He points out that the opportunity to learn, OTL, can vary depending on a given teacher’s practice. The teacher’s interpretation of curriculum, expertise within a give area of content, and his or her ability to make implementation decisions can cause serious differences between the curriculum on paper and the actual curriculum that is implemented. The critical factor regarding OTL is that a student cannot be held accountable for the acquisition of specific skills or content if the student has not been exposed to those skills or content. While both the educational community and parents might assume that a standardized curriculum evenly implemented is a given, Hirsch (1996) calls the notion, that all schools within a given school district have an
agreed-upon curriculum that they strive to implement, a myth. He adds that even within a given school there are often significant discrepancies in curriculum even between classrooms at the same grade level. Due to the uneven application of curriculum, even using scripted texts, Marzano (2003) points out that learning gaps may occur for students. Marzano concludes that these curricular gaps translate into gaps in academic performance measured on standardized assessments.

Results of Adleman’s (1999) long-term study following a cohort of students from 1980 through 1993 can be used to reinforce Marzano’s emphasis on a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Adleman’s goal, to determine factors that were likely to lead to the completion of a bachelor’s degree, yielded the following. Completing a solid academic core in high school was the strongest predictor of bachelor degree completion stronger than class rank, grade point averages, or high-school grades. The completion of a high-level math course beyond Algebra II doubled a student’s chances of earning the bachelor’s degree. Students who achieved the most took more of the most advanced courses such as AP classes, sciences, and higher math classes. These findings reinforce Marzano’s belief that the foundation of a good education is a rigorous curriculum.

Again citing Marzano (2003), “A viable curriculum is unattainable without the benefit of time” (p. 24). Marzano documents research conducted at the Mid-continent Research for Education Laboratory which determined a discrepancy between the amount of time necessary to teach a given set of standards and benchmarks as estimated by teachers, and the actual amount of time available in a typical school’s daily schedule provided for that purpose (Marzano, Kendall, & Gaddy, 1999). In addition to the shortfall between actual instructional time available and the estimated time to teach
content, there are other strains on instructional time. Issues that impede instructional implementation ranging from 21% to 69% of the school day include social activities and a variety of routine interruptions (Marzano & Riley, 1984). Finally, Marzano (2003) indicates that while implementing a guaranteed and viable curriculum is the most critical factor affecting student success, it is the most difficult to attain.

Challenging goals and effective feedback are combined by Marzano and listed as the second most critical factor affecting school climate and student success. Marzano (2003) refers to challenging goals as “high expectations and pressure to achieve” (p. 35). “The introduction of specific, measurable goals is among the most promising yet underused strategies we can introduce into school improvement efforts” (Schmoker, 1996, p. 18).

Further information about challenging educational goals was provided by Hom and Murphy (1983). After reviewing research on setting educational goals, they concluded that when students set goals for themselves, both motivation and efficiency increase. Students are also more likely to achieve at higher levels when they work toward student-developed goals than teacher-directed goals. O’Neill (2000) adds that goals focused on student learning provide educators with opportunities to understand and communicate the results of the goal-directed learning. She also suggests that there are two types of goals: process and results goals. Most of the goals enacted by schools are process goals—broad in scope and difficult to measure. O’Neill believes that results goals provide more accurate feedback on what students are learning and the effectiveness of teaching practices and strategies.
How do we know if goals are being effectively executed? The process of monitoring goals is termed feedback by Marzano (2003). He indicates that there are two factors that impact the effectiveness of the feedback. The first factor is that feedback must be provided in a timely fashion throughout the learning experience. Second, the most effective feedback is specific to the content students are learning.

Gilbert (1978) provided the following set of eight principles of effective feedback:

1. Identify expected accomplishments.
2. State the requirements of each accomplishment.
3. Describe how performance will be measured and why.
4. Set exemplary standards.
5. Identify exemplary performers and any available resources that people can use to become exemplary performers.
6. Provide frequent and unequivocal feedback about how well each person is performing. This confirmation should be expressed as a comparison with an exemplary standard. Consequences of good and poor performance should also be made clear.
7. Supply as much backup information as needed to help people trouble-shoot their own performance.
8. Relate various aspects of poor performance to specific remedial actions. (p. 178)

Gilbert indicates that although these steps seem relatively simple, they are seldom followed. Wiggins (2004) suggests that teachers too often look at feedback as an end result to learning, rather than an integral part of the learning process. Wiggins indicates that feedback or, in contemporary terms, formative assessment can have the benefit of improving academic performance. Measuring student accomplishment against a specific goal helps the student be able to reach that goal.

Parent and community involvement is identified by Marzano (2003) as the third significant factor affecting school climate. McBrien and Brandt (1997) refer to the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which lists parent involvement as one of its eight major
goals. Parent involvement, according to McBrien and Brandt, ranges from volunteer activities in the schools, to making sure children attend school on a daily basis.

Reviewing the literature on the effect of parental involvement on student success Cotton and Wikelund (1989) conclude that

The research overwhelmingly demonstrates that parent involvement in children’s learning is positively related to achievement. Further, the research shows that the more intensely parents are involved in their children’s learning, the more beneficial are the achievement effects. This holds true for all types of parent involvement in children’s learning and for all types and ages of students. (p. 3)

Holt and Murphy (1993) add that parent and community involvement can aid in overall student behavior. This relates to Marzano’s fourth factor affecting school climate: a safe and orderly environment.

A safe and orderly environment is critical, according to Marzano (2003). He states, “Without a minimum of safety and order, a school has little chance of positively affecting student achievement” (p. 53). Sewell and Chamberlin (1997) indicate that data gleaned from polls at both the national and local levels reflect public concern about school safety issues. A digital search using the search engine Google and the phrase safe and orderly educational environments in schools produced 79,700 responses on March 3, 2009. Scanning the responses yielded the following:

1. Numerous school districts have posted vision statements and policies regarding school safety issues.

2. Both the United States, Canada, and individual states and provinces have national and state-level policies dealing with school safety.

3. School safety and an orderly environment are key topics for professional development at all educational levels.
The Mississippi Department of Education (Campbell, 2003) provides an excellent example of the materials referenced above. Their website developed by the Division of School Safety includes the following. There is a hotline phone number for public use. A library of resources including a bibliography of texts and videos on topics related to school safety is provided. Sample policies from school districts throughout the United States are made available. These extensive resources tend to support the belief that a safe and orderly environment, as Marzano (2003) suggests, is a critical factor in school climate and academic performance by students.

According to Marzano (2003), the final major factor impacting the climate of a school is collegiality and professionalism. Rosenholtz (1989) analyzed 78 Tennessee schools to determine their levels of collaboration. She grouped schools into collaborative, isolated, and somewhat isolated schools. She concluded that teachers in collaborative settings had frequent interactions that focused on ways to help or support students. Teachers from collaborative schools viewed their teacher leaders as helpful to other teachers and as leaders who were willing to experiment and motivate their peers. Common planning and a willingness to work at solving problems were also characteristics of teachers with high levels of collegiality according to Rosenholtz.

How can these collegial relationships be developed? DuFour and Eaker (1998) focused on the power of professional learning communities as a way to develop and strengthen collegial relationships among teaching staffs. Dufour and Eaker cite social scientists and educators who supported the factory model mirrored by education for the first half of the 20th century. This model was somewhat effective when the majority of students dropped out of high school through the 1950s and were able to find employment
in factories. As those kinds of jobs began to dwindle during the last half of the 20th century and the emphasis on academic achievement took the reins of education, educators began to look for new systems and structures (Blankstein, 1992). Professional learning communities have become one of those systems.

What are the characteristics of professional learning communities? Dufour and Eaker (1998) indicate that in these learning communities professionals share a mission, values, and a vision. Colleagues—teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, volunteers, parents, and students—are all committed to common values and consciously work toward their shared vision. Professional learning communities function in collaborative teams according to Dufour and Eaker. These learning communities are concerned with process, and they focus on collective inquiry as their method of operation. These teams are devoted to continuous improvement through experimentation and assessment based on results. Dufour and Eaker suggest that collegiality can be encouraged and fostered through the development of professional learning communities.

Fullan and Hargraves (1996) cite specific behaviors that reflect authentic collegiality. Included is the ability of teachers to share failed strategies and practices and to be able to analyze and criticize practices and procedures. These behaviors must occur, according to Fullan and Hargraves, in an atmosphere of respect. Darling-Hammond (1998) indicates that teachers learn these professional behaviors “best by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see” (p. 8).

Marzano (2003) indicates that each of the five factors that he has identified has an impact on the climate of a school and the academic success of that school.
Educational research cited in my literature review has consistently demonstrated that the climate of a school is one of the major factors affecting student performance. The power of school climate is demonstrated in the following example. Schools under the leadership of Al Mamary, Superintendent of the Johnson City Schools of New York State, had made remarkable academic progress as reported by Brandt (1994). Mamary indicated that while all of the district’s schools were Title I eligible schools and that his schools represented the lowest socio-economic conditions in the area, they were among the highest in academic achievement. For example, 93% of the students in the Johnson City School System passed Algebra I, whereas the state average is 73% and the county average is 76%. Mamary states, “I think success comes from the kind of environment you create . . . an environment that says people are important” (p. 24).

School Climate and the K-12 Organization

What is a K-12 school organization? In this research document, a K-12 single-campus school will be defined as an educational administrative unit servicing Grades Kindergarten through 12 in one building or at one campus site. Bickel et al. (2000) refer to these schools as “single-unit schools: the only school in a typically small rural district, containing all elementary and secondary grades under one roof” (p. 6). They add that small school size may be one of the factors that results in the overall educational effectiveness of the K-12 single-campus school. A sense of school community and community involvement seem to be common characteristics of the K-12 school.

What is the educational effectiveness then of these determiners of school climate, school size, and a sense of community on students who attend a K-12 school? The impact of these determiners on a K-12 school is the focus of this study. What if anything
is different about this setting that fosters positive academic and behavioral growth in children, and encourages collaboration among staff? What if any characteristics distinguish the K-12 school organization, as I have defined it, and contribute to an increased positive school experience?

This section of the literature review will examine these factors: school size, ruralness, and community involvement since, according to Bickel et al. (2000), K-12 unit schools tend to be small and rural. The first consideration will be the smallness of the school. Margaret Fosmo (1995) poses the question, “How big is too big?” in an article written for the South Bend Tribune Reporter. Her entire article questioned the consolidation movement in Indiana and Michigan schools that was being reflected across the nation as school districts strived to survive economically. After interviewing numerous school personnel, she concluded that although school size is not the only critical factor, there were significant advantages to small schools. All staff from teachers and administrators to aides knew the students better, management issues were reduced, and community involvement was stronger (Fosmo, 1995).

Bickel and Howley (1999) shared the following insights about small schools: Small schools had fewer dropouts and fewer discipline problems. Small schools benefited special populations such as special-needs children, females, and those from various minority racial groups. Teachers tended to be more satisfied in smaller schools and therefore were more likely to be collaborative and innovative. Students tended to participle in more activities, thus reducing the impact of the lack of extensive curricula offered by larger schools. Smaller schools were less expensive on a per-graduate basis (Coburn, 2003).
Based on these kind of data, some educational systems are changing their school size. The website for the Indianapolis Public Schools viewed January 1, 2007, reflected the efforts of a large metropolitan school system to separate its mega high schools, which previously housed from 1,200 to 2,000 students, into new small high schools of no more than 400 students. This separation of mega high schools increased the number of high schools from 5 to 24. The newer entities are projected to share some common space in the large buildings such as cafeterias. The major goal of this initiative to decentralize schools was to provide more intimate learning opportunities to better meet the needs of the students. A grant of $1.6 million from the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning was reported to be helping to fund this effort (Indianapolis Public Schools, n.d.).

Organizing research data on small, rural schools point to the interrelatedness of many of the current issues in education today. For example, community service efforts and community involvement, and support of public schools, can be interwoven. Beothel (2006) stressed that small rural schools can improve and revitalize communities. For example, in Balmorha, Texas, Beothel reported that the local schools have developed health-care programs to assist their rural communities. Students under the supervision of a school nurse were providing minor health-care services for elderly residents. Students had opportunities for real-life learning, and the public receives valuable service. An endless variety of activities from social issues to local history projects could be the basis of these mutual efforts. Additionally, students from all levels—elementary, junior high, and senior high—could be involved (Boethel, 2006).
Safety issues are another area where there seems to be an advantage in the smaller schools. Wallace (2006) interviewed students and staff at Benson High School, a small high school in Arizona, after a student reported a firearm on campus. Both the local law-enforcement officer assigned to the high school and the school superintendent indicated that the small school with its sense of community was the factor that allowed the reporting student to feel comfortable in reporting the weapon. School officials who recently fenced in the campus felt that the relationships developed in the small high school added more to the security of the students and faculty than artificial security devices like the fence.

Small schools are often rural schools. In a position paper on rural schools, the National Education Association (2001) stated that “nearly 40% of America’s school age children attend public schools in rural areas . . . and that 49% of the nation’s public schools are located in rural areas and small towns” (p. 3). This issue paper listed the following benefits to students and educators. Class size was usually smaller in rural schools. In small community schools there was more quality interaction between students, their parents, and teachers due to the proximity of the schools in local communities. Often the school entity was the largest employer in the community. The schools tended to be the social and recreational centers of these communities. Most often the smaller class sizes and strong community involvement translated into higher achievement levels for students. Finally, rural schools often served as proving grounds for new educational strategies, such as multi-grade classrooms, distance learning, and cooperative use of resources. In summary, positive characteristics of small and rural schools include:
1. Community involvement
2. Smaller class size
3. Greater opportunities for student participation in activities
4. Quality relationships between parents, teachers, and students
5. A safer environment.

Summarizing these reported factors together then, if I were to overlay the characteristics of small and rural schools together on a web of school climate, the interaction of these factors becomes apparent. In a K-12 school those characteristics are magnified. A sense of belonging to the school community, for example, continues from the elementary through the high school. Due to fewer students enrolled, all students have greater opportunities to participate in athletics and all kinds of extra-curricular activities. Due to the proximity of staff, collaboration and collegial sharing become the norm across the grade levels. Educational strategies are embraced and supported by colleagues. Now the characteristics of small schools, rural schools, and the qualities that facilitate a positive school climate can be laid into a web that can encourage, support, and educate all children. Andre Agassi, tennis celebrity, has founded a K-12 charter school for at-risk students in Las Vegas, based on the belief that small classes and a positive school climate can improve the quality of education (Smith, 2006). Can public education use this privately funded K-12 school as a model?

Grade Span, School Achievement, and the K-12 Single-Campus School

Grade span refers to the number of grade levels within a given school. For example, a typical elementary school might span Grades K through 6. A primary school, however, might only span Grades K through 2. Jenkins and McEwin (1992) point out
that interest in grade span has been a focus of educational inquiry for nearly 80 years. Yet, there are few definitive answers to questions regarding grade-span configuration. Researching under the auspices of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Paglin and Fager (1997) provide the following background and generalizations. They reiterate the understanding that most research on grade-span configuration provides suggestive rather than definitive conclusions.

From an historical perspective, Paglin and Fager (1997) point out that in 1920 about 80% of all high-school graduates attended a K-8 school followed by a 4-year high school. By 1960, that same 80% of high school graduates attended an elementary school, a junior high school, and a senior high school. Currently, in most school districts the junior high has been replaced by the middle school. Paglin and Fager add that the change from junior high to middle school was a conceptual change; whereas junior highs aimed to prepare students for the high-school setting, middle schools aimed to provide a more child-centered environment. What have we learned about school achievement, particularly as it relates to a K-12 single-campus school?

A focus on the socioeconomic status of students yields one of the rare definitive conclusions relating to grade-span configuration. Again, much of the research on grade configuration is ambiguous, as Becker concluded in 1987. He found, for example, that locating sixth graders in an elementary school produced significant academic advantages. Yet, he discovered that the elementary advantage waned as the socioeconomic status of the students increased. Students at the upper socioeconomic levels seemed to perform better in a middle-school environment.
Bickel et al. (2000) studied 1,001 rural Texas schools. Included in this number were 116 single-campus schools; that is, K-12 schools that were entities unto themselves. The intent of this team of researchers was to study relationships between grade-span configuration, student achievement, and per-pupil expenditure. The Bickel et al. study built upon previous research completed in California. Similar studies were completed in West Virginia, Alaska, Montana, Ohio, and Georgia. The authors point out that the results of all of these studies found the following: Students in high poverty areas consistently made higher achievement in K-12 schools compared to students attending elementary, middle, and high-school structures. Further, academic performance continued to decline for economically disadvantaged students as school size increased.

Bickel et al. indicate that in previous studies comparing academic achievement and grade span, independent variables were limited. To increase the credibility of their study, they used a more fully specified regression model. Their intent was to challenge the results of previously conducted research on this topic, which consistently concluded that K-12 schools provided an environment that yielded stronger academic performance for socially and economically disadvantaged students than schools characterized by multiple grade configurations. The Bickel et al. follow-up study unquestionably confirmed the findings of previous research.

Another question explored in the Bickel et al. (2000) study was the contention that large schools are more cost effective on a per pupil basis, and therefore, have become necessary organizational structures in the current resource-scarce environment. The authors report, however, that “with expenditure per pupil as the outcome measure, multiple regression analysis shows that single-unit schools, on average correspond to a
reduction in expenditure of $1017 per pupil, a substantial saving, when compared with conventionally grade-specialized high schools” (p. 5). The single-unit schools referred to were 116 Texas schools that housed all Grades K-12 in one building. Bickel et al. summarized that, “given a level of school performance, the school with a broader grade span will provide that level of performance at a lower cost (all else equal)” (p. 16).

Another academic strength of a K-12 single-campus school suggested in the literature involves *flow or transition*, that is, students physically moving from one school setting to another. Mac Iver and Epstein (1991) report that about 75% of all students in schools in North America transition from an elementary setting to a junior high or middle school. This process can be stressful for students (Paglin & Fager, 1997). The academic cost of shifting from one school to another can be significant according to Wren (2003). She states, “As grade (span) configuration increases so does achievement. The more grade levels that a school services the better the students perform. The more transitions a student makes, the worse the student performs” (pp. 9-10). Simmons and Blyth (1987) indicated that a transition from one school to another results in a decline in performance, self-esteem, and motivation.

In a K-12 single-campus school, student contact/interaction with other students of differing age levels tends to be the norm. Transitions from school to school do not exist. Due to the size of most K-12 schools the faculty and staff routinely cross grade lines, thereby providing younger students with a broader range of teacher exposure. In a K-12 school, students tend to slide smoothly into the next level of school, for example, sixth grade to seventh, with minimal transition since they are not leaving the physical structure.
When students transfer from an elementary to a middle school, and then to a high school, two significant transfers are experienced by students. Wren (2003) points out that elementary schools tend to be “nurturing environment(s) with few stressors” (p. 10). She lists factors such as: forming peer relations, organizational adjustments, and learning a new physical plant as stressors that add to the impersonal structure of middle schools. She states, “Hence, it seems as if the stressors involved in school to school transition are so critical that they neutralize or even diminish the achievement gains that were made in elementary school” (p. 10).

McDougall and Hymel (1998) summarize that research on the effects of middle-level transitions vary from study to study. They report that some studies indicate definite adverse effects whereas other studies report neither positive nor adverse effects of transitions at this age level. Coladarci and Hancock (2003) suggest that additional research should focus on the corollaries to grade-span configuration. Some of these corollaries are suggested by McDougal and Hymel (1998): gender, the role of supportive relationships, measures of friendship, and self-esteem.

Regardless of the conflict regarding the ultimate effect of grade-span configuration, McDougal and Hymel (1998) conclude that “the configuration of grades, in and of itself, probably ‘does’ matter. The challenge for us is to become smarter about ‘why’ it matters” (p. 4). It would seem that even those who would dissent cannot dismiss the strength of the research linking grade-span configuration to academic performance.
Summary

This literature review has explored the historical changes in the focus of public schools in America, defined school climate, and identified factors of school climate. I examined associations between school climate and student performance using Marzano’s (2003) key factors of school climate. A K-12 school structure was described as a function of small, rural school districts. Characteristics of small schools were delineated. Finally, research regarding school achievement, as it relates to the K-12 single-campus school, was discussed focusing on the effect of school transitions on achievement and the power of the K-12 single-campus school as a delivery structure for students from socially/economically disadvantaged areas.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Schools in America have become the victims of governmental change. Bennis (1989) speaks of this type of overwhelming government change. In this case, federal legislation entitled No Child Left Behind has dictated a national curriculum enforced by high-stakes tests that minimize nearly all curricula but math and reading. The arts, humanities, and character education have become frills as school systems across the nation strive to meet artificial levels of achievement dictated by the federal government. The purpose of my study was to examine a school structure, the K-12 single-campus school, as an entity that can maintain academic rigor while providing a broad-based curriculum and focusing on the development of socially responsible citizens. Some of the research questions that I used to examine this structure include:

1. How did a K-12 single-campus school provide an alternative to large consolidated schools?
2. What effect did this organizational structure have on curriculum?
3. How did students and teachers live their lives in this type of educational setting?
4. What accounted for the school climate?
5. What were the social and/or academic benefits or deficits of attending this type of school?

6. Did a K-12 single-campus school provide a sense of security?

The answers to these questions as perceived by the students, staff, parents, and community members of the case-study school have shed some light on this fading school structure, identifying the opportunities it could present to students in the 21st century.

The Single Case Study

Creswell (1998) indicates that a case study can serve as a methodology or be the object of a study. He suggests the process of a case study is collecting and analyzing data about a specific entity, situation, or phenomenon over time from multiple sources. According to Marshall and Rossman (1980), human behavior is affected by its context. Influences on behavior might include the physical environment, cultural values and norms, and the feelings of the individuals involved. The case study addresses these issues. Trochim (2006) goes on to suggest that researchers need to have direct experience with a phenomenon to develop a deep understanding of the subject under study. Again, the case study provides this direct experience. Further, a wealth of artifacts can be collected and utilized in qualitative research to foster a thorough understanding of the subject. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), these artifacts could include written text such as letters and journals, observation notes, interviews, photographs, and family memorabilia. In their prologue to Narrative Inquiry, they reference the philosophical differences between John Dewey and Edward Thorndike. Simplifying, they credit Thorndike with establishing a need for and use of statistical, quantifiable data. It was Dewey’s need to look at the lives and interactions of
people that can bring full understanding, however, to that data by examining peoples’ experiences.

Context-rich artifacts that provide a deep understanding of the K-12 single-campus school were collected. Included are descriptions of joint, cross-grade activities, records of direct observation, and a thematic summary of students’ perceptions of their school climate based on an historic in-school survey. A series of interviews were blended into the mesh of artifacts that reflect the interactive threads that connect parts of this single-campus school.

I interviewed teachers who received their education in the K-12 system being studied and came “home” to teach in the school structure where they attended school and graduated. Utilizing the same open-ended questions, I interviewed several teachers who were not products of a single-campus school structure, but taught in that structure. I also interviewed parents whose children have attended this K-12 school and community members who had direct knowledge of this cultural entity. Collecting and analyzing qualitative data about both student and teacher perceptions adds a richness and depth to the research. Eisner (1998) talks about this: “Structural corroboration, like the process of triangulation, is a means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs” (p. 110).

Self as the Research Instrument

For those reading this research, it is important to know that I have completed nearly four decades of service in public education. Experiential background includes 18 years as an elementary and middle-school teacher, 3.5 years as an assistant principal, 15 years as the principal of a K-12 single-campus school, and 3 years as an elementary
principal. I have taught in self-contained classrooms, departmentalized settings, and in an Individually Prescribed Classroom, IPI.

Trochim (2006) suggests that to qualify as a qualitative researcher one needs to have a deep understanding of and experience with a phenomenon. As a building-level principal of a K-12 academic unit, I have faced the pressures to reach Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) along with my staff. We have, over the past several years, explored some of the following options: worked with consultants, taught co-operatively, utilized formative tests, bribed students with field trips and other rewards, hired a literacy coach, formatted a new master schedule, established after-school tutorials, and changed teacher assignments to better utilize staff expertise. The quest goes on. As the academic standards have been raised and we pushed our students to succeed on the standardized summative-assessments, the time, effort, and energy available to expand curricular breadth have diminished (Dumenigo, 2005). The demand to reach higher levels of performance has become continuously more challenging, even desperate. What can be done to re-establish a balance between the need to raise academic standards and provide a well-rounded education for our children?

Fifteen years ago I accepted a position as the principal of an elementary school, a physically attached junior/senior high school, and an off-campus alternative education site. At the time I was hired, Pennsylvania principal certification was specific to either elementary or secondary schools. The position did not include an assistant. All three schools were situated in a small rural town in north-central Pennsylvania. The elementary and junior/senior high schools were physically connected, forming a true K-12 single-campus school. The alternative-education school located several blocks away
required some oversight, but was largely self-contained and ran well with minimal intervention from me. The K-12 schools, as I quickly learned, consumed my existence.

Once I settled into the position, I began to realize that in an era when students are separated by age—elementary, middle, and secondary—I was charged with the management of a K-12 entity that reflected more of the aspects of a one-room school-house than the educational setting common to most of the school systems in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: separate elementary, middle, and secondary schools (Friedman, Harthshorne, & Algozzine, 2005).

To limit my bias as the researcher I attempted to collect data from three sources: interviews, a school climate survey, and principal reflections. In regard to interviews, I only interviewed individuals no longer directly reporting to me. Each interviewee was encouraged to expand on any answer and was provided multiple opportunities to move the interview in his or her own direction of interest.

**Purposive Sample**

The subject of this single case study was a single-campus school located in rural Pennsylvania. Pseudonyms have been assigned to the school and school district. This school entity was selected because it closely reflected the definition of a single-campus school in that Grades K through 12 were housed in a physically attached structure and were supervised by one lead administrator from 1986 through 2006 who was responsible for all aspects of governance of the entity. This was a small rural junior/senior high school of about 320 students physically connected to a K-6 elementary school housing approximately 330 students. Historic data collected from students in the classes of 2005 and 2011 were analyzed. Two groups of faculty were interviewed to determine their
perceptions of the climate in this single-campus school. The first group consisted of teachers who were products of this structure and who elected to return and teach in this setting. The second group of staff consisted of teachers who experienced some format of an elementary, middle, and high school separate campus structure and/or had teaching experience in another structure. Parents whose children had attended this K-12 school structure and community members with direct knowledge of the structure were interviewed.

**Data Collection**

**Climate Survey**

Data gleaned from portions of a school-climate survey completed in 2005 were used to assess students’ perceptions of their school environment. Questions 1 and 16-24 directly related to student perceptions of their school. Answers to these questions were analyzed for themes. This survey was developed by the School District of Palm Beach County Department of Safe Schools as a primary tool for school personnel interested in improving the climate of their school (Adler, 2007). The intent of this survey was to provide a starting point for discussion regarding students’ perceptions about their school climate. In this K-12 single-campus school, a team of teachers and an administrator attended a state-level Governor’s School on Single School Culture and afterward utilized this survey. It was selected for its ease of use, appropriate vocabulary, and short administration time. The survey, developed by the Palm Beach School District of Safe Schools, was administered in 2005 by the school guidance counselors to students in the classes of 2005 and 2011. Thematic conclusions were reported. Student identities were in no way referenced.
Observations

Written reflections by the former chief administrator of this K-12 single-campus school provided a unique perspective regarding the interwoven curriculum, shared staff, collaborative activities, and school culture.

Interviews

Teacher Interviews

Two distinct groups of teachers were interviewed. One group of teachers consisted of individuals who spent their school years from kindergarten through their senior year on this campus. The other group of teachers interviewed had attended some other school structure such as a separate elementary, middle, and secondary school. Teachers were interviewed by me in a one-on-one session on a voluntary basis. I developed a series of open-ended questions to utilize in interviews with staff and students. Permission to interview staff was obtained from the local governing Board of Education and the current principal. Staff-interview participants were not identified by name.

Graduate Interviews

I published an open invitation to graduates of this K-12 single-campus school to participate in interviews about their educational experiences. After a period of 2 weeks, volunteers were selected in the order in which they volunteered. A series of open-ended questions were used to gather information from these volunteers. Participants were not identified by name.
Parent Interviews

Parents whose children graduated from the case-study school were invited to share their reflections about their children’s educational experiences in this K-12 single-campus school. Parents were interviewed in the order in which they volunteered to participate. Parents were not identified by name.

Community Member Interviews

Community members who had direct knowledge of this K-12 single-campus school were invited to share their perceptions regarding the case-study school. Volunteers were interviewed in the order in which they volunteered. Community interview volunteers were not identified by name. I developed interview questions for the above referenced groups to identify and clarify participants’ perceptions regarding the climate of this K-12 school (Appendices A-D). Questions were structured to be open-ended in order to draw out related data according to the interest of the participants. The expression of beliefs, opinions, and feelings was encouraged.

Data Analysis

Data collected on the school-climate survey were analyzed for significant themes. Responses for questions 1 and 16-24 were identified by frequency of response. These data are presented in graphic form and common themes are identified. Comparisons and discrepancies were sought between perceptions of sixth-grade students and perceptions of graduates who answered the survey. Interviews completed by the staff were analyzed for themes as well as to support and/or refute conclusions gleaned from the student and graduate surveys. Reflections and responses from parents and community members were
also analyzed for significant commonalities with the data from other interviewed groups and the student surveys. Finally, direct reflections of my tenure as principal of this K-12 single-campus school were meshed to complete the picture.

Validity and Reliability

Patten (2004) described three types of validity that are critical in qualitative research. These are (a) descriptive validity, the ability to accurately report what has happened, (b) interpretative validity, the ability to report the meaning that participants assign to events, and (c) theoretical validity, the ability of the researcher to draw accurate generalizations from the data collected. In addition, I utilized the process of triangulation to add to the validity of the study.

Two forms of triangulation were used: methods triangulation (Eisner, 1998) and data triangulation (Gay & Airasian, 2003). The first form of triangulation, methods triangulation, refers to using several different methods to obtain data. In this study data were collected from a survey on school climate, interviews of two groups of teachers, parents, and community members, and reflections of the prior building principal. The second form of triangulation, data triangulation, was used in the interviewing of participants. The same method of investigation, the interview, was used with four different groups of participants: teachers, graduates, parents, and community members.

Gay and Airasian (2003) list the following set of 10 criteria that they feel reflect good qualitative research.

Researchers take a holistic stance.
Researchers avoid making premature decisions or assumptions about the study.
Methods focus on person-to-person interactions.
Researchers spend a good deal of time in the research setting.
Researchers gather data directly from participants. Researchers remain open to alternative explanations of phenomena. Researchers admit to and describe their biases and preferences. Phenomena are described and explained from the viewpoint of, and in the voice of, the participants. Researchers are responsible for obtaining participants’ informed consent and ensuring their ethical treatment throughout the study. The research focus is on discovery and understanding, rather than on confirmation of existing theory. (p. 189)

Several of these characteristics directly affect the reliability of the research study. Key is the idea that there must be a description of the role of the researcher and his or her biases relating to the research topic. In the introduction to this study, I explained my role as the long-standing principal of this case-study single-campus school. As such, I have a unique perspective regarding the K-12 learning threads. The developmentally designed field-trip curriculum spanning the 13 grades is an example of a K-12 learning thread. I hired two-thirds of the staff and they reflected my philosophy of education and child advocacy. This information is shared here to help the reader understand the vested interest of the researcher. Gay and Airasian (2003) further suggest that the researcher spend significant time in the actual research setting. In this case, I was the sole principal for 15 years during the time that Pennsburg operated as a single-campus school.

Finally, research data need to be derived directly from the participants. All of the subjects involved in this study were students in this school entity, or were employed as teachers in this structure, or were parents or involved members of the community. Data collected from these groups of participants have provided a well-rounded, complete picture of overall perceptions regarding the school climate of this single-campus school.
Generalizability

Eisner (1998) suggests that we can generalize as part of the process of learning, that is, examine specific learning skills and transfer that learning to other situations. He also indicates that researchers can develop images that symbolically describe an entity that may then be used as a standard to examine other such entities. In my research study, I have attempted to develop an image of what a K-12 single-campus school looks like.

Three key themes form the image of a K-12 single-campus school. They include cross-grade activities that foster strong role models, an effective peer mentoring program that benefited all participants, and exceptional, long-lasting, personal relationships between the students and teachers at Pennsburg. As described in the problem statement, many school districts are struggling to help their students reach the goals of the No Child Left Behind Legislation. The image of a K-12 school as described in this research may be useful to Boards of Education or other policy makers as they plan instructional school designs over the next decades.

Eisner (1998) also indicates that skills and ideas may be generalized. In a K-12 single-campus school faculty develops, for example, the skill is to provide long-term nurturing of the child in both academic and social arenas. This idea of long-term nurturing becomes an expectation that may be generalized to K-12 single-campus schools. This type of idea allows for predictions of like behavior in similar K-12 organizations. This may not be true of all like entities, warns Eisner (1998), but allows for predictions of likelihood. So, like a “standardized image,” an “idea” can be seen as a prototype.
Ethics: An Institutional Review Board

An IRB application was completed, submitted, and approved. Interviews were conducted and analyzed. Data were transcribed into written form and analyzed for themes.

Themes identified from the survey, interviews, and principal reflections were analyzed for commonality. Conclusions drawn from these general themes which describe the school climate are presented in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

The school and school district have been given pseudonyms. None of the persons interviewed were identified by name. Data in the form of quotations were credited to either gender randomly. For example, a female participant’s direct quote might begin: He stated that, “There were strong student/teacher relationships.” The random use of he/she helped to protect the identity of the speaker.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

To fully understand the context of the themes that have emerged from the data in case study as a form of research, it becomes necessary to provide a description of the entity being examined. The historical background, the culture of the community, the geographical setting, and socioeconomic conditions all interact and impact on the individuals involved in the case study.

From an historical perspective, this K-12 single-campus school, the Pennsburg School, became an administrative entity in 1986. One on-site administrator was responsible for the governance of all staff and students from Kindergarten through Grade 12. All classrooms were contained within a one-block area and for most of that 20-year span were physically connected. Two administrators served as principal during the school’s existence as a K-12 unit; one for 5 years and the second for 15 years. It remained a K-12 single-campus school through the spring of 2005.

Initially the Pennsburg schools were two administrative units housed in two separate buildings, a K-6 elementary and a separate 7-12 junior/senior high school. During the early years, the 1930s to 1953, elementary students attended several small community elementary schools. In 1954 a new elementary school was constructed next to the older junior/senior high school. The current high school was built to replace a junior/senior high school that burned in the mid-1930s.
A myriad of administrative/supervisory structures was attempted over the years. Initially, there was one principal at the junior/senior high school and a separate elementary principal. As financial resources waned, so did administrative support. At one point, one principal handled all three elementary schools in the new school district as the school board attempted to save money. As economic times improved, the position of elementary principal at Pennsburg was reinstated. The end of the 1985 school year found both the elementary and high-school buildings without administrators. A veteran high-school teacher was then named as the principal of the Pennsburg schools. During his tenure, the buildings were physically connected and a central office was built that facilitated the management of both buildings by one principal more effectively. When this gentleman retired, a second K-12 principal was installed as the sole administrator of this K-12 complex and a district-operated alternative educational setting. After 7 years, a part-time assistant principal was added. This administrative structure endured for another 8 years.

The Pennsburg unit was one component of a seven-school-building district. Each of the three communities within the district maintained a junior/senior high school and a K-6 elementary. Only the Pennsburg schools were governed as one unit, although in one of the other communities the same principal administered both the elementary and junior/senior high schools. In the Pennsburg community there was also an alternative education program that was part of the responsibility of the Pennsburg principal. Northwoods School District, which encompassed Pennsburg, was formed in 1964, combining several smaller rural school districts.
Geographically, the Northwoods School District is located in one of the counties along the northern border of the state of Pennsylvania. Collectively these counties are usually called the “northern tier.” The two counties in which the Northwoods District is located are very rural and contain many opportunities for outdoor recreational activities. Most natives are avid hunters and virtually close the counties during the first days of deer season each fall. The Northwoods schools, like many of Pennsylvania’s rural schools, close their doors to students during “buck” and “doe” days each year. Lumbering and tourism are major industries in the county. A number of multigenerational dairy farms are still operational. Numerous weekend cottages and hunting/fishing camps dot the landscape. Real estate in the area surrounding Pennsburg is growing in value as folks from urban areas relocate their families to small communities with small-town American values. In addition, speculation regarding possible large natural gas fields has driven up prices of land.

A major north/south interstate highway was completed within the last few years. It runs through the center of the school district. South and central Pennsylvania along with southern New York are now linked to the area. Two small cities, one north and one south of the district, are about 35 minutes away and have provided residents the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of metropolitan areas and then scoot back to a pristine rural setting. The highway has brought a number of chain businesses to the community, giving a small economic boost in terms of some new jobs. At the same time, the new highway has made it possible for people from New Jersey, Philadelphia, and southern Pennsylvania to move into the area and maintain family ties back home.
Local residents refer to these new residents as “flatlanders.” Often these folks who have moved from urban areas make demands on their new communities for services that were available in their previous communities. They do not understand the local culture, which allows neighbors to hunt on each other’s property without asking for permission. Frequently, a local walks to a favorite hunting spot only to find the area posted forbidding trespassing. Many locals view these newcomers as interferences in their way of life.

The three communities of the school district lie along a north/south corridor approximately 10 miles apart with Pennsburg in the center. The northern community is a small college town. It is the most diverse of the communities from an ethnic perspective. Children of university personnel attend the local schools. Expectations of these parents sometimes vary substantially from expectations of other parents in the school district. These expectations translate into requests for a more varied curriculum, state-of-the-art technology, and alternative programming.

On the other hand, district schools in the northernmost community, the college town of the Northwoods School District, have many opportunities to partner with the local university. Student teachers, students participating in Observation and Participation, and college students involved in tutoring programs find their way into those schools. Every other year the university sponsors a summer reading camp and uses the elementary school in that community as its site. Often there are special cultural presentations sponsored by the university for local children. Since children from this community can easily walk to the university, the activities are readily accessible. Children in that elementary school reap the benefit of those types of opportunities. The
same is true for students who want to take advantage of college classes while still in high school. Due to the proximity of the university, students from that community are able to take advantage of that opportunity whereas students in the other high schools in the district are just too far away.

The southernmost community encompasses thousands of acres of farmland and forest. Many of the farms have been in the same families for multiple generations. This is the most conservative of the communities. Parents of students who attend the elementary and junior/senior high school in this section of the district are actively involved in their children’s educations. They have a strong parent-support group that raises funds to supplement activities for their children. As a rule of thumb, parents in this community strongly support their schools and their teachers. Many parent expectations reflect strong core values reminiscent of the 1950s and 1960s: a belief in the value of the family, of small community-based churches, and the community schools. Students are sent to school with the expectation that they will receive a solid education in academics in a well-structured/disciplined environment. Pennsburg is geographically located in the middle of the district, between the two “extremes.”

Although Pennsburg is only 10 miles distant from its sister communities, it has a culture all its own. Many of the early settlers to the region were Irish and Polish immigrants. They provided the labor to mine the rich veins of bituminous coal that laced the region. They brought with them solid family units and a strong Catholic faith. Eventually, the town would boast an Irish Catholic Church and a Polish Catholic Church. As the mines faded in importance, a foundry was established within the borders of the town. It made specialty pipe fittings and became the major community employer,
remaining so today. Of the three communities, this is the blue-collar town. The success of the foundry serves as a barometer for the economic health of the community.

The Pennsburg campus lists more than 60% of its students on the federally funded free and reduced lunch program, nearly twice the percentage of students in each of the other two communities within the school district. Many of the students come from homes that are managed by a single parent. About 15% of the children live in extended family situations, where one or both grandparents are present and active in childrearing. Occasionally, adult siblings or friends live together and raise their children in one household. While most of these parents or caretakers want their children to succeed in the school setting, few of them have achieved advanced degrees or professional standing. Often this translates into home settings where education is not a priority, or, even if it is, caretakers sometimes do not have the educational backgrounds to be able to support their children effectively. Frequently, calls home regarding poor academic performance receive a response similar to this: “If he’s passing, that’s all that matters.” All too often, high academic expectations of teachers are not reflected at home.

The Pennsburg school complex lies in the center of the town. The original portion of the school, which now houses the junior/senior high school, was built during the mid-1930s under Roosevelt’s New Deal. It is a wood-frame, two-story building cased in red brick. One can imagine that it must have been an amazing piece of architecture when first completed. The elementary section of the school, completed in 1954, was constructed as the result of the jointure of several small school districts. Both buildings received some physical updates in 1990. At that time they were physically joined together to accommodate the single administrator who managed the complex. The office for each
section of the building was located in the center of the complex where the buildings were joined as one. In the late 1990s, a second renovation added a new music suite, a distance learning room, an auditorium, computer labs, and several new elementary classrooms.

There are a number of shared areas within the complex. The art room and vocal music room each staffed by one teacher handle all the elementary music, mandated junior high music and art classes, and elective music and art classes for the high school. There is one gymnasium, affectionately referred to as “The Pit.” During high-profile basketball games, all of the bleachers on both sides of the gym and bleachers on the stage rock with the enthusiasm of hundreds of supporters. All Grade 7 through Grade 12 Physical Education classes and overflow elementary Physical Education classes are housed there. Prior to the completion of the new auditorium, both sixth grade and senior graduations occurred there. All food for student breakfasts and lunches is cooked in one kitchen. Food is then transported to the elementary to a warm-up kitchen. Outdoor fields are used by students at all ages. The instrumental music room handles instrumental music classes from Grades 4 through 12.

An auditorium was constructed during the 1990 renovation. This addition provided a place to showcase student performances from both elementary and secondary-age students. Classroom teachers sign up to use the space for special class presentations. It houses sixth-grade graduations and senior high National Honor Society inductions. It also provides a meeting hall for community interest groups who need a large area for public forums.

The most interesting shared space is the office complex. Built to accommodate one administrator, it is located where the buildings were joined together. During the K-
12 single-campus school era, it housed side-by-side offices for the building-level secretaries, the principal’s office, and a conference room. This common area gave birth to the working concept of the K-12 school. Teachers and students from all levels interacted there. Positive relationships were fostered there. Scraps of collaboration between teachers ignited numerous joint activities. Elementary teachers and coaches engaged high-school students and queried them about their progress. A wealth of information about programming and students was exchanged in a matter of minutes. Casual conversation created a thorough understanding of the make-up of courses and activities, keeping everyone in the knowledge loop. Students at all levels had frequent opportunities to engage with teachers they had previously had or with teachers they would later have. This informal contact helped to grow faculty/student relationships and maintained those relationships as well.

The physical structure of Pennsburg encompasses one full block and actually eliminated a section of a street when the elementary building was constructed. There is a half acre of playing field in addition to the elementary playground. On the high-school side, the building stretches nearly to the sidewalks. Today, both sections of the complex are in serious need of major structural upgrades. Mechanical systems will no longer support the technological needs. The roofs need to be replaced over several sections of the complex. Windows and doors are outdated, as is the security system. The entire complex is now the focus of a feasibility study to determine the future of the structure.

Results of the Four Interview Groups

I interviewed the following four groups:
1. Teachers in the K-12 single-campus school who graduated from this structure and other individuals who graduated from the K-12 single-campus school

2. Teachers in the K-12 who did not attend this structure

3. Parents of students who attended the Pennsburg K-12 structure

4. Community members who had firsthand knowledge of the Pennsburg K-12 single-campus school.

Samples of the survey questions for each of the four groups are contained in Appendices A-D. In addition, I was the principal who served as head administrator of this K-12 single campus school for 15 of the 20 years that it existed as a single administrative unit. As a former member of this educational entity, I added to the data collected from the interviews. Emergent themes from each of these groups are presented in this chapter. Themes that recur in each group are also presented, along with input from the building administrator. Artifacts in the form of programs and collaborative activities are also added to the data pool. Additionally, results of a student school climate survey conducted in 2005 are blended into the fabric of the research results.

All interviewees were volunteers who either responded to a request in a local school newsletter, school email, or heard about the study by word of mouth and volunteered to be included. The one common thread, and only criteria for participation, was that the interviewee had firsthand knowledge of the K-12 school entity when it functioned as one administrative unit.

The age range of the interviewees was low 20s through mid-70s. There was at least one individual representing each age group: 20s, 30s, 40s, and so on. About 70% of the group had at least one advanced degree beyond the high-school level. Several
individuals perform manual labor or hold other types of positions in the workforce. Several of the individuals were retired. Some of the interviewees were eligible to participate based on knowledge of the case-study school for multiple reasons. For example, a teacher interviewed might also have been a parent of students who attended the school. One individual taught in the school, has grandchildren who attended there, and served several terms on the local school board. In short, the persons interviewed regarding their perceptions of the case study, Pennsburg School, had a variety of intimate experiences with the school entity ranging over decades. Following is an examination of the themes that emerged from each of the four groups and then core themes that evolved from the data.

The strategy I employed in reporting this research data was to provide the reader with a rich and deep cross section of the fabric of each of the four groups, the principal’s reflections, and the school climate survey. My intent was to have the reader follow the threads I followed and deduce those themes that I synthesized from data collected.

**Graduates of Pennsburg**

Respondents’ Perceptions Regarding School Climate

The first group interviewed was graduates who attended Pennsburg for their K-12 education. Several participants returned to teach at Pennsburg. Other responding graduates of Pennsburg who participated in this study chose careers outside of education.

I began by establishing the connection between each participant and his/her educational career at Pennsburg. All individuals in this group, with the exception of one, spent their entire school career at Pennsburg. The other interviewee came to Pennsburg for third grade after attending another local school for first and second grades.
To establish a baseline with this group, I asked participants to rank their overall education at Pennsburg on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest possible positive score. The lower the number, the more negative the overall educational experience was in the participant’s perspective. There were four 10s, two 9s, and one 6. Table 1 provides a graphic representation of participants’ perceptions regarding their overall educational experiences.

The individual who ranked his education as a 6 indicated a lack of cultural diversity at Pennsburg. He also felt that there were limitations in terms of elective opportunities. The individual indicated, however, that these comments do not necessarily reflect deficits caused by Pennsburg, but reflect the type of community where Pennsburg is located: rural and somewhat isolated and small.

Participants stated an overall positive outlook regarding their education. They believed that they had a good academic background that prepared them positively for college and other advanced educational opportunities. One interviewee stated, “There were no holes in my education.” Another said, “My position in this community and this school is due to my experience in this system.” Most of the group cited the competence of their teachers as the reason that their academic backgrounds were solid. One stated, “Overall, the quality of teaching was good.”

Another positive perception that was expressed was the academic and extracurricular experiences offered at Pennsburg. One respondent told of his opportunity to participate in environmental field experiences during a special partnership with a local university. Another graduate explained that opportunities for travel abroad though Culture Club were available for those who were interested. Students were able to earn
money over an extended period of years so that most students could access that type of opportunity. Opportunities to travel to State Student Council conventions as a representative were considered significant for a small school by another respondent.

Two other positive comments about their education at Pennsburg were addressed by each of the respondents. Each spoke of the close relationships between the staff and the pupils. Graduates indicated that their teachers were interested in them as people. One respondent stated, “As a student, it was easy to relate to the administration and teachers.” This sentiment was echoed by each of the interviewees.

The other comment that was universally expressed by the group was that peer relationships were strong among the student body. This was not isolated to grade levels, but was related as knowing the rest of the student body. One respondent indicated that this familiarity made transitioning from grade to grade a seamless flow. “There was never an awkward start to the year. It was just coming back to your school family,” this person stated. Table 1 provides a summary of the positive comments for rating their Pennsburg experience a 9 or 10.

Since the overall educational experience of this group of graduates was overwhelmingly positive, I attempted to ascertain the single most important characteristic of a positive school climate as perceived by this group. All seven of the members of this group stated that a strong relationship between the students and teachers was critical to a positive school climate. One respondent stated, “There needs to be a lot of respect between the teachers and the kids. There needs to be a level of trust.” This was described as “openness,” a willingness to listen and help with the issues of life, as well as
Table 1

Graduate Participants’ Reasons for Rating Their Pennsburg Experience Positively

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive responses</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced a strong academic background</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced quality teaching</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for extra-curricular opportunities</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for exceptional academic opportunities</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships between teachers and students</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional relationships among students at all levels</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

with academic concerns. Another interviewee indicated that “the staff needs to be caring in the way they handle kids.” Still another said that teachers need to be “energetic, ambitious, and positive” in their dealings with kids. Another said, “There should be lots of positive reinforcement from teachers and support from the teachers and the administration.” All of the respondents in this group felt that teachers needed to be friendly and caring. Knowing each student and having a personal connection to them was also cited as being critical to school climate. One of the respondents explained that the faculty should be easy to work with. This individual expanded the relationship beyond the teacher/student relationship to include positive relationships between the teachers and parents and the community at large. They also indicated that interrelationships among the faculty are critical, that the positive interactions among the faculty trickle down to the students.

Two of the respondents stressed a connection between the home and school (teachers) as being a critical factor in a positive school climate. One participant
suggested, “There should be a welcoming, an openness from the school.” This was defined by the participants as a willingness to be involved in school functions as a supporter of extra-curricular activities. Volunteering at the school as a classroom helper and participating in a parent support or booster group was also seen as being desirable. Being well-versed in school curriculum was also cited as important.

Several other characteristics of a positive school climate that were expressed included providing a variety of activities in which students could participate. One participant mentioned the many opportunities that students at Pennsburg had for meaningful field trips, such as excursions to New York City. An abundance of academic opportunities was also stressed by several respondents. Academic opportunities within the school curriculum were noted. In addition, several participants felt that a positive school climate should extend activities beyond the regular curriculum, such as partnership opportunities with local universities.

Two respondents felt that a strong sense of structure in terms of organization and procedures was critical. A third participant included a consistent discipline system as part of structure in a positive school climate. One explained that this structure should be universal across the grades and clear to all, including students, staff, and parents. This would involve procedures for leaving school early, how excuses were handled, administration of medications, and so on.

One of the respondents stressed that in a school with a positive climate there needs to be respect between students. She went on to explain that at Pennsburg there was very little bullying. “Not every student fit into every group at my school, but we didn’t isolate kids,” she stated. Table 2 presents a list of characteristics that respondents in
Group 1 identified as being critical factors in creating a positive school climate in any school.

Table 2

*Graduate Participants’ Perceptions of the Characteristics of a Positive School Climate*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of a positive school climate</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A strong relationship between students and teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A strong home/school connection</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic opportunities beyond the core curriculum</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A strong sense of structure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A consistent discipline system</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful interactions between students</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After each respondent developed a list of critical characteristics of a positive school climate, respondents were then asked to select from their list of characteristics of a positive school climate the one or two characteristics that were essential to student success. Six of the seven participants again stressed a strong relationship between the students and the teachers. Several expanded on their belief that the teacher is the most critical factor in a positive school climate. One stressed the ability of teachers to work one-on-one with students, and another focused on the need for students to be able to confide in their teachers, providing a safe haven for the students. This person indicated, “Teachers knowing all the kids personally is most important.”

The significance of the teacher as a role model was also stressed. Again one respondent focused on the ambition of the teacher. “They [the teachers] need to be able to encourage their kids to learn. They need to be able to work with all kids.” One
respondent summarized the ideal student/teacher relationship: “Good relationships add up to making a school climate that is safe. Then it’s ok for teachers and kids to take risks.”

The seventh participant strayed from her original focus on the teacher and discussed a sense of belonging as the most critical factor in a positive school climate. She related that so many former graduates come back to Pennsburg because “they want to touch base with a caring attitude. They feel welcome. When I meet people from other schools, they often have such bad memories compared to how I feel about my educational experiences.” This respondent did go on to explain that the great relationships between the students and the teachers fostered that sense of belonging they saw as being critical.

To summarize, this group overwhelmingly felt that strong relationships between the teachers and students of a school are the most critical factor in creating a positive school climate. This was expanded to a perception that teachers need to demonstrate caring behaviors, need to be involved on an individual level with students, and need to foster a supportive and welcoming attitude.

Did the Pennsburg graduates see a connection between the characteristics of a positive school they identified and the characteristics of the school climate at Pennsburg? All seven of the participants expressed strong positive sentiments regarding the student/teacher relationships that they experienced at Pennsburg. The following comments indicate the strength of this perception. “Our teachers were interested in us as people, and back then had time to spend with us.” “There was a lot of trust between faculty and students. Kids and teachers really got to know each other.” “The teachers were interested in helping all kids, no matter how hard it was.” They cited the fact that
there were always teachers at sporting events to encourage students. One participant’s perception summarized the group feeling this way, “Relationships with teachers were warm and comfortable. It was a happy place. All of the relationships were good.”

Comparing the ideal characteristics of a positive school and the actual perceptions of Pennsburg graduates yielded conflicting perceptions regarding the home-school connection. One of the respondents felt that there was a lack of parental involvement during the 7 through 12 years. This person expressed the belief that participation from parents fell off steadily at Pennsburg until the senior year, when interest was somewhat renewed. The other participants had different opinions.

Communication in all directions was perceived as very good by another participant. Another indicated that as a coach in Pennsburg, parent support is uncanny. He stated, “As a coach at this school, other coaches ask me how we get this kind of support.” This teacher/coach went on to discuss graduation ceremonies. He pointed out that there may be only 50 students in a graduating class, yet 700 or 800 people cram into a crowded, hot gymnasium to watch the ceremony.

The participants felt that everyone fit. Again, they stressed that there was a wonderful sense of belonging at Pennsburg. Everybody seemed to find a niche. Students were accepted, not isolated. One respondent mentioned how accepted a student of another race was in his class. Another talked about a student who transferred into Pennsburg because he was not accepted at one of the other district high schools. The student finished his last 2 years of high school at Pennsburg.
Respondents also indicated that the academic program at Pennsburg was rigorous. “Teachers insisted that we do our work and they [the teachers] provided extra help if we needed it.” Table 3 shows the most significant characteristics of a positive school climate named by participants and present at their school.

Table 3

*The Most Important Factors of a Positive School Climate Identified by Participants and Present at Pennsburg*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of a positive school climate</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A strong relationship between students and teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A strong home/school connection</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful interactions between students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>82.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents’ Perceptions Regarding Cross-Grade Co-operative Activities

Dialogue with the group of graduates led to discussions regarding cross-grade activities, that is, curricular events that were shared between elementary and high-school-age students. Each of the seven respondents spoke at length about the peer-mentoring program. High-school-age students who had gaps in their schedules and students belonging to a high-school group called peer tutors had opportunities to spend time with elementary students. Often this provided a meaningful way to complete an older students’ schedule. One participant said, “As a kindergarten student, I could hardly wait for our high-school buddy to come to read to us. It was exciting to have high-school mentors.” The same individual indicated that it was just as exciting to go to the elementary school to tutor when she was a high-school student.
Three of the participants surveyed indicated that this opportunity to tutor helped them to decide that they were interested in a career working with children. One of the respondents worked with a special-needs student on a daily basis. She indicated that “he really looked forward to my coming to help him every day and it made me feel good to be able to help him.” Another said, “I tutored from 10th through 12th grade. I loved working with the little kids. They all looked up to us.”

The theme of experiencing and being a good role model was stressed by six of the seven respondents. They addressed the positive benefits for the younger students having someone to identify with as well as the opportunity for the older students to become responsible citizens. Another respondent said, “The older kids were always so good with the younger ones, even some of the high-school kids that you would never expect to be good at that.” Student athletes were especially effective mentors. One of the respondents related that the elementary kids looked up to their athlete mentors. They wrote their names on their tee-shirts. The older kids were idolized by the younger ones.

The Block Party was named as a favorite activity that crossed over grade levels. This was described as a giant fund-raising activity sponsored by the high-school clubs and organizations. The event occurred at the beginning of the Homecoming Weekend. Booths and game activities were set up on White Pine Park. White Pine Park is a beautiful in-town park rented by the school district for athletic events within walking distance of the school. Giant 200-year-old white pines give the park an aura of timelessness.

Under the shade of these pines, primary students are coached and assisted by older students to win small prizes and treats. By the afternoon, the entire school is in
attendance and crowds the bleachers to watch the pep rally. At the conclusion of the pep rally, all of the students walk in a line across the entire park, picking up trash before walking back to the school for dismissal. One of the respondents said, “It was so neat to watch the older kids helping the little ones win a goldfish or playing other games with them. We really looked forward to this activity every year.”

Another co-operative activity noted was the high-school Parenting Class. Primary students provided clients for the older students to work with. One participant indicated that they had to develop lessons for each session with the primary students. Snacks were selected and prepared. She said, “If you walked into one of our classes you could see some pretty tough varsity football players sitting on the floor holding a little kid and reading to them.”

Culture and Art Clubs also involved students from multiple grade levels. Often these students also served as tutors in the elementary classes. One respondent indicated that, “since we had the same art teacher, a lot of our activities involved kids at varying grade levels. Sometimes, because the school was smaller, there would be a couple of kids doing an independent art class during an elementary class. There was a lot of interaction between all of us.”

Two of the participants discussed the Saturday morning basketball programs as an activity that crossed traditional grade lines. On Saturday mornings, varsity basketball players coached elementary students in the basics of basketball. There were sessions for both boys and girls. One respondent said, “I experienced this program as an elementary student, then as a high-school mentor, and now as a supervising coach. The older kids are great role models.” The other participant stressed the importance of this type of
activity in an era when there are so many absentee fathers. “This is a chance for these kids to see a young adult in a positive way and get some personal attention that they are not getting at home.”

Mentors on field trips were another crossover activity mentioned by two of the respondents. One discussed serving for several years as a Ski Club helper from the high school. “I got to go on elementary nighttime ski trips for most of my high-school years. I helped the kids put on boots and taught a lot of kids to ski.” This same respondent also accompanied the elementary fifth- and sixth-grade students on their “Learn to Ski” day trips. He remembered how much he had enjoyed older students being on trips with his classes in the elementary and wanted to do that for other kids.

Finally, one of the respondents talked about having classes like band in the high-school side of the building, since one music teacher taught all the band classes 4-12. This individual said that it became familiar, walking the halls with the older kids. She went on to relate how easy her transition to seventh grade was. The older kids took the sixth-grade students to the high school for Move-up Day. “They told us stories about our teachers to be. It helped dispel rumors and was great to hear their stories. This made our transition so easy.”

In discussions regarding activities that crossed over grade lines, each of the participants was eager to share some of his or her personal history about their school experiences at Pennsburg. Each valued these types of opportunities, especially the chance to tutor and their experiences having a tutor during some of their elementary activities. Being or experiencing a strong positive role model was considered a real asset to students and the school.
Respondents’ Perceptions Regarding the School Spirit at Pennsburg

Positive role models at Pennsburg were considered a source and outcome of the positive school spirit at this K-12 complex. Responses from all seven participants in this group were strong positive comments about the spirit of Pennsburg. One participant indicated that “the school would say it was family oriented.” This individual discussed the close links between all the members of the school community. This person used the term “cross-generational” explaining, “Teachers had your parents, or an aunt or uncle, or at least an older brother or sister.” There was a comfort level in this. One of the other respondents echoed these feelings. This person said that the kids at Pennsburg were happy and content, adding that “even the kids who were not especially academic were always glad to be there.” This respondent also indicated that teachers were always accessible for all our needs. This statement was expanded to mean that social and personal needs were important to teachers along with academic needs of students.

Another respondent indicated that the spirit of the school would be positive. This person stressed, “Everyone watched out for everyone else. It was very supportive.” Again this person stressed the importance of the teachers at Pennsburg. This person felt that the teachers were almost always positive. This person added that there was always excitement surrounding the sports programs and the field trips that were available.

One participant added to the theme of the first three respondents, saying that the spirit of the school would say, “I am home. It was just like a good family, everybody took care of everybody else.” The role of the teacher was again stressed in that the teachers knew who needed extra help and made sure that they were taken care of. This person added, “Even the cafeteria ladies knew all the kids by name.” This respondent
also related that there were always kids at the school. “Some of the kids never wanted to leave.”

Another member of this group in responding to the question said, “If you cut me open I’ll bleed blue, the school color. We still talk about how great school was for us.” He said that the pride of the school would shine.

The next participant also said that the school spirit would reflect pride. He talked about coaching a winning basketball team at Pennsburg that competed at the state level. “I got calls of support from everywhere, even Afghanistan from former students who were following our team. Former students from all over came to see us play.” They stressed the involvement of the community and that the school was the hub of the community almost as if there was no distinction between the school and the community.

The last participant in this group also stressed the tightness of the community as a reflection of the school spirit. “The spirit of our school would say it was proud of its kids. Our kids go far. The academics are challenging.” This respondent said that the small size of the school has an impact on the school spirit, but the fact that everyone is encouraged to have an active part is a major factor. “They all feel that they belong.”

Participant responses regarding the spirit that they felt Pennsburg School reflected about itself are the following:

1. We are family orientated.
2. Everyone belongs here.
3. There are cross-generational links.
4. There is pride in our students.
5. We are supportive.
Participant comments suggesting that there are strong cross-generational links and that if they were to be cut open they would “bleed blue,” one of the school colors, give an indication to the strength of positive feelings of these former graduates about Pennsburg. They strongly stress the support of teachers and the community. There was a perception from several respondents that there was no seam between the school community and the community-at-large.

Respondents’ Perceptions Regarding the K-12 Organizational Structure

Each of the members of the group of graduates was asked to list three positive and three negative aspects of Pennsburg. Each respondent was able to readily name three positives. Only one respondent was able to name two negatives. Four of the respondents did not name one negative. The positive attributes of Pennsburg as perceived by the participants of Group 1 are the following:

1. A strong tutoring/mentoring program across grade levels
2. Frequent opportunities to intermix across grade levels
3. One administrator Grades K-12
4. A safe and comfortable environment
5. Exceptional school spirit
6. Caring and supportive teachers
7. Caring and supportive community
8. High-quality teachers
9. Ease of flow across grade levels in every aspect
10. Ability of teachers and students to maintain high-quality relationships throughout a student’s career and beyond.
Several of the participants spoke again of the many opportunities to intermix students in the formal tutoring program and during special projects. The bond with older tutors was seen as an advantage to all parties. One respondent spoke of the excitement her daughter expressed when one of the high-school football players did his senior project in her classroom. “The boy demonstrated some of the instruments that he played. He was really good. My daughter started to play a second instrument.” Having mentors who were high-school athletes was seen as a special bonus. This type of interaction was credited as the reason so many of the students participated in athletics and other activities at an early age. The older students were seen as motivating the younger ones. Activities like Rocket Day and Block Party were revisited as learning opportunities outside of the classroom that helped younger children to learn social skills in a risk-free environment.

The safety and comfort of students were addressed as major factors. One participant stated that, “I used to walk my little brother to and from class every day. This was comfortable and safe for him.” This was expanded to the transition between sixth and seventh grades. It was explained that since there were so many opportunities for students to be in the high-school area, there was a familiarity with that setting long before a student reached the age of a seventh-grader. Several respondents spoke of this transition as being seamless.

The quality of the teaching staff was seen as a positive. Several of the respondents stressed the academic strength of the staff. One spoke of a history teacher who addressed diversity for a student population that was rural and isolated. The participant indicated that this opportunity would not have existed without that type of teacher. Another talked of the art teacher who took the Art and Culture Clubs to a
residence for the elderly each year at Christmas. “We made presents and took them to the older folks. Looking back this was a great way to teach solid values to kids. We didn’t just get a good academic education; we had opportunities to learn to be good citizens.” One participant went so far as to say, “Teachers had an almost parental bond with us. I remember a teacher correcting my grammar when I was talking to another teacher, just like a parent might do.”

Proximity, the connection of the physical plant, encouraged interaction at multiple levels. One graduate who taught in the elementary school and coached in the high school spoke of the ease of keeping tabs on his players. There was an easy flow of students between the elementary and high-school sides. “I was able to find a good time and tutor some of my athletes to make sure they were making the academic grade. All of our coaches want our students to be strong academically.” The respondent went on to say that, “We were always accessible to the kids for any kinds of problems they might have.”

One of the graduates who returned to teach at Pennsburg spoke of the ease of communicating and collaborating between the grades. “As the students move from grade to grade there is always someone who can shed light on the student’s learning style. What works and what doesn’t.” This opportunity to share easily with colleagues under the same roof was seen as a bonus for both students and teachers.

Having one administrator for Grades K through 12 was also perceived as a positive. One respondent said, “As a kid I knew what was expected as I moved from the elementary section. I already had a good relationship with the principal and knew it would continue. There was continuity because of this.” The participant went on to say, “Later as a parent, my friends and I knew that there was one contact at the school who
could answer questions about any concerns across the grades. This made communication with the school easy.” Another participant added that “a negative now is having two administrations and separating the K-12. It breaks up the continuity of everything.”

In this chapter, the number of positive responses outweighs the negative responses. One of the factors contributing to this situation might be explained in light of Thorndike’s work with the Halo Effect (Thorndike, 1920). Thorndike developed the theory that an overall impression of a condition or trait is sometimes generalized to the whole entity. Since participants for this research were accepted on a volunteer basis, it is possible that the individuals responding may have had positive beliefs about their alma mater, the school where they taught, or their local school community. This may account for the few negative responses. One respondent indicated, “I am partial to the way it was, because it was so good for me. I would not change anything.” The balance to this condition lies in the fact that graduates interviewed include top-notch students and weak academic students, those very successful in Pennsburg, and some not so successful. There was a significant age range of participants from early 20s through the 70s. Finally, occupations include blue collar workers, business persons, and professionals.

The negative aspects of Pennsburg as perceived by the participants are listed below:

1. Shortage of space
2. Lack of funding
3. Difficult for the school to compete in some girls’ sports.

A shortage of space was named by two of the respondents as being a problem during their tenure at Pennsburg. One of the individuals indicated that during her junior year, the
1990-91 addition was completed and that as a result some of the space issue was resolved. Both respondents pointed out that this was not the fault of the school, but was linked to funding sources. Another respondent named funding and lack of resources as a major problem. This respondent also made a point of stressing that this was not the fault of the school, but inadequate legislation that neglects small rural schools. The other individual to list a negative indicated that due to the smallness of the school it was sometimes hard for girls’ sports to be competitive with the larger schools in our league. She went on to say that she had participated on a volleyball team that secured a district championship.

It is noteworthy that while this group of graduates eagerly responded to the positive aspects of their school, most did not identify negative aspects. Those who identified issues hastened to point out that these aspects were largely out of the control of the school.

If the graduates were so strong in their affirmation about the positive environment at Pennsburg, what would they change about their school? Two of the respondents indicated that there was nothing they would change at Pennsburg. One stated that “I am partial to the way it was because it was so good for me. I would not change anything.” Three other participants said that they would have liked to have had more varied academic opportunities. They defined this need as having more elective courses. One of them indicated that after the schedule was changed to a block format, there were more electives offered and more opportunities to fit those electives into student schedules. Both respondents felt that this lack of elective offerings was due to the smaller size of Pennsburg. None of the individuals felt that this caused a significant deficit in their
educations. They pointed out that positive relationships with teachers and their peers in a small school more than made up for a lack of elective courses.

One respondent indicated that she would change the lack of emphasis on girls’ sports. She felt that boys’ athletics were supported more strongly in the school and the community. She was not able to pinpoint a cause for this belief, however, but saw it as something she would change about Pennsburg.

The last participant in this group suggested that she would change the ability of staff to recognize specific learning disabilities. This respondent felt that the model of identification and intervention in use today is a more refined model than the one that existed during her tenure at Pennsburg. She also indicated that this may be a function of a lack of resources. She noted that there are more specialists in the school now than when she attended.

The strength of commitment to the K-12 organizational structure by members of the graduate group can be gauged by their comments in support of that structure. Five of the respondents said yes immediately that they would support the K-12 structure and the other two said absolutely. Here are some of their reasons. “Absolutely! I think the K-12 was a more family-oriented system. It was always safe and secure for everyone.”

Another stated, “Yes, I would support it. I am so familiar with the success it brings. Working under one administration K-12 was the best.” This individual spoke of the flow of curriculum, procedures, and supports. This was followed by, “The K-12 cannot be outweighed for its success.”

One respondent spoke of the physical link of the buildings. “The buildings being linked provided lots of opportunities to do things across the grades. You can still group
kids for age-level-appropriate things.” They stated that the tutoring program provided such great mentors for the younger children and that this system was functional because the complex was physically joined. Another participant added to this idea, stating, “Going to basically one school eliminated the stress of changing schools at different levels.”

The final respondent in this group would support the K-12 structure based on the positive relationships fostered by that structure. This person stated, “The K-12 structure fosters family relationships. Kids don’t get isolated. That is key in this bullying age, especially with the breakdown of the family.” For this participant, the interaction between the older and younger students was seen as a strong reason to support the K-12 structure. “There was such good role modeling,” this person added. Links between families, students, and grade levels at school were seen to be positive. “I think that positive feeling caused kids not to want to harm each other.” Table 4 portrays the intense level of commitment to the K-12 structure by the participants.

Table 4

*Pennsburg Graduates’ Level of Support for a K-12 Structure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would support a K-12 structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would not support a K-12 Structure</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 lists the reasons the respondents supplied for supporting the K-12 structure. It should be noted that several of the reasons listed here in support of the K-12 structure are also found in Table 2.

Table 5  
*Participants’ Reasons for Supporting a K-12 Structure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Family oriented</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed success of the structure</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe and comfortable environment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of transition from grade to grade</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency of one administrator K-12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another strong indication of the intense support of the members of this group in favor of the K-12 organizational structure lies in their willingness or interest in sending their own children to a K-12 school. All seven of the participants in this group of Pennsburg graduates stated that they would send their children to this type of a school structure. Reasons participants would opt to send their children to a K-12 school are listed below:

1. Solid support system from community and teachers
2. Consistent disciplinary philosophy from K to 12
3. A sense of belonging.

The following comments from participants provide the reader a sense of the strength of the commitment of these graduates to Pennsburg. “I liked school here. I felt
that I belonged and that everyone cared about me. There were no cliques, so no one was really ever left out. I had to move to another school for a half year in Jr. High. I was so scared. I was so happy when I could come back here. It really is like a family here.”

Another stated, “I bought a home here. I am here for life and I want my children to attend here.” Finally, one respondent said, “Absolutely, this system shelters kids. Kids are protected, safe. The continuity of administration was a real plus.”

As with each of the groups, respondents were encouraged to express any beliefs, feelings, or assessments regarding the K-12 structure at Pennsburg, their alma mater. Several respondents reinforced their previous positions. They indicated that relationships with teachers were great. It was stressed that this held true for long-term relationships due to the physical structure connecting all parts of the complex and because so many activities crossed grade levels. Another respondent suggested that there were opportunities for everyone to be involved in all kinds of activities if they wanted to participate. Relationships were close, personal, and long-lasting. The safety issue of not having to leave the site was reiterated.

One respondent spoke of feeling empowered as a student. This person stated, “Everyone had opportunities to mold and shape the environment. You could do things that mattered for everyone even as a kid.” This person cited activities such as Student Council projects, volunteer activities such as going to a retirement home with homemade gifts at the holidays, and Pennies for the Panther. One of the students had suggested collecting pennies to pay to have one of the dead white pines at White Pine Park sculpted into a panther, the school mascot.
Field trips and the outdoor-education program at Pennsburg were great for a small school. One participant indicated, “Every year we had opportunities to travel to local points of interest.” These trips were described as short walking trips for some of the younger kids. “At every grade level there were also really nice trips that we looked forward to like Philadelphia, Washington, DC, and New York City.” The participant mentioned how helpful the community was to support the dozens of fundraisers that were held each year that made these trips possible.

“The outdoor activities at Pennsburg were fantastic.” The participant listed picnics, walks, and hikes to the Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania. “We did a low and high ropes course and camped out as a class.” They spoke of how these activities helped to build class spirit and also supported the academic program in the sciences and physical education. “I think that seeing our teachers in these kinds of settings helped to make them more approachable. We were able to share these activities with them.”

Finally, one of the respondents again stressed that the academics were rigorous, especially the research component and the focus on the senior research project.” The key additional perceptions participants wanted to share about their school are listed below:

1. Positive long-term relationships with teachers
2. Ample opportunities to be involved in a variety of activities
3. A safe/comfortable environment
4. A sense of empowerment as a student
5. An outstanding field trip program
6. Outdoor educational activities across the grades
7. A rigorous academic background.
Emergent Themes From Group 1

Interview Group 1 was composed exclusively of graduates of the case-study school, Pennsburg, a K-12 structure supervised by one administrator. Each of the respondents was asked a series of 13 questions. Analyzing the responses of the seven participants yields several core themes. The recurring themes that emerged from the Pennsburg graduate interviews are listed below:

1. Close personal relationships with teachers
2. A variety of extracurricular activities
3. Exceptional peer relationships
4. A rigorous academic program
5. Outstanding peer mentoring/mentor program
6. Enriching cross-grade activities.

Although each of these topics was discussed by participants in some manner, the three strongest themes are close personal relationships with teachers, exceptional peer relationships, and an outstanding peer mentoring/mentoring program. From a graduate’s perspective, the close personal relationships with teachers were critical to the success of any school. It was identified as the single most important factor in Table 3. Also, each participant named this characteristic as the most important factor of a positive school climate identified at their own school, Pennsburg. Participants viewed this relationship with their teachers as long term, beginning in Kindergarten and lasting through the senior year and beyond. They felt that their teachers were interested in them as individuals, that they were receptive and willing to support them with academic issues, growth, and development issues, and were generally responsive to their needs.
Supportive and accepting peers were discussed by each of the candidates. Peers were identified as students in the school, not just classmates or age-mates. Participants spoke of everyone having a niche, a place where he or she fit in. Students were not isolated, but rather were respected for who they were, including their idiosyncrasies. There were no groups or cliques that excluded other students. All the respondents expressed the belief that there was a general sense of belonging. They cited specific instances where students who had had major issues at other schools came to Pennsburg and found a “school home.”

The third recurring theme was that Pennsburg fostered an outstanding peer tutoring/mentoring program. Each of the participants related stories of experiencing the positive benefits of an older student tutoring/mentoring them during their elementary years. Each spoke of the opportunities for the older students to gain responsibility as they served as helpers in the elementary grades. Stories relating the benefits for learning-disabled students were reported. Favorite experiences with an older tutor on a field trip were shared. The consensus was that this program was mutually beneficial; everyone including the faculty benefited from this program. Most important was the strong role modeling provided by the older students for the younger ones.

These three themes were repeated over and over by all of the participants as they shared their impressions about their experiences at Pennsburg.

**Teachers Who Were Not Graduates of Pennsburg**

Respondents’ Perceptions Regarding School Climate and Their Schools

The second group to be interviewed was teachers who taught in the Pennsburg School when it operated as a K-12 single-campus school but who received their
educations in other school systems. Seven respondents in this category volunteered to participate in this study. This group was selected to provide an alternate perception to the group of Pennsburg graduates who might be expected to be loyal to their alma mater. The age range of this group was mid-20s through mid-50s. Teaching experience fluctuated from 4 years to 24 years in public education. Several of the participants had teaching experience in multiple school districts.

I first verified that members of this group had long-term experience with educational structures other than the K-12 single-campus school. Of the seven respondents, there were seven distinct organizational structures (Table 6). One of the respondents changed school districts and experienced two of the structures listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Organizational Structures of School Systems Attended by Non-graduate Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure 1</th>
<th>Structure 2</th>
<th>Structure 3</th>
<th>Structure 4</th>
<th>Structure 5</th>
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<td>6, 7</td>
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<td>9-12</td>
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<td>8, 9</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these structures, with the exception of the last two, requires students to transition to at least two other school settings. One of the structures requires students to transition to three other educational settings beyond their elementary school. This group
of respondents did provide a diversity of experience with school organizational structures different from the K-12.

Respondents rated their overall school experiences from 6 to 10. One individual rated his elementary experience as a 9, junior high as an 8, and high school as a 6. Those individuals who rated their experience as a 9 or 10 indicated that their schools pushed academics and that they felt well prepared for any additional schooling or the workforce.

None of these individuals in this group discussed positive relationships with their teachers; however, three respondents indicated that there were no strong bonds between them and their teachers. One individual indicated that there was a serious disconnect between the administration at all levels in his school district. “On the surface the climate seemed open and friendly, but because of the disconnect there was an underlying fear.”

This group developed a longer list of ideal characteristics of a positive school climate than the first group interviewed. The characteristics identified by this group are listed below, with one respondent for each of the listed characteristics. Although many of the same characteristics were identified by each group, the non-graduate group did not identify any consensus characteristics as did the first group.

1. Consistent discipline policy
2. Strong academic teachers
3. A good organization with a vision
4. No elitist groups
5. A feeling of safety and comfort
6. A sense of belonging
7. Consistent procedures expressed by teachers and the administration
8. A holistic, broad-based education
9. A collaborative faculty
10. Everyone knows everyone
11. Good parent connections.

When asked to identify the most significant characteristics of a positive school climate, non-graduates of Pennsburg were not able to reach consensus as to the most critical factors that create a positive school climate. One respondent spoke at length about the importance of having a sense of belonging to the institution, a team, or a class. She said, “This is what gives kids the motivation to want to come to school. Kids need to enjoy something at school—they will give you more.” She expressed the concern that our current solitary push to reach AYP scores in reading and math is negatively affecting a well-balanced education. She indicated that, “We’re going to lose them. We push them to learn so much ‘stuff’ that they really don’t need to know.”

Two of the participants in this Pennsburg non-graduate group indicated that good teachers were the most important element in a positive school climate. One focused on the strong academic abilities of the teacher; the teacher and the students need to be held accountable. The other respondent stressed the effective influence of the teacher on school climate. This individual felt that positive, caring relationships with students were the most important factor and that this type of teacher motivates students to achieve high goals. A third respondent’s perception expanded on the importance of the pupil/teacher relationship. This individual felt that a safe and caring atmosphere was the most critical factor.
Another respondent focused on consistency as the most significant factor in a positive school climate. He felt that good communication between the teachers and the administration fosters this. He indicated that the teachers and the principal need to have a common understanding about the rules and procedures that govern the building. These need to be accepted by all and applied in a consistent manner.

One of the participants described a hidden curriculum as overriding the academic curriculum. “Honesty, respect, effort, and all those other adjectives are critical for success in life.” He went on to explain, “This is the core of it—you can teach a lot of people to do math. Without trust they are not productive.” This hidden curriculum, he felt, was the critical factor in creating a strong positive school climate.

The last participant in this group stressed the importance of a strong organization that had a clear vision. She felt that it was necessary for this clear vision to be apparent at all levels of the organization. A clear vision could then be translated into workable goals: long and short term. It was her belief that this would in turn produce a positive school climate. Table 7 lists the most significant characteristics that impact on a positive school climate as delineated by this group of participants.

Table 7

*The Most Significant Characteristics That Impact on a Positive School Climate Perceived by Non-graduate Pennsburg Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical characteristics that affect school climate</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sense of belonging</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency of procedures</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe and caring atmosphere</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A solid organization with a clear vision</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hidden curriculum: honesty, respect, trust</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This group shared a diversity of experiences in regard to the school climate of their own alma maters, from comfortable and supportive, to cold. The first respondent came from a small community school system similar to Pennsburg. This individual said that “teacher relationships with kids were cold. They were not personal.” Student relationships tended to mirror the teacher/student relationships. Although students interacted within grade levels, there was no interaction between students of different grades. “A senior would not recognize that a freshman even existed,” she said. She indicated that parents at all levels were involved in the schools and did a lot of fund raising.

Two other respondents spoke of negative or non-relationships with their teachers. One indicated that teachers were authoritarian and that they were really not open to kids. “Issues of a personal nature were never discussed. They were just shoved onto the guidance counselor,” he stated. He added that there were a few teachers who were more personable and that the kids congregated around them. The other participant said, “We had no relationships with our teachers, unless they were our coaches. Relationships with kids were better, but only in some classes.”

The next respondent spoke of diminishing teacher interest as she moved from the elementary to the junior high. She related that this trend continued into the high school. “By senior high school, the teachers had just lost interest in us.” Her perception was that the teachers did not push students to strive academically.

Another respondent described his experience in a big-city school system as negative. He remarked, “The kids were not friendly. When we had a class meeting, I didn’t know half of them. That wasn’t a comfortable feeling.” There were three
socioeconomic groups at this individual’s school: a wealthy group, a poor group, and a middle class. The respondent indicated that only students from the wealthy class were noticed or seemed to matter to teachers, coaches, or the other students. He added with emotion, “I was from the poor school, and I knew it.”

The last two respondents had positive comments about the climate in their schools. One simply stated, “My schools were safe and caring. You knew the teachers cared about you.” The other participant spoke of having quality teachers. “My teachers were helpful,” she said. “They recognized students’ strengths and weaknesses and capitalized on those.”

Examining the reactions of this non-Pennsburg graduate group indicates that five of the seven participants negatively perceived the climate of the schools that they attended. Four respondents focused on poor relationships with their teachers. Although only two respondents indicated that quality teachers/a collaborative faculty were critical to a positive school climate, and only two respondents selected quality teachers as the most significant characteristic of a positive school climate, four members of this interview group identified the climate of their school as being negative based on poor student/teacher relationships. The other individual who said that the climate of her schools was negative listed poor peer relationships based on an elitist structure as the cause.

Conversely, the two respondents who viewed their school climates as positive reasoned that this was due to quality relationships with their teachers. Responses from these two respondents reflect the responses of the Pennsburg graduates who unanimously
identified strong student/teacher relationships as the most significant reason for the positive climate at Pennsburg.

Of the seven respondents, only one felt positive about his total school experience. He said, “I think that a school reflects the community where it’s a part.” This individual indicated that his schools were located in a small community that was actively involved in the schools. His only negative feelings reflected that experiences were limited due to the smallness of the schools.

Two others responded that their elementary educations were overall positive, but that as they moved to middle or junior high school the overall experience deteriorated. By the time they reached high school, the school experience was decidedly negative. Both participants cited a lack of positive teacher relationships as the main reason for their negative feelings. They also stated that their interactions with their elementary teachers were positive. A third participant also said that his elementary experience was overall positive, but that high school was not. This individual had official graduations at each level as he moved from building to building. He remarked, “It was increasingly intimidating as we moved from building to building. The worst was going to the high school.”

Each of the other three participants reflected overall negative feelings about their educational experiences. One said, “I loved my school, but I couldn’t wait to leave. There was so much conflict between administrative directions and teachers’ expectations.” Another said that she did not have any special feelings about elementary or middle school. She went on to add, “Maybe that says a lot, that I don’t have any fond
memories.” She also added that there were no group student projects like fundraising activities.

Finally, the last participant focused his comments on the lack of sports programs within the schools. He indicated that all of the sports programs were handled by the community rather than the schools. “The community ran it all. There was no school spirit or loyalty to a school. I never felt connected there.” Table 8 identifies the feelings of non-graduates as positive, neutral, or negative. These responses provide a contrast to the overall positive feelings Pennsburg graduates expressed about their school.

Table 8

Non-Pennsburg Graduates’ Overall Feelings about Their Personal Educational Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Overall feeling</th>
<th>Jr. High/Middle</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents’ Perceptions Regarding Cross-Grade Activities and Transitions

Noting the strength of the peer mentoring program at Pennsburg, participants in the non-graduate group were queried about cross-grade activities at their alma maters. Five of the participants in this group indicated that there were no cooperative activities between the grades or schools where they attended. One stated, “The older kids didn’t
even know the younger ones existed.” Another said, “The schools were separate entities. It’s not like here at Pennsburg where the older kids are such great role models for the younger students.” One of these individuals did say that they were able to work with community students in a child-care class, but added, “That was an odd situation for us.”

Two other respondents mentioned limited interactions. One spoke of the opportunity to go to one of the several elementary schools within the district to tutor during her senior year. The catch was that the senior had to be able to provide his or her own transportation to the elementary facility. This seriously limited the number of seniors who were able to participate. This participant also indicated that her high school put on concerts for the middle-school students. This, however, was not an interactive situation.

The last participant also indicated that there was a peer mentoring program at his school. This occurred between the high school and middle school. Other than that one activity, high-school students were not allowed to be in the junior-high section of the school. She said, “There was so much that the high school could have shared with the elementary; like here at Pennsburg when John [a high-school student] went to the elementary to work with the elementary kids. He was a super athlete and a super guy. The little kids really looked up to him. It was a great experience for John and the little guys. That would never happen at my school.”

Again the contrast between the perceptions of the Pennsburg graduates and the group of teachers that did not graduate from Pennsburg are very different. Only two members of the non-graduate group were able to list minimal contact with students in different grades or schools. One-hundred percent of the Pennsburg graduate group listed
multiple opportunities they experienced across the grade levels. These were perceived as positive experiences. Eighty-five percent of the Pennsburg graduates addressed the positive aspects of Pennsburg’s tutoring program. Three respondents even stated that their individual career choices were strongly influenced by the peer-tutoring program.

Unlike the Pennsburg graduates, non-graduates experienced a number of transitions between building levels at the schools they attended. Six of the seven participants in this group shared overwhelmingly negative experiences regarding this transition. The first respondent said, “There was an aura of intimidation. It was not welcoming. It was a very emotional time.” Another stated, “I was intimidated. Every time we moved buildings, it was a new experience. You had to learn all those new procedures and had to face all those older kids who were new.”

A third participant talked about a huge adjustment with all the new teachers. He spoke about a system of cliques where the in-town students were those who were accepted by the other students and the staff. Kids from the outlying areas were always on the fringe. One example he gave was that all of the clubs and activities met right after school. If you lived in the country and had no transportation, you were not able to participate in any of those types of activities.

Another participant shared, “It seemed like such a huge step.” She spoke of having a transition night, but that she still felt overwhelmed. She added, “Some of the kids didn’t even come for the first week after orientation.” She went on to talk about differences in the whole educational approach from hours of more homework to having to write down all of the teacher’s notes verbatim. She concluded with, “My grades really suffered that year.”
Two other participants related teacher-sponsored behavior that could be identified as bullying. One spoke of being called rabbits. She said that all of the grades were named for animals. “We were rabbits and we knew it. There was no welcoming committee. We at Pennsburg do a much better job of transitioning our kids.”

The last respondent to report a negative perception regarding his transition shared a story of overt bullying of younger students. He indicated that freshmen were required to walk behind seniors. Teachers referred to us as freshmen. “One of our coaches,” he shared, “lined us up and shook our hands. If you were a freshman, he squeezed until you dropped to your knees.” He went on to say that at activities like dances there was never any association between grades. He finished by saying of his transitions, “Every time you left one building, it was like starting all over again.”

The only respondent to indicate any positive reaction to the question of transition felt that there were lots of opportunities to get involved. He also stated, “They [the faculty] were open to everybody and that made the transition easier.” He also added, however, that, looking back, “I was probably intimidated.”

Again the contrast between the perceptions of Pennsburg graduates and non-graduates reflects two different kinds of transitional experiences. While the non-graduates used words like “intimidating” and shared experiences of being bullied, the Pennsburg graduates used words like “never an awkward new year,” and “seamless” to describe their transition experience.
Respondents’ Perceptions Regarding the K-12 Organizational Structure

Having been educated in a variety of building organizational structures, what advantages and disadvantages did the non-graduates perceive regarding the K-12 case-study school? Each of the seven participants interviewed had strong positive perceptions regarding the advantages of the K-12 case-study school, Pennsburg, where they taught.

Several of the respondents addressed the ease of transition at Pennsburg. One stated, “It isn’t like you leave one building and go to another; it’s just down the hall.” He went on to indicate that high-school kids keep in touch with their elementary teachers. “There is a natural communication between kids and teachers. It’s continuous and lasts long because they see each other in the halls and in the office.” Another, in addressing the ease of transition, stated, “At some points in the elementary grades, students are in the high school and get to interact with older students and teachers. Transition was so much easier then.”

A third respondent also said, “The gradual transitioning is a real advantage. Since the kids had lots of opportunities to interact across the grades, there was no pressure.” This individual also spoke of the proximity of students and teachers to each other. She spoke of being able to swap kids across the grades. “I had some of my high-school learning support kids’ work in a fifth-grade reading class. It was the coolest thing ever.” She went on to say, “Sometimes the older kids were better and sometimes the elementary kids read better, but they all liked working together.”

One of the other participants also addressed the shared activities as an advantage. He stated, “The biggest advantage is probably the role modeling. It’s immeasurable—a big advantage.” At Pennsburg, the elementary kids know the high-school kids. “They
are heroes.” He added, “You could put up a billboard with the varsity basketball team, all
good students, and the little kids would know them. That’s why we are who we are in
Pennsburg.” Following is the example he provided: “That’s why at an away playoff
game, we have four times the fans even though the other team may only be an hour away
and we are three hours away from home.”

An advantage at Pennsburg, as perceived by another participant, would be a sense
of being part of an entity. He said, “Kids here are all Panthers from the elementary on.
At my school district, you were a Cougar, a Mustang, a Shawnee Indian, and finally a
Red Rover.” He indicated that none of the students knew any of the athletes at any of the
other district buildings. With passion he explained, “At Pennsburg, our senior-high kids
walk the sidelines of the junior-high games after their practices. No one says they have
to, they just do. You’ll see them giving each other a high-five in the hallway.” As a
coach, he indicated that it really is not necessary to keep checking grades, because the
athletes are the best students. He also spoke of role modeling. “Our kids are all good
kids and followed good role models when they were younger. Now they model too.”
Finally, this participant spoke of the opportunity for teachers to be consistent across the
grades. “We were academically stronger when we were one entity.” He spoke of the
great student/teacher relationships. “A kid develops a great rapport with his seventh-
grade history teacher. If he has trouble with history as a tenth-grader, he will go back to
his seventh-grade teacher for help.”

The other two participants addressed the concept of having one administrator at
the K-12 as an advantage. One respondent stated, “There were more options for
everyone, kids and teachers, with one administrator. You could do special things.” This
individual also discussed the strong advantages of positive role modeling by older students. “Both the younger and the older students profited from the effects of good role modeling. The kids who were elementary tutors always talked about the little kids they worked with, and the elementary teachers would often tell us at the high school how much their kids enjoyed working with the older students.”

The last respondent said, “When you come from being completely connected K-12, you know the administration. You know what’s expected. Teachers have a great connect, a continuous feeling. There isn’t such a leap between grades. It is such a smooth flow.”

After teaching at Pennsburg when it existed as a K-12 entity for 2 years to 15 years, three of the participants could not name any disadvantages of this structure. Two of the respondents indicated that this is a large job for a single administrator, and that administrative support would be helpful. Another added that occasionally content at a K-12 faculty meeting was more focused toward either the elementary or the secondary teachers. He indicated that this was not necessarily a disadvantage and that it was informative.

Another participant cited the following disadvantage: If a student gets a negative reputation early in his or her career, it could carry with them throughout their school years and prejudice new teachers against them. She pointed out that this could really happen in any school regardless of the school’s size. She then added, “Due to the level of teacher collaboration at Pennsburg, every kid has an advocate, so this really isn’t an issue here.”
Finally, the last participant suggested that a drawback of the K-12 structure is that since students are engaged with kids across grade levels, there is always the possibility that a younger girl can “hook-up” with an older guy. His point was not that he had experienced this as a K-12 phenomenon, but that, due to proximity, it could happen. The advantages of a K-12, as perceived by non-graduates who taught at Pennsburg, are listed in Table 9.

Table 9

*Advantages of a K-12 as Perceived by Non-graduate Pennsburg Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ease of transition</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive cross-grade activities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive role modeling</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong sense of belonging</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-lasting positive teacher/student relations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency provided by one administrator</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pennsburg graduates expressed overwhelmingly positive comments about the school spirit at Pennsburg. Members of the non-graduate group again provided a diverse reaction regarding the spirit of the schools they attended. Three of the participants had positive comments about the schools they attended. One participant indicated that her school would say it was proud of its athletics. Another indicated that his school would say it was confident and successful. The third respondent, providing positive feedback, said that her school would say, “I’m here. I’m a presence. People identify with me.” This individual serves on the alumni board from her school. She indicated that there is a strong sense of connectedness between her alma mater and her community.
The next respondent reported a mixed reaction. She indicated that the spirit of her elementary school would speak of comfort. On the other hand, the spirit of her high school would reflect arrogance. The other three participants all had negative comments regarding the spirit of their schools.

One of the respondents said that her school would say, “Athletics, athletics, athletics! Sometimes there was more emphasis on athletics than academics.” Another participant reporting negative feelings said that there is a strong contrast between his school and Pennsburg. He described the spirit of his school as “selfish.” He explained that at Pennsburg coaches and teams are valued as a part of the overall culture. At his alma mater, there was no esprit de corps. He said, “It was all about what was best for me.”

The final respondent said the spirit of his school would be “tenseness.” He related, “It’s even more like a prison. There is a jaded feeling to the school. It just seems like the kids are prisoners.” He indicated that some of this is due to the inappropriate behavior of the students: their involvement with drugs and their disrespectful behavior. Table 9 portrays the positive or negative direction of non-graduate teacher participants in regard to the spirit of their own alma maters.

When discussing their perceptions regarding positive and negative aspects about the K-12, Pennsburg, where they had taught, non-graduates’ reactions were similar to the reactions of graduates. Each of the seven respondents was easily able to list a number of positives regarding the K-12 structure. When asked to provide negative impressions of the K-12 structure, participants struggled to identify more than one negative. Two of the
Table 10

Non-graduate Teacher Perceptions of the Spirit of Their Alma Maters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Non-graduate perceptions of spirit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

participants were not able to identify any negatives, and one indicated that his negatives would be the opposite perceptions he had given as positives of the K-12.

Two respondents identified a consistency of approach as directed by one administrator as a significant advantage. One said, “Expectations are known and consistent. The overall atmosphere is more open. People are more willing to work together if the atmosphere is open.” The other indicated that with one administrator, “First there is a greater consistency, better communication at all levels.”

Another positive listed by four of the non-graduate teachers was the opportunity for meaningful interactions across grade levels. Each of them tied positive high-school role models to these cross-grade activities. One participant stated, “The younger kids get to see the right stuff happening. The high-school kids perform great role models for the younger kids.” Another stated, “Peer mentoring was by far the greatest positive. It was just like the real world where everyone intermingled.” A third participant added her perception about cross-grade activities, “It’s easy for the two levels to mingle. It’s
important for the high-school kids to be role models.” The last respondent to reflect on cross-grade activities stressed that, “due to the variety of activities where kids from different grade levels interact, I think all of our students are more accepting of others.” She described a number of students who had varying levels of learning difficulties who were just accepted as a part of the student body. She said, “Those kids with exceptionalities were a part of activities and our kids just got used to seeing them. They had a place like everyone else.”

Several of the respondents focused on the ease of teacher communication across the grades fostered by the K-12 structure. “When Pennsburg was one school, proximity was huge! There was more interaction between the teachers across the grades. We were a building team. Now that is ruined.” One participant described opportunities for junior-high teachers to meet with intermediate teachers. “We were able to get valuable information on how our kids learned best, what worked and what didn’t,” he related. These discussions covered a variety of topics from homework to vocabulary that was content-specific. He added, “This is one of the reasons that the transition from the elementary to the high school was so easy.”

Two other positive reactions to the K-12 setting were shared. One of the respondents addressed the opportunities to share both materials and staff across the building. “In these economic times, it just makes sense to share resources whenever possible. This is our responsibility,” she stated. The other perception strongly stated was the general camaraderie that was fostered by this setting between the administration, the teachers, and the staff. This respondent echoed a previous perception that we functioned as a building team. “Everyone felt support from everyone else. This was on both a
personal and a professional level. This operational behavior drifted down to the kids and was reflected,” she stated. She cited several catastrophic events in the lives of her colleagues whose impact was softened by supportive colleagues. She also spoke of how well-received substitute teachers were and how everyone went out of their way to make sure that their experiences at Pennsburg were positive.

One of the negative responses was a perception that the single administrator could be spread too thin. This respondent indicated that strong Deans of Students and eventually a half-time administrator took care of this concern. Another negative response stated was the potential for a long-lasting personality conflict between a given student and teacher. Due to the small size of Pennsburg, often students visited the same teacher for different courses during their high-school careers. If there was a conflict this could be a concern.

One of the respondents shared his concern that one of the high-school tutors might act inappropriately while in the elementary school. He went on to say that this was such a valuable program that he always worried that some student would spoil the program for everyone. I interpret this negative as a disguised positive. The only other negative comment was a concern that teachers need to act professionally all the time. The participant indicated that this comment should apply to all schools and was not a reflection of either Pennsburg or the K-12 setting. Overall the positive perceptions of the K-12 setting outnumbered the negative perceptions. The positive perceptions about a K-12 school structure as identified by non-graduate teachers at Pennsburg during the time it operated as a true K-12 school are listed below. Each of the positive aspects identified by
this group of non-graduate teachers was also identified in some manner by the graduate teachers during their interviews.

1. Consistency of expectations and procedures under the direction of one administrator
2. Meaningful interaction/activities across grade levels
3. A strong peer-mentoring program that fosters good role models
4. Students more accepting of others
5. Ease and value of teacher collaboration across grade levels
6. Sharing of resources, both materials and personnel
7. A strong sense of camaraderie between the administration, teachers, and staff.

The negatives as identified by some of the group of non-graduates are listed below. Again, as with the graduate teacher group, non-graduate teachers struggled to identify negative aspects of the K-12 structure where they taught. One individual went so far as to say that the sense of unity, one team, had been ruined when the building was split.

1. Principal can be spread too thin
2. Fear of inappropriate tutor behavior that could jeopardize the program
3. A concern that teachers in all schools always act appropriately
4. The possibility that a personality conflict between a teacher and student could be long-lasting.

The contrast between graduates and non-graduates of Pennsburg becomes stronger when we examine the changes non-graduates would make to their alma maters. Each of the participants in this group had strong feelings about what they would change
about their schools. All of their responses were directly related to interpersonal relationships. One simply stated, “I would change the cold culture. There would be more positive interactions between the kids and the teachers.” Another respondent addressed the poor relationships between administrators that affected all interactions in the school. She said, “Everyone there needs to be more student centered, not blame students for everything, especially those things that they have no control over.”

Two other participants addressed the difficulty of transitioning between schools. Both felt that better interpersonal relationships between students and teachers who were empathetic to student fears could have helped. One added, “My school did nothing like we do with our orientation night at Pennsburg. We were just moved on and left to fend for ourselves.” The other said, “With each transition between schools, there were students who didn’t have a positive experience and were left on the outside looking in.”

Two other individuals in this group would change the lack of school/community involvement at their schools. One said, “To be one body—like everybody had a part in it. Everybody is a part at Pennsburg. We are like this.” The other added, “I’d have liked for my community to be more involved. The parents should set high expectations for student achievement, not leave everything to the school.”

Finally, one of the respondents said that he would like to have had his school put more emphasis on academics rather than athletics. He told a story about not wanting to dissect in biology class. The biology teacher was a coach and the respondent was a student athlete. He related, “He let me go to the rest room during dissection and I still got an A. That was ok then, but now I feel cheated.” Overall, all seven participants of the non-graduate teacher interview group were able to identify an aspect of their alma maters
that they viewed as seriously negative. This position is in stark contrast to the Pennsburg graduate group.

Finally, members of the non-graduate group were asked to demonstrate their level of commitment to the K-12 organizational structure. All seven non-graduate teachers who taught in Pennsburg when it was a K-12 single-campus school expressed their support of this structure. Each indicated that he or she would as a school board member or a leader of a parent group recommend the K-12. Three individuals qualified their answer, indicating that the size of the student population would affect their answer. These individuals felt that for a small student population this is an effective structure. One of the respondents indicated that this is a good structure for a community school.

One of the respondents again discussed the peer-tutoring program as one of his reasons to support the K-12 structure. “Peer mentoring by the high-school kids is huge, so powerful!” His second reason to support the structure is the mind-set that has developed in the community. He spoke of the community interest in watching kids grow from primary school through the high school. He gave an example of an older gentleman who always attended games. “He was blind, yet he came all the time to follow the kids.” This individual also spoke of the enormous community involvement in graduation ceremonies over the years. “We have community members who come to graduation who have no kid connection to the schools. Their own children may be long gone, but they show up at regular athletic events and for graduation. They know the kids and want to be there for graduation. It is a real community event.”

One of the participants addressed the need to be fiscally responsible with taxpayer money. This respondent indicated that it does not make sense to duplicate services in two
buildings when it is not necessary. She cited a small example of having one fax machine in the office that was shared. “If I was planning a new building the infrastructure could be designed to be economical and yet functional,” she stated.

The final respondent said that, “as a board member, I would look at all of the positives [and support the K-12 structure].” This statement mirrors the feelings of this interview group.

Expanding on these responses, participants indicate by a six to seven margin that they would favor having their own children or grandchildren attend a K-12 structure. One of the seven participants indicated that she might favor two separate schools, reasoning that each school could specialize in kids at that age. All six of the other respondents indicated that they would want their children to attend the K-12 structure. Their answers to this question summarize their positive feelings regarding a K-12 structure.

The first participant to respond positively spoke of defending the school when her children attended Pennsburg. She said, “I appreciated that there wasn’t an obvious disparity among the students. It was almost the feeling of an extended family. It was a very accepting and comfortable atmosphere.” She spoke of the excellent relationship between the administration and teachers; how well they knew each other personally and worked as one overall. She also addressed the ease of transition for the students. She concluded by saying, “If the three junior/senior high schools consolidated in our district, I could not say this would be true.”
Another respondent said, “The K-12 is a friendlier atmosphere. The older kids watch out for the younger kids and they learn how to handle the younger kids, friendly mentors.”

He went on to say, “Look at the openness at Pennsburg—there is more cooperation and sharing. I think nothing of walking to the elementary to see a teacher. At [another district school where I work] this does not exist.”

One teacher responded, “I would want my daughter to feel that she belonged—had pride in her school.” He went on to discuss student behavior at Pennsburg saying that there are always kids at the school. He pointed out that it was not that there was nothing for them at home; they just come and stay all the time. He concluded, “Kids have a sense of belonging here and want to be here whether it’s in the weight room or working with teachers.” Another participant echoed the same sentiment saying, “Yes, I want to put my kids in this kind of environment. I want them to have this feeling of closeness and a sense of belonging.” This participant added that the tutoring program at Pennsburg is great. She said, “It helps some of them determine a career focus. They get a realistic viewpoint through the tutoring.”

One of the other respondents said that she would support the structure because of the predictability of having one administrator. He stated, “That helps kids be more successful. When kids don’t know the expectations, it becomes a threat and they are more anxious and don’t do as well.” She also said that the K-12 put extra pressure on the department heads to be leaders and that this helped to strengthen the system by sharing leadership.
Finally, the other participant who reacted positively to the K-12 setting had several reasons for his support. He spoke of the interaction of the coaches with students. He indicated that most of the coaches are elementary teachers who watch out for the kids as they move through. He provided this example: “There is an eighth-grader named Bobby who is always on the edge of trouble. Three of the coaches sat him down this fall, and plan to work with him throughout the year to keep him on track and capitalize on his athletic abilities. These coaches track the kids and keep them safe.”

This same respondent spoke of his own child having trouble with an academic schedule at another district high school. He related that it took several parents digging up test scores to change the schedule. He said, “That doesn’t happen here at Pennsburg. We are so tuned into our kids’ levels of ability. We know our kids well enough to almost guess where they will do best.” He added that the connections between the staff help all the teachers share knowledge about all of the students. “We have the ability to talk to each other.”

He gave the example of the annual spring academic fair. This activity started as an elementary science fair and grew into a school-wide academic fair. He noted, “You’ll see the older kids stop to check out what the younger kids have made.”

Finally, he shared this story, which seems to be indicative of the climate/culture of Pennsburg K-12, according to the staff who taught there:

I turned around one day to find one of my seniors in the shop with an elementary student in tow. I asked what they needed and the senior said he brought the younger student who was his elementary mentee to the shop as a reward for good classroom behavior to make something. It was so neat to watch their interaction. That’s what I meant by the K-12 is so powerful! That was not the only time this happened in my area. There were other experiences like that in other areas of the school like the gym. There was the daily interaction—like when they passed in the hall and the older kid would ask how the younger one was listening to his teacher. Little kids loved it, the
older ones paying attention to them. The power is when the older kids talked, the younger ones listened.

Below is a listing of the themes that emerged from the second group interviewed for this study, non-graduate teachers who taught at Pennsburg while it was a true K-12 single-campus school:

1. Transitions interviewees experienced at their alma maters were difficult to painful.

2. Overall feelings about their alma matters were negative.

3. Respondents would improve the student/teacher interactions at their alma maters.

4. The following themes from the first interview group recurred in the second group:

   a. Close personal relationships with teachers existed at Pennsburg.

   b. There were enriching cross-grade activities at Pennsburg.

   c. Pennsburg had an outstanding peer mentoring/mentoring program.

Participants in the second interview group experienced a variety of school structures that included as many as four separate entities during their own school careers. Each taught in Pennsburg when one administrator supervised the entire K-12 complex. Each also experienced the division of Pennsburg into two separate entities. None of the teachers were in favor of the separation of the school when it occurred. None of the teachers support the separation 3 years after the division of the building. Comments such as, “We were a building team. Now that is ruined,” reflect the beliefs of this interview group.”
Emergent Themes of the Non-Graduate Interview Group

The three strongest themes that emerged regarding participants’ perceptions of their own alma maters include experiencing difficult to painful transitions between school entities, overall negative feelings about the culture of their alma maters, and a strong desire to change the poor student/teacher interactions at their alma maters. While sharing experiences from their youth, two of the respondents became visibly emotional when discussing the transitions they had experienced as they moved from one school to another. They shared episodes of bullying from older students and teachers. As a group, they would like to be able to improve the student/teacher interactions at their schools. This issue was seen as the strongest negative by six of the seven respondents. They elaborated on this theme, indicating that there was often no sense of belonging, comfort, or security. In general, while most of the group felt that their academic background was sufficient to good, only one felt any positive relationship with his school. Each of the other respondents rated their own schools poor in effective areas that they, as teachers, felt were critical to a successful school. Some of these factors included quality teachers, a sense of belonging, a safe and caring atmosphere, and a hidden curriculum of honesty, respect, and trust.

Three other themes emerged from the interviews with this group. These were the following perceptions about Pennsburg when it existed as a K-12 school:

First there were close, personal relationships among teachers and between students and teachers at Pennsburg. To the group this translated to a safe and supportive environment for students. Teachers knew students, their abilities and their needs, and were willing to do what was necessary to help each child grow.
The second theme was that there were enriching cross-grade activities at Pennsburg that provide growth opportunities for younger and older students. Students were described as being more accepting of differences at Pennsburg because students had ample opportunities to experience students who had different abilities and disabilities.

Finally, this group felt that the peer-mentoring program was “powerful” and “huge!” Respondents spoke of outstanding high-school role models and of younger students who respected older kids and responded to their interventions. Although each of the members of the non-graduate Pennsburg teacher group came from a variety of school structures, their overall perceptions of their schools were negative. Yet, as a group they shared three positive reactions to the Pennsburg K-12 School that were identical to those of the graduates of Pennsburg. These themes were listed on page 105.

Parents of Students Who Attended Pennsburg

Respondents’ Links to the K-12 Case-Study School

The third group interviewed was parents whose children attended Pennsburg School during its tenure as a K-12. There were six individuals in this group. Participants had from one to five children who attended the case-study school. Three of the individuals were professionals, two were the owner/operators of a small business in the community, and one worked in a local manufacturing firm. They ranged in age from 30 to 73. As with the first group, graduates of Pennsburg, the members of this group may have been eligible to participate in this study for multiple reasons. All met the criteria for participation in the study since they had firsthand knowledge of Pennsburg when it operated as a K-12 school. In addition to having had children who attended Pennsburg, several of the respondents also had grandchildren who attended Pennsburg. One had a
unique perspective since she attended Pennsburg when it was a K-12 and her child was in attendance when the division of the building into two schools took place. This gave her the ability to compare the entities. Another parent taught in Pennsburg when it was two separate schools and during most of the time when it operated as a K-12 school. This individual also has a unique perspective. The following responses provide a look at the K-12 school from the perspective of the parent.

Participants have lived in the community for 18, 20, 28, 51, 57, and 73 years. Several of these individuals have spent their entire lives in this community, excluding time away from home for military service. Several have grown up in the area, moved away, and returned to raise a family in the Pennsburg attendance area.

Several members of this group, parents, moved into the community. Their impressions of the Pennsburg School shed another perspective on the case-study school. The first respondent discussed her impression of the interactions between the teachers and the students. She indicated that relationships were positive. She stated, “They [the students] weren’t just a number here.” The next individual to respond spoke also of the positive relationships between the students and the teachers. He said, “The teachers seemed to have a solid religious background and a value system that was in line with our family’s. We felt that this translated into them doing a better job. We were comfortable sending our kids here.”

The third participant to have moved into the area indicated that her first impression was that the community and its school were small. This suited her comfort level because she came from a small community school. She also said that she noticed right away that kids came not only from the local community, but from the surrounding
countryside. She said, “This was good because the kids got to know each other right away and kept those relationships.”

Only one of the individuals who moved to the Pennsburg community did so because they wanted their children to attend school in Pennsburg. He discussed moving into the area to work with youth. The family was looking for a small-town atmosphere. He said, “The school was like that [small]. It was so easy to get to know everyone. The staff was so friendly and supportive. There was a real hometown feeling.” This respondent worked for a number of years in the alternative education setting that was aligned with the Pennsburg School. He served there as a counselor working with students, many of whom were educated at the Pennsburg campus. This provided him with significant second-hand knowledge about the school from students he counseled, as well as firsthand knowledge from his own experiences.

Members of the group had as many as five children and two grandchildren who attended the case-study school. It should be noted that Respondent 4 had two children who graduated from Pennsburg. A third child attended K through 9 at Pennsburg and completed his education at another district high school. This individual also has a unique perspective, having a child who experienced a different type of organizational structure than a K-12.

Another respondent also had another child who attended a different type of organizational structure. Their comments add support to the K-12 structure. The first participant indicated that there were huge differences between her son’s experiences at Pennsburg and the other 7-12 school he attended. She indicated, “He went from a safe environment where everyone knew him, to a system where he had to prove himself.”
There was no initial acceptance that my other children had experienced. He missed the camaraderie from the teachers that he had previously experienced.” She shared that there were some caring teachers in the new school setting, but that the caring attitude was not school-wide as it had been at Pennsburg. Academically, there was rigor at each of the schools. She pointed out differences in athletics also. The other school was more competitive internally. “This was okay for my son because he was a good athlete. Not so for others who were not as good. They did not have the same opportunities,” she indicated.

In the K-12 school there were opportunities for everyone to be able to participate. “There were no stigmas. My older children,” she said, “played in the band and were also very involved in athletics. My youngest son, in the other school, had to fight to be accepted because he broke the school social groups by joining many things.” She noted that this was very different from the K-12 school, Pennsburg, where all the kids were encouraged to participate in as much as they could. She concluded that Pennsburg was a more accepting school where all students had a feeling of belonging.

The second participant to note differences between his child’s previous school and Pennsburg spoke of his son’s fear of mandated tests required in another state. He indicated that his son was just scared of the state tests and added that all my children felt more comfortable here at Pennsburg.

Respondents’ Perceptions of Their Children’s Experiences at Pennsburg

Each of the members of the parent group was given a list of items to respond to in terms of their family experiences at Pennsburg. The list included: (a) curriculum, (b) sense of belonging, (c) collaborative activities, (d) your comfort level as a parent having
your children attend the K-12 school, (e) advantages and/or disadvantages of the K-12 structure, and (f) opportunities for the children to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Participants’ responses to each of these subcategories will be grouped together. The first category is curriculum. About 85% of this group of interviewees expressed positive perceptions regarding the curriculum at Pennsburg. Two of the respondents said that the curriculum flowed from K-12. One described it this way: “[The curriculum] was a beautiful stream. It flowed from kindergarten through 12th grade.”

Five of the six respondents stressed the rigor of the curriculum. Each indicated that their children were prepared for the challenges of college. One stated that all of his children have college degrees and that one daughter is the only female vice president of a large company. This daughter was able to reach this success from a solid background in Spanish gained at Pennsburg. Another felt that the excellent relationship between teachers and students at Pennsburg was a key to the successful implementation of the curriculum.

Finally, one of the participants indicated that three of his children did well with the rigorous curriculum. One of the children struggled, however. He stated, “The one who had learning issues had immediate attention from the staff. They were right on top of him providing what he needed.”

One respondent felt that the curriculum at the elementary section of the school seemed to be pretty “standard.” Her concern at the secondary level was a lack of elective choices for students. She added that this was probably the result of the small size of the high schools in the district.
The responses regarding a sense of belonging were unanimous and expressed with robust emotion. Every participant indicated that their children and grandchildren felt a strong sense of belonging at Pennsburg. The first respondent felt that the sense of belonging grew from the deep interactions between the school and the community. He indicated that all of the students seem to fit in. “I think the teachers feel the freedom to be able to connect with the kids on lots of levels. There is good communication between the teachers and the kids. That’s what helps them feel like they belong.”

Another said, “It’s [a sense of belonging] the number one thing. Everybody at Pennsburg belongs.” He felt that this was a causal factor in the success of the students. He also indicated that individual students’ backgrounds do not matter in any arena, and concluded with, “It is a true village raising children.”

One parent said, “Oh yeah! They had a strong sense of belonging. They were made to feel like a part of the school, a part of their class.” He added that this strong sense of belonging was the root of their success. His children felt a responsibility to their class and the school as well as to their parents. He said, “They wanted to do good so that they wouldn’t let their class or the school down. This really motivated them.”

One of the respondents in this group who had both children and grandchildren graduate from Pennsburg said, “All of my kids are still dyed-in-the-wool Pennsburg supporters. They were active in sports and other activities. Their lives were good there. The same was true for my grandchildren.”

“Pennsburg was like a big family,” offered another. “Everybody was interested in everybody. The teachers and the principal really cared about the kids.” This participant
stressed that since Pennsburg was a smaller school it was a more comfortable place. “As parents we knew all the teachers. It was a great comfort level.”

The last participant, responding to a sense of belonging, indicated that both of her children felt a strong attachment to Pennsburg. Her perception was that the students were there for each other, that they supported one another. She elaborated that this was not just accepting others, it was really supporting them. She mentioned several handicapped children. “Those children,” she said, “were always taken care of, helped, never belittled.”

The next category that was examined was collaborative activities. Each of the parent respondents in this interview group spoke about positive activities that their children had experienced at Pennsburg. Four of the participants directly addressed the tutoring program. One respondent described the program like this: “When my kids were small they could hardly wait for the older kids to come into their rooms to work with them. They were good role models for my kids. Then when my kids were older, they were excited to be able to work with the younger kids.” In speaking about the tutoring program, another added, “My two older children learned to give back to the community—a lesson learned through the school.” In discussing the peer-mentoring program, each of the participants stressed the value of the role modeling exhibited by the older students.

One of the other participants addressed the concept of role modeling by older students through the Saturday Recreation Program. This program has traditionally been staffed by varsity basketball players and coaches who volunteer their Saturday mornings to work with elementary students. In his words, the result of this training was strong
motivation by the students to participate in junior-high sports when they came of age. He
added, “At this school we never have to cut kids. Everybody gets to participate.”

Some of the other collaborative activities that cross grade levels included Rocket
Day, Block Party, whole-school reading like on Dr. Seuss Day, and elementary students
taking part in classes at the high school such as typing. Rocket Day, Track and Field
Day, and Block Party were activities that were held in White Pine Park, a facility rented
by the school district for athletic events. Block Party was held each fall as a part of
homecoming activities. Rocket Day and Track and Field Day activities were held in the
spring. Each of these activities incorporated younger and older students.

High-school students, for example, helped sixth-grade students build and set off
their rockets developed in science class. At a Block Party you might find some younger
children playing games sponsored by high-school clubs, a game of football and/or
softball with participants of varying ages, some grade levels in the swimming pool, and
others playing volleyball. One parent, explaining about Block Party, said, “You’d see an
older kid tying a younger kid’s shoe or helping them win a fish.” Most often the fish
activity was a failure as a profit maker because if the little kids cried when they did not
win a fish, the older student would give them one anyway. At the end of the day, all of
the students would line up and walk across the park picking up trash. This was great
public relations with the community and helped each of the students feel a responsibility
for taking care of the park.

Other collaborative activities involved students from the elementary grades taking
mini-courses in the high school. Often an elementary and a high-school teacher would
develop a joint lesson or lessons that benefited everyone. An example would be a fifth-
grade teacher taking her students to the business teacher for a few lessons on keyboarding, or an elementary art class or culture club going to the shop to make presents to take to a local retirement community for the residents.

One of the participants discussed the high-school graduation as a collaborative activity. First, the actual ceremony was held in the gym to be able to accommodate all the people who wanted to be there. This participant spoke of graduations as being special. She said, “I like that we have former graduates come back to be the keynote speakers. The principal knew each of the kids and made positive remarks about each of them during the graduation.” During the last few years of the K-12 setting, the same principal had served as the graduates’ principal from the time they were in kindergarten.

Whole-school reading activities were another example of these cross-grade collaborative activities. One participant remembered a Dr. Seuss Day her son had enjoyed. All of the students from Grades 7 through 12 were paired up with a student in Grades K through 6. On the appointed day, children met in the elementary section of the building and shared their favorite children’s stories. Every corner of every classroom and hall was filled with reading partners. Each respondent in the parent interview group had positive examples of cross-grade collaborative activities their children have participated in. Table 11 lists the collaborative activities that were shared by these parents.

The next area of focus was the parents’ level of comfort when their children attended Pennsburg. All six of the parents responding indicated that the safety of their children was the strongest reason that they felt secure during their children’s tenure at this K-12 school. One of the parents said that in addition to being safe, her children were happy at Pennsburg. She indicated that, “Not just safe, they were happy there. They
Table 11

Cross-grade Collaborative Activities Reported by Pennsburg Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cross-grade collaborative activities</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer-mentoring program</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocket Day, Block Party, and Track and Field Day</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole-school partnered reading</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation ceremonies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

would tell you that this was the best time of their lives.”

Two others added that, in addition to being safe, their children were “well-cared for” and “secure.” These two respondents spoke of having good relationships with teachers who were easy to talk to. One of the parents stated, “I think the solid values of the teachers increased our comfort level.”

This parent added, “We were very comfortable having our kids go to this school. It does not have a reputation for being a drug school like some other schools.” He also said, “This is an advantage of the K-12, the flow. Everyone knows everyone and they are all so interconnected. This adds to the comfort level.”

Finally, one of the parents stressed that “having one principal created a consistency of leadership and a good game plan that everyone knew. There was a great collaboration between the staff, a flow. All levels knew what the other levels were doing. It made the curriculum stronger and teaching more effective.”

Parents’ perceptions of the opportunities for their children to participate in extracurricular activities were also examined. The consensus of these parents was that there were extensive opportunities available if students elected to participate. One mother
indicated that “if the kids in this school didn’t participate in extra things, it was their own fault.”

Respondents’ Perceptions Regarding the K-12 Organizational Structure

Participants in the parent group were also asked this to identify three positive and three negative things about a K-12 organizational structure. As with the other two groups, participants in the parent interview group were able to easily name several positive characteristics of this case-study K-12 school. Conversely, this interview group, like the other two, had difficulty naming negative characteristics. Two respondents were not able to name any negative aspects of the K-12 setting.

Three of the six respondents stressed the positive aspects of older students being good role models for the younger children. One of the fathers stated, “The bonding with all the kids across the grade levels is a real plus. There were good role models. The kids all know each other and really seem to support each other.” A parent/grandparent said, “My grandson had great role models when he was younger. When he was a varsity player there were younger students around him all the time. It’s like our kids get to be friends with their heroes.”

Three of the respondents also spoke of the excellent rapport between the students and the teachers. “The teachers’ interest and support for each student was so powerful,” indicated one parent. This parent went on to add that there was such great collaboration across the grades by the teachers. She felt this “rubbed off” on the kids and helped to strengthen the positive pupil/teacher relationships. Another father added that the teachers got together to discuss curriculum and kids. He expressed the belief that this teacher
interaction allowed for constant improvement of the curriculum and helped to strengthen the teachers’ abilities to know their students better.

Student safety and comfort were listed as advantages of the K-12 setting. One parent said, “They are all so familiar and comfortable here. They know where everything is. Transition is easy being at one site.” Another parent stated, “Safety and harmony were such huge positives.” She felt that at Pennsburg there was an intentional building of community spirit and responsibility. She gave the following statement: “Even kids who had made mistakes in their lives were accepted back into the fold and nurtured. Their indiscretions were accepted and they re-entered the flow.”

Another parent, speaking about safety, said, “This [Pennsburg] was one entity then. The school, church, community, and families were all one, centered on the school. The school promoted this integration.” This parent felt that there was a safety and a comfort level that grew out of the K-12 setting. She concluded, “Since all those issues [social] were taken care of, the focus could be on quality education.”

Finally, one of the parents said, “I never thought about any kind of a school but this K-12. It seems so natural.” This individual also addressed the concept of dealing with only one administrator as a strong positive. “There was a consistency of expectations and response that was comforting to both students and parents.”

Table 11 lists the perceived advantages of the interviewed parents whose children attended Pennsburg when it functioned as a K-12 school.

There were three perceived disadvantages suggested by the parent interview group. One of the participants indicated that the small size of the school resulted
in the fact that there were limited elective courses. Another parent indicated that due to the rural nature of Pennsburg, there was little diversity. Neither of these conditions were created by the K-12 structure, but rather have their roots in the location and size of the school.

One parent felt that a disadvantage of the K-12 structure in Pennsburg could be the possibility of a long-term negative relationship between a student and a teacher. This respondent said that since a student, in most cases, has repeat experiences with his teachers, that if the experience was not good during the first course, the negative feelings could carry into another course later. Again, this might be a function of Pennsburg’s size rather than a disadvantage of the K-12 structure.

Finally, one parent suggested that although he felt that the older students were overwhelmingly good role models for the younger students, there was the possibility that an older student could be a negative role model. An example he cited was an older student kissing a girlfriend outside of the school bus in front of younger students.

Like the other two groups interviewed, parents were queried regarding changes they would make to the K-12 case-study school if they could. All of the respondents who

Table 12

*Parent Perceptions of the Advantages of the K-12 Settings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent perceived advantages</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-school students were strong role models</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent teacher collaboration</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong pupil/teacher relationships</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of safety, comfort, and belonging</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a natural setting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency of one administrator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
suggested changes identified items that related to a lack of resources. Two of the parents suggested that it would be helpful to have additional paraprofessionals to help children with special learning deficiencies. One of the parents felt that there was a need for additional vocational courses for those students who were not college bound. He talked about a previous cooperative program between several school districts that met this need. The Northwoods School District pulled out of this partnership partly due to its cost. The other participant suggesting changes to Pennsburg would have provided more space in the building, additional technology, and generally more resources.

The other two participants in this parent group suggested no changes to Pennsburg. One of them said, “I wouldn’t change the way it was then.” He suggested that the collaborative activities and “flowing” curriculum were strong points.

Each of the parents in this group strongly endorsed the K-12 setting. They supported the notion of having their grandchildren attend a K-12 organizational structure. The emotion of the response ranged from yes, to sure, to absolutely. One parent said, “The elementary kids intermingled with the high-school kids. The tutoring program was a really big deal. The little kids got to work with their heroes and the older ones got to do something valuable too.” Another indicated, “The setting is beneficial to the kids, a really good environment. Social interactions here are solid. This is so important to their success.”

One of the parents said, “There is a safety here for the kids. They know where they are going; everything is comfortable. There is such a great comfort level for kids in this kind of structure.” Another parent stated with strong emotion, “Absolutely, I’d give everything to have my grandson be able to attend school in Pennsburg for all the positive
reasons I have stated.” A final emotional response came from a mother whose daughter now teaches in another school. Her initial answer, “Absolutely,” was followed by, “When she attends this school’s [Pennsburg’s] activities she says she misses the attitude of the supportive people here. There is a special nurturing at Pennsburg.”

Emergent Themes From the Parent Group

The themes that emerged from parents’ perceptions of their children’s experiences at Pennsburg are listed below.

1. Children and grandchildren all experienced a strong sense of belonging, comfort, and acceptance.

2. The curriculum was rigorous.

3. Relationships between teachers and students were positive.

4. Cross-grade activities and peer mentoring were viewed positively.

Each of the parents in this group addressed the strong sense of belonging, comfort, and acceptance that their children and grandchildren experienced at Pennsburg. Their examples ranged from the positive support learning-disabled children received from other students, to accepting students who had made significant mistakes on a personal level and were brought back into the collective fold.

Each of the respondents in this group felt that the overall curriculum was rigorous. They indicated that their children were able to enter the college of their choice and did well in the college setting. One even listed the strong success his children have reached and linked that success to their educations at Pennsburg.

As in each of the previous two interview groups, this group also felt that relationships between teachers and students and among teachers were strong, personal,
and positive. Several stated that this was one of the key components to their children’s success. Strong teacher collaboration was also seen as a positive connective link to the rigorous curriculum.

Finally, the peer-mentoring program was named as a major positive factor in the case-study school. All of the parent participants stressed the value of the program to both the younger and older students. All spoke of the excellent job the high-school students did as role models. One of the parents indicated that this process was a practical way the older students were able to give back to their school community. Each of these themes strongly supported the K-12 structure.

Members of the Pennsburg Community Interview Group

Respondents’ Contextual Links to the Case-Study School

The final group interviewed was composed of members of the Pennsburg community attendance area. As with the other three interview groups, the only criterion for participation was firsthand knowledge of Pennsburg when it was operated as a K-12 school under one chief administrator. Similar to the other three interview groups, individuals in this group were eligible to participate for multiple reasons. There were five participants in this group. Two members of the group were professionals, one served as a professional support, one worked in a local manufacturing firm, and one served in a local business. Two of the individuals were graduates of Pennsburg; however, their children now attend Pennsburg since it was split into two administrative units providing them a unique perspective to compare with their own experiences. The other three respondents attended a variety of school structures, but were for a time employed within the Northwoods School District. One individual served on the Northwoods School Board
for several years. Each has a unique outlook regarding Pennsburg School from his/her own perspective. They represent the economic spectrum from blue-collar workers to professionals.

Members of this group have been residents for 6, 20, 30, 32, and 44 years. Respondents included several younger parents. Two respondents had children who experienced the end of the K-12 setting prior to the division of the schools. Several of the respondents were grandparents.

One of the individuals responding spent his entire career in the K-12 school and has a daughter who began her school career in the K-12 prior to its division. Another community member spent the last 2 years of her high-school career at Pennsburg and her son began his career at Pennsburg prior to the division. One of the community members had two children graduate from Pennsburg prior to the K-12 structure and one who graduated from the K-12. This respondent also served as the school guidance counselor for over 35 years, experiencing two administrative structures. Another community member had grandchildren who attended Pennsburg during the K-12 time frame, taught there during that time, and served on the Board of Education during the K-12 era. Each of these individuals had multiple perspectives regarding the school.

**Respondents’ Perceptions of Their Experiences With the Case-Study School**

Respondents from the community group were asked to react to their experiences with the following topics: attitudes of children, attitudes of staff, activities observed or attended, and miscellaneous interactions with the school. Student attitudes were the first topic to be addressed. The first community member to respond indicated that students
were close-knit at Pennsburg. He indicated that “the whole school was community orientated. I think that the teachers encouraged this. Pennsburg was always closely connected to the community.” Another respondent also addressed the closeness of the students. She said, “There are close connections between everyone here probably because of the proximity and the attitudes of the staff. The kids never lose the connections they develop in their elementary years.” Another indicated that for the most part the kids were happy. This participant said, “They related to the greater community, the churches. The students had good relationships with each other.”

The final respondent said, “In this building kids get to know each other, even across grade levels. This is really nice for all the kids. Role modeling was the standard at Pennsburg.” This community member added, “Since the buildings are split you don’t see as much interaction between the grades. There used to be good community interaction from the school, like when the high-school students helped set up for the Coal Festival. Now this has stopped too.”

The second topic was attitudes of the teachers at Pennsburg. All five respondents indicated that the staff had positive attitudes. One indicated that this was the basis for a good comfort level for the students. Another said that the staff worked well together and that that attitude flowed to the students. This person said that there were no cliques at Pennsburg like at other schools. She said, “All staff members get along well. It’s like they have a goal—a purpose: the kids. The teachers are interested in the whole kid, the entire child and it shows. It’s an attitude that sucks you in.”

One of the respondents addressed the principal as a member of the staff. He indicated that students were connected to their teachers. He said, “That was true for the
administration too. The students always felt that they were important as individuals to the principal. I think that was partly due to the fact that they were together for so long.”

The third topic was activities observed or attended. Each of the respondents had positive examples of activities that often transcended grade levels. Three of the community members mentioned the positive effects of the peer-mentoring program. Two of them shared long-term relationships that have existed between tutors and their tutees. One said, “I was a tutor when I went to Pennsburg. I helped in the sixth grade. I went on field trips with them like to New York City to help keep track of the kids. I still have relationships with kids that I worked with years ago.”

Another community member spoke about her interactions as a guest speaker at Pennsburg. She indicated that “as a business person I had only one person to contact to set up my sessions. The K-12 structure and one administrator allowed for that.” She also indicated that communication was easy for parents regarding all kinds of issues for the same reason.

One of the other community members spoke of several specific events. She addressed the spring Academic Fair. She stated, “Not only do parents come to check out their kid’s work, but younger and older kids are interested in seeing what the others did. The student enthusiasm is great.” This respondent mentioned the Kindergarten Bound night. Older siblings come with their parents and kindergartners. She also talked about Girls Night Out. Sixth- and seventh-grade girls spent an overnight experience with key personnel talking about growth and development and sharing age-appropriate activities.

The last topic was to describe any miscellaneous interactions with the school. One of the respondents indicated that when there was one administrative unit, mentor
teachers could be assigned across the whole school. She shared, “I remember when two elementary special-education teachers handled the induction for two new high-school special-education teachers. Not only did the strongest teachers serve as mentors, but it also made the curriculum flow better across the grades.”

One of the members of this interview group talked about watching the accepting behavior of the student body toward special-needs children. She indicated that everyone can fit in. “It’s not just the teachers, but the kids who are so accepting and provide such great support,” she said.

Respondents’ Impressions of the K-12 Educational Structure

Each of the participants had the opportunity to share their overall perceptions regarding the K-12 school setting based on their experiences at Pennsburg. Each of the five respondents shared strong positive feelings about the K-12. The first community member stated, “The K-12 I know supports kids and makes a positive comfort level for them.” She went on to explain that in other schools she has been associated with, only the good students received attention. She indicated that at Pennsburg things are different and that all the teachers are caring. She concluded, “The K-12 I know supports kids and makes a positive comfort level for them.”

Several of the other participants also addressed a sense of belonging and the ease of transitioning in the K-12. One stated, “It takes the shock and stress out of the transition to the high school.” He related that because of the shared activities, students already know many of the high-school teachers before they reach high-school age. He added, “I like the flow of the K-12. Pupil/teacher relationships are great here. My nieces
and nephews have too many transitions and they don’t feel comfortable with their
teachers like kids do here.”

Another respondent also addressed belonging. She said, “I think there was always
a sense of being part of something big. It sounds trite, but being at Pennsburg was like
being part of a big happy family.” This respondent also addressed the ease of transition.
“Since there had been so many joint activities, the younger kids already felt like they
were a part of the high school.” This participant closed her comments by saying, “I think
the strongest positive thing about the K-12 was the great role models of both the teachers
and the older kids. This fostered communication between the grade levels. The staff was
so involved and knew the kids so well that the kids older and younger had a lot more
nurturing.”

One of the other community members spoke of the closeness of the students at
Pensburg. He indicated that the students remained close even when some of them
moved away. “I think kids from this school are more involved with each other and their
communities. It is a way of life for them. This is a result of the K-12.” “One of the best
things about the K-12 was that you could watch kids like in a study through the whole
process,” he added. He shared that his perception was that teachers in a K-12 really got
to know the kids. He said, “The school could get a handle on how to work with a kid,
and more importantly pass that on to other teachers easily. In a guidance setting,
sometimes things came to light at either level and could be shared. Without that
connection lots of things would never get addressed.” Finally, this respondent said that it
was easier to work with the curriculum in a K-12. He said, “You can pick out the holes
and fix them easily. We did that with a discrepancy in terminology between sixth- and seventh-grade math terms. The communication of the K-12 makes this possible.”

The last respondent in this group of community members shared perceptions from the viewpoint of a secretary who worked in Pennsburg when it was a K-12 setting. She addressed the importance of having the principal always available. She indicated, “If there was a problem or an issue, it could be addressed until it was concluded. The principal knew all the kids so there was a consistent flow to all the dealings with each student. The strongest point about the K-12 was the continuity, the consistency, one community.”

None of the individuals in this group of community members identified any negative aspects of the K-12 setting. One individual did state that the role modeling of the older students could have been negative except that the culture of the school and the support offered by the K-12 setting would not accept negative role modeling. The perceptions of the group can be summarized by this comment from one of the participants: “I definitely want my kids to be able to go to a K-12 school.”

Emergent Themes From the Community Interview Group

Several themes grew from the responses of this interview group, community members with firsthand experience of Pennsburg during the K-12 years. One of the strongest themes to emerge from this group was that relationships between students and teachers and among students were strong and positive. Two of the five respondents included the principal as a participant in these positive relationships. The peer-mentoring program was perceived as a causative factor in the development of these positive relationships.
A second theme was that the students felt comfortable and secure at Pennsburg. Respondents felt that students had a strong sense of belonging. This perception of student comfort was linked to the positive interactions between the students, teachers, and principal.

The third theme that emerged from this group was that there were extensive activities that transcended grade levels. Each participant was able to share several activities that he or she perceived helped to increase children’s sense of belonging, strengthened students’ acceptance of others, and stretched students’ academic growth.

The strongest themes that were generated by this interview group are listed below:

1. Strong interpersonal relationships between teachers and students and between students
2. An excellent peer-mentoring program
3. Positive activities that transcended grade levels
4. A strong level of comfort and a sense of belonging.

**Emergent Themes Across Four Interview Groups**

Four sets of individuals were interviewed regarding their perceptions of Pennsburg when it operated as a K-12. The groups included were (a) graduates of Pennsburg including some who returned to teach there, (b) other teachers who graduated from other administrative structures, (c) parents of students who graduated from Pennsburg, and (d) community members. The prime requirement for participation was that the individual had to have had extensive firsthand knowledge of Pennsburg during its 20-year tenure as a K-12 single-campus school.
After drilling into the data collected from each of the four interview groups, there are themes that appear to be constant across all four groups and several themes that were constant in two or three of the interview groups. Following are common themes that emerged from each of the four groups. The first constant theme is that the relationships between students and teachers at Pennsburg were close and personal. Reasons cited for these strong relationships include proximity: Students and teachers “brushed shoulders” in the office area and in the hallways on a regular basis. Since students were readily accessible, it was easy for teachers to not only maintain contact, but monitor student growth in a variety of venues. In addition, it was possible for students to easily access a former teacher with whom they had had positive interactions, particularly in times of stress or need.

The second constant theme across the interview groups was a belief that the peer-mentoring program that provided high-school tutors for elementary classrooms was perceived as being successful. Each group of participants stressed the value of the program for all of the participants. Respondents felt that the younger students benefited from exceptional young role models, often high-school athletes, while older students developed a sense of self-esteem and community responsibility. At least one respondent from each interview group related a story about long-lasting relationships that were formed between tutors and their “students.”

The third strong theme was a belief that cross-grade activities that fostered a sense of belonging, safety, and comfort were beneficial to all participants. A variety of activities were shared that involved older students working with younger students in whole-class activities or individual activities. These included Rocket Day, Block Party,
field trips, Track and Field Day, whole-school K-12 partnered reading, and special content activities that paired an elementary and high-school class together. Respondents stressed the value of strong, positive role models for the younger students. Several of the respondents were able to remember when they or their children participated in these activities. The general perception was that activities like the Block Party were eagerly anticipated by everyone and helped to add to a strong sense of belonging.

Cross-grade activities that fostered a sense of belonging in a safe, comfortable environment were discussed in a variety of ways, but were addressed by each of the groups. Most respondents indicated that the strong teacher/student relationships helped to foster these feelings of belonging. In the interview group that taught in Pennsburg, but attended other types of school structures, a common theme was that the culture of their schools was overall negative. This group would have changed that condition in their alma maters if they could. They did not have a sense of belonging to their schools as did the respondents who attended Pennsburg or who had children or relatives who attended there.

These key themes—strong, close student/teacher relationships, enriching cross-grade activities, a powerful peer-mentoring program, and cross-grade activities that fostered a sense of comfort, security, and belonging—were perceived to have grown out of a K-12 structure in which staff and students at various grades from the high school and the elementary classes intermingled in purposeful activities across grades and content. The closeness and physical proximity of teachers and students at all grade levels encouraged these themes. The physical connection of a common office area supported this direction.
The perceptions of the individuals interviewed regarding their experiences with Pennsburg as a K-12 school were positive. The next analysis of the results provides some insight into the perceptions of several groups of students who were attending Pennsburg in 2005.

**Historic Student Survey Themes**

In order to expand on the perceptions of the K-12 school structure at Pennsburg, I wanted to provide some data based on the perceptions of students who were attending Pennsburg during the time that it was operating as a K-12 school. During the summer of 2004, the assistant elementary principal, the high-school guidance counselor, and several teachers from the K-12 school attended a Pennsylvania Governor’s Institute. The purpose of the institute was to examine the day-to-day practices of participants’ schools in regard to their impact on the culture of the school. As a team, we determined that one of our goals for that school year was to ‘polish’ the climate of our school. Team members brought back a starter survey (Adler, 2007) from the Governor’s Institute that was administered to students as a point from which to begin this process.

Two classes were selected to take the survey: members of the class of 2005, the senior class, and members of the class of 2011, the sixth-grade class. One section, 25 of the 42 seniors that year, completed the survey. The sixth-grade class was exceptionally small that year at 34 students, and 31 of those students completed the survey. The Pennsburg School Improvement Team chose those grades so that students of both elementary and high-school age could share their perceptions of their school.

The survey was developed by the School District of Palm Beach County Department of Safe Schools (Adler, 2007). It is not a norm-referenced document, but
was developed to be used as a starting place for schools that were interested in looking at the culture of their schools. This purpose was in alignment with the goal of the Pennsburg team. There are 24 questions on the survey, which appears in its entirety in Appendix J. Students were to circle one of the following responses to each statement: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Statements 2 through 15 ask for student opinions regarding how teachers should behave in a given situation, or how students feel regarding theoretical aspects about education in general. For example, statement 5 reads: Student misbehavior provides a teaching opportunity. Statement 14 reads: Data is feedback about performance and how close students are to their targets. Information collected about these statements provides little insight regarding student perceptions about the actual climate at Pennsburg. Statement 1 and statements 16 through 24 develop data that are directly linked to students’ perceptions about their school. Additionally, reactions to these statements directly relate to the themes that were isolated from the four groups that were interviewed in my study. Looking at these data provided the second step in the process of triangulation.

Questions 1 and 16 through 24 relate directly to students’ perceptions about the climate of their school. Table 13 lists questions 1 and 16 through 24 and the combined percentage of students who answered agree or strongly agree to each of these statements. A percentage was determined for each survey by dividing the number of responses of agree or strongly agree by the number of students responding to that statement. Percentages for each statement were then averaged. For example, 74% of the seniors and
56% of the sixth-graders circled agree or strongly agree to statement 18. The average of their percentages was 65%. These average percentages are reported in Table 13.

Table 13

Average Percentages of Students Responding Agree or Strongly Agree to the Following Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>% of students in agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The same rules are in effect across the campus.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. There are adults on campus who will support students’ social and emotional growth.</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Students are in the company of adults who will listen to them.</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. All students have at least one adult they feel connected to.</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. There is a sense of community at school.</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Students are made to feel that they are valuable contributors.</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Students have opportunities to lead activities, such as student government, peer mediation, and/or participate in drug and violence prevention, peace-promoting initiatives, community service, etc.</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Students learn language, attitudes, and behaviors to prevent substance abuse.</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Students are afforded the opportunity to engage in career exploration.</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Students are afforded opportunities to develop special interests in the arts, physical education, and leadership.</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statements 16, 17, and 18 relate directly to teacher/student relationships. Ninety-four percent of the students from both the elementary and secondary age groups agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 16: There are adults on campus who will support students’ social and emotional growth. Eighty-four percent of the combined group of students believed Statement 17: Students are in the company of adults who will listen to them. Finally, the perception of 65% of the group of students was aligned with Statement 18: All students have at least one adult they feel connected to. These high percentages of agreement indicate that in this K-12 school there are close, personal relationships between the students and the teachers. This student belief matches the perceptions of each of the groups interviewed. While all four groups strongly supported the belief that student/teacher relationships were exceptionally positive at Pennsburg, this was especially true for Pennsburg graduates. Stated another way, students assessed during their experience at Pennsburg and graduates all perceived their relationships with their teachers as positive and strong.

Statements 19 through 24 can be grouped into statements that reflect on the students’ sense of belonging or a sense of community. The average percentage of responses from both elementary and secondary students ranged from 64 to 86% agreement with these statements. Statement 19, *There is a strong sense of community at school*, rated a 76% approval. Again, this perception mirrors the beliefs of all four of the interview groups who positively addressed the sense of community. Statement 20, *Students are made to feel that they are valuable contributors*, may be one of the reasons that students feel such a strong sense of belonging to Pennsburg.
Statements 21, 22, and 23 received a positive average rating of 64%. Statement 21, *Students have opportunities to lead activities, such as student government, peer mediation, and/or participate in drug and violence prevention, peace-promoting initiatives, community service, mentoring, etc.*, had a 66% approval. Statement 22, *Students learn language, attitudes, and behaviors to prevent substance abuse and violence*, had a positive rating of 64%. Finally, students rated Statement 23, *Students are afforded the opportunity to engage in career exploration*, at 65% agreement. Each of these statements points to a curriculum driven by an educational attitude concerned about the growth of the whole child. Participants who were interviewed about their perceptions of this K-12 provided numerous specific examples of activities that would support these student perceptions. Peer mentoring was one of the most significant examples stressed by each of the interview groups. The frequent references to the older students providing strong role models for younger students would support the acquisition of attitudes that would be against the abuse of drugs. Another benefit of the peer-mentoring program would be the opportunity for many high-school-age students to mentor younger students in a variety of settings both within the confines of the school and on meaningful field experiences outside of the school.

Strong agreement, 86%, with Statement 24, *Students are afforded opportunities to develop special interests in the arts, physical education, and leadership*, is another indication that even though Pennsburg is a relatively small school with a limited curriculum, students still have many opportunities to extend their personal interests in these areas. Looking back to the responses of those interviewed sheds some light on why this statement was so highly rated by students.
Participants from each of the groups gave multiple examples of the cross-grade activities that they experienced at Pennsburg. These activities were never limited by the administration. Whenever two teachers found a common interest or content, cross-grade activities developed. Leadership opportunities for students abounded during these projects and activities. Whole-school reads were but one excellent way for older students to model for younger ones. Student chaperones for field activities would be another example cited by the interview participants.

Statement 1, The same rules are in effect across the campus, received only a 15% agreement from the surveyed students. When the Single School Culture Team first viewed the responses to this question, it seemed very negative. Looking back at comments from the interview groups regarding the consistency of discipline would, initially, indicate a discrepancy between surveyed student perceptions and the perceptions of members of all four interview groups. In an effort to gain a better understanding of students’ views, the principal at that time informally spoke with groups of seniors and sixth-graders who completed the survey. The younger students indicated that some teachers allowed them to chew gum in their rooms while others did not. This one situation was the primary reason that the sixth-graders felt that campus rules were not uniform. The students did feel that “big offenses” such as being involved in a fight were all handled in a similar fashion.

The seniors were more adamant regarding discipline differences in the day-to-day operation of the school. One of the students gave the example of classmates using inappropriate language. There is a clear standing policy that if a teacher overhears inappropriate language used by a student, they are to write this on a discipline form
including the word(s) in quotations. When this is received in the office, the principal or Dean of Students will know when they see the quotation marks that this is exactly what the teacher heard. A hierarchy of consequences would then be imposed. The student concern was that not all teachers enforced the rule consistently.

Similar objections were addressed by other students who added concerns about the differences in how teachers handled students not completing homework, eating food or having drinks in the classroom, conflicts between students, and other day-to-day operational procedures. Students did agree that the ban on wearing hats in the building was uniformly enforced by all faculty members. Students indicated their preference for classroom procedures in some rooms as opposed to the procedures that were followed in other classrooms. They did not indicate displeasure with the differences between operational procedures from class to class. That is, they did not feel that there was a hardship for students moving from one teacher’s rules to another’s. They did, however, reinforce their position that rules were not consistently enforced across the campus. The Single School Culture Team used this student feedback to reinforce with colleagues the need for more consistent application of procedures school-wide.

Two themes emerged from the student survey completed by 6th- and 12th-grade students. The first theme was that the student/teacher relationships at Pennsburg were strong and positive. The second theme was that there was a strong sense of belonging and community among the students at Pennsburg. These themes parallel the themes that emerged from the interview groups. Cross-grade activities and the peer-mentoring program that were fostered by the K-12 structure were credited as causes of these themes.
Principal's Reflections

The following reflections span the last 15 years when Pennsburg operated as a K-12 single-campus school. Having served as the sole administrator for much of that time prior to the addition of a half-time assistant, my direct reflections can provide a unique perspective on this case study. As the researcher, it was necessary to integrate principal reflections with interview group and survey themes to provide a holistic picture of this entity.

My first experience with Pennsburg occurred the spring prior to assuming the administration of the complex. I spent a week visiting the school to become familiar with the school and the community. The day I arrived was Rocket Day. The entire elementary school was assembled at White Pine Park to watch sixth-graders set off rockets they had built during science class. In addition, there were high-school tutors involved in the rocket launchings. High-school physical education classes were using the swimming pool. Other high-school groups were involved in a volleyball game and softball game. These were rewards for outstanding performance in the classroom.

My first impression was mass chaos. As I watched the interactions of the various groups and individuals, both adult and student, it became apparent that there was a web of structure underlying all of the activity. What was most amazing was the interaction of the older and younger students. Most of my previous educational experiences had been in segregated structures, elementary, middle, or high-school settings where students of specific ages were isolated. Here elementary and high-school-age students were involved in a variety of activities. What was even more startling was the intervention I observed.
One example involved a smaller group of elementary students who were fighting over a rocket that they had retrieved after flight. The students were shouting at each other, which had drawn my attention. Before I got to the scene, an older student, one of the peer helpers, stepped into the dispute. He took the rocket and helped the younger boys determine the markings on the rocket and ultimately who the rocket belonged to.

Later that morning, as I was walking near the end of one of the fields, I overheard several high-school girls direct some third-graders to go back closer to their classmates who were playing near the pavilion. This type of “nurturing” was to play out time after time that day and for all of my years as the Pennsburg principal. This attitude and behavior were not an accident. Probably 10% of the high-school student population of about 350 students was actively involved in the peer-mentoring program each semester. These high-school mentors directly observed teachers interact with their students. They modeled these behaviors when they worked with the younger students. Adults assumed that the older students would direct the younger ones, and the younger ones accepted direction from the older students.

Strong role modeling by the high-school students was the standard over time. This is not to say that a high-school tutor was never reprimanded, or in a few cases removed. Many of the student athletes opted to participate in the mentoring program. The majority of coaches taught in the elementary section and the older students enjoyed this extra contact with their coaches that tutoring allowed. While this in itself benefited the older students, it also provided in-class heroes for the younger students.

While walking the halls during routine observing, at least four or five tutors would be seen in various classrooms. One-on-one mentors often worked intensively with
students who needed extra help. The excitement over a “success” that emanated from these sessions was a joy. The benefit to both parties was obvious. Routinely, a mentor would stop me in the hall to share the progress of their “student.”

As these elementary students moved into the junior-high grades, they already had a positive and supportive mentor who maintained their role. This helped to make the transition to the high school so much easier for those students with academic or social difficulties. At joint activities those younger students would often gravitate to their mentors where they felt comfortable. I directly observed the longevity of these relationships, including into the post-graduation years for students who stayed in the community.

Another unique characteristic of the Pennsburg School was the number and variety of cross-grade activities that students and teachers participated in. Since many staff members had worked with each other for years, they had developed not only good working relationships, but a solid understanding of content taught by their colleagues. It was a natural step due to the proximity of all the grade levels to be able to work together on pet projects. The advantages to students of these cross-grade projects were obvious: opportunities to examine rich content in a hands-on context. As the principal, I began to encourage these types of activities.

We also expanded on the scale of the activities. For example, reading partners in a fourth-grade and an eighth-grade who both studied the battle of Gettysburg grew into a whole-school read. The elementary Title 1 teachers paired each student K through Grade 12 with a partner. Books were aligned to the ability level of each pair of students. At the designated time, the entire junior/senior-high section of the building melted into the
elementary section of the school. The result was 45 minutes of character-building reinforcement for over 700 students. Title I teachers paid special attention to the abilities of learning-support students to make sure they were matched to reading level peers. At the conclusion of the first activity, I was asked over and over, “When can we do this again?” The question came from staff as well as students.

Another huge advantage of the K-12 setting was the opportunity to enact curricular changes in a positive and efficient manner. Being the sole or lead administrator in a K-12 setting provides some unique curricular opportunities. Here are several examples. Several of the Title I teachers approached me with a program to promote individual reading by students, Reading Counts. In this program students read books on their level and then take brief quizzes on the classroom computers. The staff in the elementary grades began to level classroom and library collections. We ordered a number of quizzes and began the program. When the sixth-grade students moved to seventh grade, the program went with them with my endorsement. The next year I added the program to the eighth-grade curriculum. Teachers used a variety of procedures to make the program meaningful for students. Some teachers added extra points to grades for the completion of Reading Counts Quizzes. Others used this as a regular reading grade. This provided a flow from the primary grades through the junior high years that encouraged students to read.

Changes in curriculum are also more easily addressed in this structure. In the late 1990s our junior and senior high-school math scores on the summative PSSA tests were poor. Staff in the upper intermediate grades and math teachers in the high school met to look for causes for these weak scores. One of the issues that became apparent during
these discussions was that the vocabulary used in the lower grades was inconsistent with that used in the upper grades. During subtraction, some grades borrowed while some regrouped. Teachers across the grades agreed on appropriate terminology and began to use the agreed vocabulary in all of their classes. This developed a consistent flow in this curricular area.

The ability to meet across the grade lines to discuss curriculum is a real bonus of the K-12 structure. Due to proximity and positive peer relationships fostered by the structure, teachers at Pennsburg communicated frequently to attack curricular issues and to plan for the multitude of cross-grade activities.

School-wide policies were also an advantage to students, parents, and staff. These policies could be as simple as requiring all students K-12 to remove hats before entering the building, to more complex issues such as homework. During the course of the 1990s, most of the staff was sent to receive APL Training. APL Training focused on a set of research-based classroom management strategies that helped to maintain focus while improving academic success for all students. After the staff had been trained, the techniques learned were put in place school-wide, K-12. All students profited from the appropriate use of wait time, bell ringers, checking for understanding, on the clock, and other effective strategies.

One of the outgrowths of the APL Training was the development of a K-12 homework policy. Based on the research shared by the APL presenters, a group of staff from across the grades developed and implemented this consistent policy. The policy was shared with all stakeholders providing clear expectations for all, and much more
support than we had previously experienced from parents. The policy developed by staff is in Appendix I.

Other in-servicing was more easily scheduled due to Pennsburg’s structure. Mentor meetings, a part of the new teacher Induction Plan, between the principal, new teachers, and mentors could be held as joint meetings. Again, a consistent building-wide approach could be shared with new staff and reinforced with veteran staff. In a geographically large school district with seven buildings—three elementary schools and three junior/senior high schools—Pennsburg was able to function under one, consistent set of rules. This allowed for a smoother transition for students moving to seventh grade and provided for better relations with parents who knew the rules from Kindergarten up through the grades.

The most significant benefit of the K-12 single-campus school, in my opinion, was the long-term, positive relationships between staff and students. This was also true for the principal. When you have known a sophomore’s background from the time he or she was in kindergarten, you have a huge amount of knowledge about him or her. You are aware of their learning style, likes and dislikes, triggers that affect behavior, triggers that can increase motivation, and special talents and deficits. This knowledge made the principal a huge resource for the classroom teacher who was having difficulty dealing with a given student or finding ways to reach that student.

It also allowed the principal to enact developmental strategies to help each child reach her potential. Attention to appropriate behavior or academic achievements allowed the principal to guide the child’s growth in all areas. Due to this knowledge base, the principal was a valuable asset in Individual Educational Planning Meetings (IEP
Meetings) for students with specific learning issues. Rather than attacking student issues in a reactive manner, it was possible to develop proactive plans that helped students at all ages grow at their own rates.

Students also viewed the principal at Pennsburg differently from other schools. The principal was not just the disciplinarian and building manager, but someone you could approach with any kind of issue. To some extent, this was due to the small size of the school, which averaged 50 students per grade from K-12. It was, however, the opportunity to have all kinds of interactions over time that built the relationship. These interactions also allowed the principal to know students on a deep and personal level. These principal/student relationships allowed the developmental philosophy of the K-12 structure to come full circle. Regardless of their individual role as teacher, paraprofessional, or principal, all adults were also interested caregivers. This was the philosophy of the building which was facilitated by the K-12 structure and proximity of all grades and teachers. The themes identified by the Pennsburg principal as significant characteristics of the case-study school are listed below:

1. Cross-grade activities that fostered positive role modeling
2. Uninterrupted flow of curriculum
3. Strong personal relationships between teachers and students
4. Ease of enacting consistent procedural, behavioral, or curricular changes across the grades.
Conclusions: Common Themes Reflected Across Three Data Sources: The Four Interview Groups, the Single School Survey, and the Reflections of the Building Principal

In an attempt to examine the school climate of the case-study school, Pennsburg, three sources of data were collected. Data were acquired from four interviewed groups: graduates of Pennsburg, teachers who taught at Pennsburg but attended structures other that a single-campus school, parents whose children attended Pennsburg, and community members. The only criterion for participation was that the individual have firsthand knowledge of Pennsburg when it operated as a single-campus school.

The second source of data was information gleaned from a school climate survey completed by two groups: the class of 2005 and the class of 2011. This survey was developed by the Palm Beach County Department of Safe schools (Adler, 2007). It was intended to provide some initial data about the culture of a school for school officials who were interested in examining the climate of their schools.

Finally, reflections from the principal who administered the Pennsburg complex for 15 of the 20 years when it operated as a single-campus school were examined. Emergent themes that grew out of the data were re-examined to identify the key themes that defined the school climate of Pennsburg and to determine if those key themes were impacted by the true K-12.

Two key themes were common across all three sources of data. An additional key theme was not included in the survey given to students, but was a key theme across all four interview groups and the principal’s reflections. These three key themes are listed below:

1. Cross-grade activities that foster strong role models
2. An effective peer-mentoring program that benefited all participants

3. Exceptional, long-lasting, close, personal relationships between the students and the teachers at Pennsburg.

The first two themes—cross-grade activities that foster strong role models and an effective peer-mentoring program that benefited all participants—were possible and were nurtured by the proximity of all students and faculty in the K-12 setting. The simple fact that everyone was accessible to everyone else and in the course of daily living had occasion to interact with others made Pennsburg different. Teachers meeting in a common office-area and sharing coaches across the school who worked with both high-school and elementary-age students encouraged the cross-grade activities. The staff knew each other, and professional collaboration grew.

The same was true for the peer-mentoring program. Older students did not have to travel to another site; they merely walked across the hall. Since they were so accessible, it was easy to schedule students into the elementary. One elementary teacher worked directly with the high-school guidance counselor to facilitate this program. When an elementary teacher needed a big brother or sister to help manage a child’s behavior or a reading or math tutor, it was a simple procedure to find an older student who was available to help. The K-12 structure made this possible.

Detractors might question the link between the K-12 structure and the strong teacher relationships with students. After all, shouldn’t positive student/teacher relationships be the case in all schools? Data provided by the second interview group who attended other educational structures indicated that the special relationships fostered at Pennsburg were not typical in any of their schools. Does the small size of the school
impact the intensity of student/teacher relationships? There is research that supports that conclusion. However, the power of the day-to-day interaction supported by the peer-mentoring program, proximity, and the variety of cross-grade activities at Pennsburg allowed for the development of long-lasting, deep relationships.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The following conclusions and recommendations have resulted from a qualitative case study of a K-12 single-campus school organizational structure. The case study examined the school climate of Pennsburg School, a K-12 complex located in rural Pennsylvania. Pennsburg is a part of the Northwoods School District. Pennsburg School operated as a K-12 entity for a period of 20 years from 1995 through the spring of 2005. During this time there were two lead administrators, one who served for 5 years and another for 15 years.

A small number of K-12 single-campus school organizational structures can be found in rural school districts across the United States. Economic constraints have caused the demise of this structure as well as many smaller community schools as policy makers have used school consolidations as an answer to economic woes. This study took an in-depth look at one K-12 single-campus school in terms of the school climate through the eyes of groups of individuals who had firsthand experience with that entity.

Problem

As school districts have attempted to reach the academic goals of the No Child Left Behind Legislation, they have generated numerous unintended consequences.
Weaver (2003) suggests higher dropout rates, eliminating all but core courses, the loss of highly qualified teachers, and a narrowing of the curriculum are results of the new direction of public education. The problem for educators is to raise academic standards while maintaining the richness of the educational fabric without generating the negative unintended consequences.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine a disappearing school organizational structure, the K-12 single-campus school, to determine if such a setting could help educators reach academic goals in an environment reminiscent of the goals of the one-room school-house. Kruez (2006) lists those goals as developing citizenship, personal relationships, and character.

A second purpose of the study was to provide data for policymakers on the K-12 single-campus school as they look at alternative organizational structures to meet their educational goals.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question was: What are some of the unique characteristics of a single-campus school? Additional questions that were addressed included: Is there a curriculum flow, connections that link content across the grades? How do students, staff, and faculty live their lives in this type of school? What is the school climate like in such a setting? What are interpersonal relationships like? Are there social and/or academic benefits?
Research Design
This study used a “single case-study design.” One entity, a K-12 single-campus school, was examined. Data about this institution were gathered from three sources: four interview groups, administrator reflections, and a school climate survey. Four groups of individuals were interviewed. The interview groups included graduates of Pennsburg, teachers who taught in Pennsburg but attended other educational structures, parents of Pennsburg students, and Pennsburg community members. To be eligible as a participant, an individual needed to have firsthand knowledge of Pennsburg when it operated as a K-12 school. A school-climate survey completed by students in Grades 6 and 12 in 2005 was examined for relevant data. In addition, I, as the principal who served as the chief administrator of Pennsburg for 15 years, provided reflections regarding the climate of the school as I perceived it.

The collected data were analyzed for emergent themes from each data source. Common themes across the four interview groups were then identified. Finally, common themes across all three data sources were revealed. Based on such an analysis of these data, conclusions were drawn and recommendations presented.

To protect the anonymity of the respondents, pseudonyms were used for the names of both the school and the school district. In addition, the gender of respondents was mixed in the reporting process.

Conceptual Framework
The conceptual framework for this study was based on the research and theories of Charlotte Danielson and Robert Marzano. Danielson’s work, *Enhancing Profesional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, was used as the basis for the state teacher
evaluation system for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Danielson, 2006). One fourth of the evaluation document, Domain Two, is devoted to the classroom environment. It addresses:

1. Component 2a: Creating an environment of respect and rapport
2. Component 2b: Establishing a culture of learning
3. Component 2c: Managing classroom procedures
4. Component 2d: Managing student behavior
5. Component 2d: Organizing physical space (Danielson, 2006).

These components are critical factors in school climate and were addressed in the interview groups and the school survey, as well as in the principal’s reflection.

Marzano’s (2003) findings in What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action, are a compilation of 35 years of educational research on school climate. He lists five factors that affect school climate and ultimately student success. The factors include:

1. Guaranteed and viable curriculum
2. Challenging goals and effective feedback
3. Parent and community involvement
4. Safe and orderly environment
5. Collegiality and professionalism.

Data gathered in this study were sifted through the lens of Marzano’s school climate factors. In a similar manner, emergent themes were linked to those same factors.
Results Linked to Research and Conclusions

Deal and Peterson (1999) suggest that individuals’ collective perceptions about organizations to which they belong have a significant effect on their productivity or academic success. What was the collective feedback on the school climate of Pennsburg? Three main themes emerged from the data sources and were present in each of the four groups interviewed. In addition, there were three other themes worthy of note. The three main themes that emerged are listed below:

1. An effective peer-mentoring program that benefited all participants
2. Cross-grade activities that foster strong role models
3. Exceptional, long-lasting, close personal relationships between the students and the teachers at Pennsburg.

An effective peer-mentoring program, the first theme, was enthusiastically reported by each of the interview groups. One of the graduates interviewed said, “As a kindergarten student, I could hardly wait for our high-school buddy to come to read to us. It was so exciting to have high school mentors.” This same sentiment was echoed by a non-graduate teacher, who in discussing the positive aspects of the peer-mentoring program related, “One of my students, John, went to the elementary to work with the elementary kids. He was a super athlete and a super guy. The little kids really looked up to him. It was a great experience for John and the little guys.” This teacher indicated that this type of tutoring would never have happened at his alma mater.

Both the parent and community interview groups reported that either their children/grandchildren or someone they knew had had positive experiences in the peer-mentoring program. One parent indicated that his children had the benefit of great high-
school role models when they were young and then were able to serve as tutors and role models when they were older. A community member said, “My children learned to give back to the community—a lesson learned through the school.”

Commenting on the peer-mentoring program, the former principal related that long-term relationships were developed between students and their mentors. These relationships made transitioning to the high-school section easier since younger students already had a positive high-school link in their previous mentors. He also reported that there were multiple benefits of this program. Mentoring often provided a positive role model for younger children who had no positive role model in their lives outside of the school setting. Older students learned responsibility—to be on time, to be prepared, and to develop a caring attitude toward their students. One of the participants indicated that in this type of structure the possibility existed for negative peer role modeling. She also stated that the faculty and staff of the school did a good job of monitoring students and negative modeling although if it happened on occasion, it was not tolerated.

Marzano (2003) examined over 35 years of educational research to identify key factors in academic success related to school climate. Pennsburg’s peer-mentoring program is linked to four of the five factors he identified. A guaranteed and viable curriculum, one of Marzano’s (2003) key factors, was strengthened by peer mentors who helped academic or behaviorally needy children reach the goals of the curriculum. Mentors helped students by presenting challenging goals and providing effective feedback. The previously noted story of a high-school mentor taking his student to the high-school shop as a reward for reaching classroom goals is an excellent example of this. Parent and community involvement was strengthened as older students became
involved with younger students in a positive manner and shared those experiences with family members.

Marzano’s fourth factor, a safe and orderly environment, was also fostered by the peer-mentoring program. Younger students grew to trust and depend on their mentors to help them and in some cases to protect them. One of the respondents interviewed stated in support of the K-12 structure at Pennsburg, “As a child [the school climate] would feel comfortable, safe, and free.” This belief was shared by members of each of the groups interviewed.

The second theme, cross-grade activities, was cited by each of the interview groups and the former principal. This theme also relates to Marzano’s fourth factor, a safe and orderly environment, and the fifth factor, collegiality and professionalism. To be able to bring cross-grade activities to fruition requires substantial effort in managing the environment. Class schedules, availability of resources, and locations throughout the buildings need to be carefully coordinated. These types of opportunities were fostered by the proximity afforded by the physically connected K-12 setting.

Collegiality and professionalism, again encouraged by the proximity provided by the K-12 single-campus school, caused the cross-grade activities to flourish. Multiple opportunities to casually meet in the adjoining offices and the ease of visiting staff at any grade level allowed conversations that grew into long-term projects. An eighth-grade Social Studies teacher with a Reading Certificate paired with a fourth-grade teacher to develop and facilitate a unit on the Civil War. A fifth-grade Science Fair grew into a school-wide Academic Fair. As these types of cross-grade activities developed relationships among professionals and students, it became easier for staff to collaborate
on specific students’ needs. One respondent offered, “As students move from grade to grade, there is always someone who can shed light on the student’s learning style; what works and what doesn’t.” Collegial relationships grew in this setting and prospered. Pennsburg reflected the ideal collaborative school as characterized by Smith and Scott (1990): “Teachers plan instruction together and share ideas, they identify teacher leaders who promote improved instructional practices, and they do not hesitate to seek help” (p. 16). As a result, efforts to support students became increasingly more effective.

The third main theme was that exceptional, long-lasting, close personal relationships between the students and teachers existed at Pennsburg. Palmer (1997) says that “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique: good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. Good teachers join self and subjects and students in the fabric of life” (p. 17). These statements were reflected in the comments from all four interview groups. Graduates said things like, “Relationships with teachers were warm and comfortable” and “The teachers were interested in helping all kids no matter how hard it was.” The second interview group, non-Pennsburg graduate teachers, bemoaned the fact that they never had those close ties with the teachers in their schools and were quick to contrast the positive relationships between Pennsburg’s students and staff.

Ninety-four percent of the students surveyed in Grades 6 and 12 indicated that there were adults on campus who would support students’ social and emotional growth. Eighty-four percent of those students said that they were in the company of adults who will listen to them, whereas 64% of the students felt connected to at least one adult. These surveys were conducted in 2005, when Pennsburg was still operating as a K-12
single-campus school. This further substantiates the positive feelings students had about their relationships with their teachers.

The Pennsburg principal noted, “The most significant benefit of the K-12 single-campus school was the long-term, positive relationships between staff and students.” He observed that this type of relationship also existed between the principal and the students. Working with students from their kindergarten year through their senior year provided a wealth of knowledge about the student in academic and social terms. This thorough knowledge of the children allowed the teachers and principal to develop pro-active strategies to help each child progress. It also provided each child with caring adults who knew them well and could be a significant resource in times of need. Brophy and Good (1986) reiterate the perceptions of the participants when they state, “The myth that teachers do not make a difference in student learning has been refuted” (p. 370).

While any of these three key themes might be revealed in other schools, they were not so indicated by any of the participants interviewed who had experienced other types of educational structures in their educational backgrounds. None of the interviewed Pennsburg teachers noted any of these themes as part of the climate of their personal school experiences prior to teaching at Pennsburg.

In addition to the three main themes, there were several other themes that emerged from the data. One of the stronger themes was the deep sense of belonging and feeling of security that students, teachers, and parents perceived at Pennsburg. Again, linking Marzano’s (2003) climate trait, a safe and orderly environment, to the Pennsburg participant perceptions is a match. Citing Wallace (2006) a school superintendent and local law enforcement official indicated that a “sense of community” provided a student
at Benson High School with the comfort level to report a fellow student who had a gun on campus.

All of the parents interviewed in this case study felt that their children had a strong sense of belonging and safety. One said, “They were made to feel like a part of the school, a part of their classes.” Another indicated that every child was accepted at Pennsburg regardless of race or personality; everyone had a niche. In speaking of the spirit of the school, one participant stated that the spirit of Pennsburg would say, “I am home. It was just like a good family, everybody took care of everybody else.” Another said, “Even kids who were not academic were glad to be there [at Pennsburg].” Finally, respondents in each of the interview groups indicated that the positive relationships between the teachers and students were a cause of the strong sense of student belonging.

Another secondary theme that emerged from the data was that Pennsburg offered a viable, rigorous curriculum. This theme was reflected by participants in each of the four interview groups. One graduate said, “Teachers insisted that we do our work and they [the teachers] provided extra help if we needed it.” Another offered, “Our kids go far. The academics are challenging.” Educational research supports participants’ beliefs. McEntire (2005) in summarizing studies of rural K-12 schools in Texas by Bickel et al. (2000) and in Louisiana by Franklin and Glascock (1998) reported that student achievement in K-12 schools, as measured on achievement tests, was equal to or better than achievement of students who attended separate elementary, middle, and high schools.

The Northwoods School District was one of the first districts in Pennsylvania to offer core courses via distance learning. Students at Pennsburg have had opportunities to
access college courses taught by their own teachers under co-operative agreements with local universities. An innovative five-block schedule was pioneered in the Northwoods School District. A co-operative health-careers partnership with a nearby hospital offered students a unique opportunity for rural students to gain firsthand knowledge of health careers. In short, although elective courses were limited due to the size of the school, unique and challenging opportunities were available for students.

The third secondary theme that quantifies the case-study school is transition or flow, that is, a natural movement from grade level to grade level of people, curriculum, and structure. Each of the interview groups touched on this concept. Flow is the essence of the K-12 structure. Interview data indicated that participants who attended structures other than the K-12 had significant, in fact, painful experiences transitioning to the next level schools. Paglin and Fager (1997) indicate that every time students are moved to another school structure their feelings of detachment increase and feelings of worth decrease. This was not the case at Pennsburg. One participant referred to the transition as “seamless.” By the time students were ready to move into seventh grade on the high-school side, they had had numerous cross-grade experiences with faculty and older students. They were comfortable in the high-school setting and considered it just an extension of their elementary school. When asked about the K-12 setting, one parent said, “I never considered any other structure. What we have seems so natural.”

There was a flow to the curriculum. Since teachers at Pennsburg were so comfortable with each other, they readily share with one another. The content of this sharing could be a specific student’s curricular needs, learning strategies for a given content, new techniques, or requests for curricular assistance. Holes or weaknesses
within the curriculum are more easily identified and corrected when a faculty sees itself as a functioning unit. By the same token, it is easier to introduce new content or strategies working in a team setting. Rosenholtz (1989) gathered large-scale data on the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement. She found that collaboration is a strong predictor of student success. Pennsburg teachers agreed.

There is also an ease of transition or flow when the same person is responsible for setting disciplinary standards for a whole school. When that school is a K-12 school, discipline flows in a consistent manner across time. That is not to say that the adult speaks to a kindergarten and 12th-grade student in the same tone, but it means that the same set of expectations is in place for all students. It also implies that discipline is developmental. If the culture of the school dictates that everyone is treated with courtesy and respect, these expectations hold over time and become the school culture.

One afternoon as I climbed to the second floor of the high-school side of the complex, I heard a loud voice addressing two seventh graders. It was an eleventh grader who had two seventh-grade students by the collar. He stated rather emphatically that their performance was unacceptable in our school. The conversation line made me smile. That junior had heard that same line of reasoning from me as his principal on numerous occasions. Somewhere, he shifted from the receiver to the sender of the message. As he sent the two remorseful seventh graders down the hall, he turned and gave me a quick smile. That one episode reflects the value of the K-12 setting: growth over time in a safe, nurturing, family environment.

The initial questions have been answered. The K-12 provides a family-like atmosphere that both nurtures and academically challenges students. One-hundred
percent of the graduates interviewed indicated that they would want their children to attend a K-12 school. Parents and community members said that as members of a school board they would support the K-12 structure as a viable option. This research should be considered by any Board of Education interested in restructuring their schools into student-centered environments that can be safe, challenging, and supportive.

**Discussion**

Why was the Pennsburg peer-mentoring program so effective? Why were the cross-grade activities so productive? Why were the student/teacher relationships so close, personal, and long lasting? Why would a 30-year old graduate, a professional, say, “If you cut me open, I’ll bleed blue [the school color]!” Why were transitions from the elementary grades to the junior high grades “seamless?” Why was there such a sense of belonging, security, and safety at Pennsburg?

I believe the answer is not in the smallness of the school, although size impacted these conditions. It was the fact that students were educated in a second family, a school family. One of the graduates said it like this: “The K-12 fosters a family-like environment that you don’t get in isolated settings.” Another graduate said that she had to move away from Pennsburg for a half year during junior high. She related, “I was so scared. I was so happy when I could come back here. It really is like a family here.” Due to the proximity of the students and staff, the office in the center of connected buildings, there is a natural interaction between participants. A sister school in the same district that is physically separated by a two-lane road exhibits little interaction across the grade levels.
The proximity at Pennsburg fostered beginning professional relationships across all levels of assignment. Those relationships became professional partnerships that in turn fostered cross-grade activities. Those cross-grade activities strengthened teacher relationships and allowed opportunities for students to connect at varying times with older and younger students as they interacted on joint projects. Those relationships developed trust and nurturing relationships among students of all age levels. Participants related stories about long-term relationships that developed during peer mentoring and became life-long relationships.

Those peer relationships fostered a sense of belonging and security. One respondent said that there was always someone looking out for you. If you were on a school bus and your peer mentor was on that bus, it was like having an older sibling to watch out for you. That was also true in the halls and cafeteria at school. Members of each group described experiences as student or mentor with warmth and fondness.

Those relationships also took the “sting” out of transitioning. Participants indicated an ease of transitioning between grades since they already had experiences with the next teacher. One stated, “It [the K-12 single-campus school] takes the shock and stress out of transitioning.” Another said she was never anxious about returning back to school after summer vacation because everyone and everything (procedures and expectations) was so familiar.

Finally, as the researcher who has collected, analyzed, and synthesized substantial data on this case-study school, I have concluded that it is the strength of pupil/teacher relationships that is both a causative factor of the success and benefit of the K-12 single-campus school. At an open house I observed a third grader burst into tears outside the art
room where every square inch of wall space was adorned with student exhibits. The little girl had a poor attendance record and had nothing on display to show her grandmother. The art teacher put her arm around her and led her into the art room. Within minutes the little girl was proudly showing her grandmother her chalk drawing. At a pause in graduation practice years later, the little girl, then a senior, reminded me of that open house night. That art teacher taught all the students K-12, took them on trips to New York City, and traveled with them over Europe. Elementary teachers sit at high-school graduations beaming as their former students and athletes walk across the stage. Those teachers are joined by families and the community, often 800 or more individuals crammed into a steaming gym to watch perhaps 50 seniors graduate. The intricacies of the fabric woven into that K-12 single-campus school have created an environment that fosters strong academic growth, a sense of belonging, community, and citizenship.

**Recommendations**

My study presents several recommendations for policy makers and suggestions for additional study. Educational policy makers at the local, state, and national level need to examine the K-12 structure. The results of my study have demonstrated that the K-12 structure encourages a sense of belonging, fosters security and safety, provides for solid student/teacher relationships, and grows collaborative staff relationships that extend academic opportunities for students.

Policy makers might also want to examine the potential savings of resources that a K-12 setting affords. Common areas such as art and music rooms, gyms, computer labs, central offices, and auditoriums can be shared, making it unnecessary to replicate those structures in two separate buildings. Personnel can be shared where certification
will allow it. If the building complex is smaller in size, teacher specialists such as art, music, and the school nurse can be shared at significant savings. The K-12 organizational structure offers an opportunity to reduce costs without resorting to impersonal mega complexes.

**Recommendations for Additional Research**

1. A logical extension of this study would be a comparison of two school structures: a K-12 setting and another structure such as separate elementary, middle, and high school. Academic success, student attitudes toward learning, and school climate could be compared. A strong sense of belonging to a school community was reported by Wallace (2006) as the key factor that caused a student to report a gun on campus in an Arizona high school. Perhaps building K-12 schools that provide a more nurturing environment makes more sense that spending sparse resources on video cameras and metal detectors.

2. A comparison of cost savings for personnel and other resources between a K-12 structure and a typical elementary, middle, and high-school structure would be of benefit to policy makers.

3. A comparison of the K-12 structure and other educational structures in terms of elements of safety such as a sense of belonging could be examined. Citing Purcell and Shackleford’s (2005) report to the National Rural School Association that large schools provide a target-rich environment for terrorists points to the need for other structures.

   Faced with the daunting challenges that confront public education in the 21st century, it would behoove policy makers, parents, and educators to take a hard look at a structure that seems to meet so many of those challenges, the K-12 single-campus school.
APPENDIX
APPENDIX A

OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND OTHER GRADUATES OF THE K-12 CASE STUDY SINGLE-CAMPUS SCHOOL
Appendix A

Open-Ended Survey Questions for Teachers and Other Graduates of the K-12 Case Study

Single-campus School

1. Please tell me your name and where you attended elementary and high school.

2. Generally, was your educational experience a positive one?

3. Could you describe the characteristics of a positive school climate?

4. Which of these characteristics do you feel are most important to student success?

5. Now, discuss the characteristics of the school climate of your school.

6. Can you list and describe some occasions when high school students worked with one of your elementary classes?

7. As an elementary student, how did you feel about working on a co-operative activity with high school students?

8. As a high school student did you experience similar activities?

9. What was your reaction to these activities as a high school student?

10. Can you recall a special elementary or high school “buddy” who had an impact on you?

11. Were these co-operative activities socially or academically valuable to you as a student?

12. Can you describe your transition from grade six to seven?

13. If the spirit of this K-12 school could speak, what would it say about itself?

14. Can you list five positive things about this K-12 school?
15. If you had the power to change anything about this school, what would you change?

16. If you were a school board member on a committee to restructure your school district, would you suggest or support a K-12 structure?

17. If so, what factors would you use to cement your position?

18. If you had the opportunity to send your children to a K-12 school, would you select that option? Please explain your reasoning.
APPENDIX B

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR STAFF WHO DID NOT ATTEND A SINGLE-CAMPUS K-12 SCHOOL
Appendix B

Open-ended questions for staff who did not attend a single-campus K-12 School

1. Can you tell me your name and where you attended elementary and secondary school?

2. Could you describe the characteristics of a positive school climate?

3. Which of these characteristics do you feel are important for all students to be successful?

4. Describe the organizational structure of the school system where you attended.

5. Discuss the climate of the schools you attended.

6. As an elementary, middle school, and high school student describe your feelings about being a member of the school community you attended.

7. As a student at any level, can you describe any experiences you had that were shared between schools?

8. As an elementary student can you recall a high school student with whom you were able to react? Was this person a good role model? Did the school encourage such interactions?

9. Describe your transition from the junior high to the high school setting. Do you think it would have been a smoother transition if you had attended a single-campus school?

10. As a teacher in a single-campus school what is your perception of the advantages and disadvantages for students?
11. If the spirit of the schools you attended could speak, what would it say about itself?

12. Can you list five positive things about the schools you attended?

13. If you had the power, what would you change about the schools you attended?

14. If you were a school board member on a committee to restructure the schools, would you suggest/support a K-12 system?

15. What factors would you use to cement your position?

16. If you had school age children, would you want them to attend a K-12 single campus school? Please explain your reasoning.
APPENDIX C

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS WHOSE STUDENTS ATTENDED A K-12 SINGLE-CAMPUS SCHOOL
Appendix C

Open-ended Questions for Parents Whose Students Attended a K-12 Single-campus School

1. Can you please tell me your name and where you live?

2. Are you a long time resident of this area, or are you new to the area within the last three years?

3. Did you move here because of the schools?

4. How many of your children attended a single-campus school?

5. Did or do you have children who attended a different type of school structure?

6. Can you reflect on the experiences of your children as they relate to the following:
   
   Curriculum
   Sense of belonging
   Collaborative activities
   Your comfort level as a parent having your child attend the K-12 school
   Advantages and/or disadvantages of the K-12 structure
   Opportunities for the children to participate in extra curricular activities

7. Can you name five positive things about this K-12 setting?

8. What would you change about this system if you could?

9. If your grandchildren had the opportunity to attend a K-12 school would you support that option? Please explain your reasoning.
APPENDIX D

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS
IN A K-12 SCHOOL AREA
Appendix D

Open-ended questions for community members in a K-12 school area.

1. Can you tell me your name and where you live?

2. Are you a long time resident of the area, or new to the area within the last three years?

3. In what context do you have experience with the K-12 single-campus school being studied?

4. Will you reflect on your experiences with the school in terms of the following:
   - Attitudes of children
   - Attitude of staff
   - Activities observed or attended
   - Miscellaneous interactions with the school.

5. What is your overall impression of this K-12 school setting?
APPENDIX E

PERMISSION FROM LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD TO INTERVIEW TEACHERS
August 15, 2007

Albert Lindner
400 Gramser Street
Blossburg, PA 16912-1451

Dear Albert,

Please be advised of the action of the Board of Education on August 13, 2007.

On said date, the board voted to approve your request to interview students and staff in relation to your dissertation, "The Impact of a K-12 Single Campus School Structure on the School Climate in a Rural Pennsylvania School as Perceived by Students, Graduates, and Teachers."

Sincerely,

[Signature]

James J. Bakosh
Director of Business Affairs
Secretary/Board of Education

JMB/30

xc Joseph Kalata, Supt.
File

The mission of the Southern Tier School District, in partnership with family and community, is to educate ALL students to become responsible and productive members of society.
APPENDIX F

PERMISSION FROM PRINCIPAL TO INTERVIEW TEACHERS
Albert P. Lindner  
400 Greger St.  
Bloomsburg, PA 17815  

December 17, 2007

Dear Mr. David, North Penn Junior Senior High School Principal,

I have completed coursework and have received approval from my Dissertation Committee to proceed to the real phase of my doctoral studies through Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. I am in the process of obtaining permission from the university's IRB to conduct my research.

The title of my research is "Perceptions Regarding a K-12 Single-campus School: A Case Study." School districts across America are struggling to reach the benchmarks set by Federal legislation, No Child Left Behind. A plethora of strategies have been employed to help meet those objectives, including a variety of organizational school structures. The purpose of this study is to describe a unique educational school structure in a K-12 single-campus school. Perceptions of educators and students who taught in this case study school will be examined. Data from this study will be available for decision makers as they attempt to develop effective educational organizations.

The majority of staff taught in the case study K-12 single-campus school prior to its separation into two administrative units. I am requesting your consent to interview teachers on a voluntary basis. The interviews will be arranged at the teacher's discretion and will not in any way interfere with instructional time.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I will be pleased to share the results of this study with you upon its completion. I will be glad to provide you with a copy of my complete proposal if you would like to examine it.

Sincerely,

Albert P. Lindner

My signature allows my consent for Albert Lindner to interview teacher volunteers during the winter of 2008 as part of my research.

[Signature]  
12/17/07 Date  

[Name Printed]
APPENDIX G

REQUEST FOR VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS
Request for Interview Volunteers

Dear graduates of North Penn Junior/Senior High School, parents of graduates, and community members. I served as the principal of Blossburg Elementary and North Penn from 1991 through 2005. This was a unique learning environment where the threads of learning were interwoven across grade lines. I am currently working on a doctorate through Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. My research will be a case study of the Blossburg schools when they were one administrative unit. I am interested in gathering the perceptions of the people who knew our school best. I believe that this was a unique educational structure and would like to record its story. If you would be interested in sharing your impressions and answering some questions regarding the school please contact me at any of the following:

alindner@southernmioga.org
home: 658-3616
work: 658-2146

None of the participants will be identified by name.

Your participation would be welcomed,
Sincerely,

Al Lindner
APPENDIX H

CONSENT FORM FOR ANDREWS UNIVERSITY IRB
Andrews University

Department of Educational Leadership

"Informed Consent"

Title of the Study: Perceptions Regarding a K-1 Single-Campus School: A Case Study

Albert V. Lindner, Educational Leadership student, LEAD 899: Doctoral Dissertation
Dr. James Tucker, advisor
Dr. Shirley Reed, methodologist

Research Activity: I have been told that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I will be asked to answer a series of questions regarding my perceptions of a K-1 single-campus school that I am familiar with. I will be involved in the actual interview for no longer than one hour. At a later date I will be asked to review a transcript of my interview with the questions. This process will also be limited to no longer than one hour. The interview will take place in the conference room of our local public school.

Purpose: I have been told that school districts across America are struggling to reach the benchmarks set by Federal legislation, No Child Left Behind. A number of strategies have been employed to help meet these objectives including various organizational school structures. The purpose of this study is to describe a unique educational school structure: a K-12 single-campus school. Perceptions of graduates, teachers, parents of students, and community members familiar with the case study school: a former K-12 administrative unit in north central Pennsylvania will be examined. The research will be limited to perceptions of the participants regarding only this school. The intent of this study is to provide data on the positive and negative aspects of this type of school organizational structure. The case study school will not be named in the report. Data in the form of themes and unique characteristics of this entity will be available to help decision makers as they arrange to develop effective educational organizations.

Methods: I have been told that graduates of the case study school, teachers who worked in this school, parents and members of the community will be asked to share their perceptions of this K-12 school. Volunteer participants will be solicited via a local school newsletter and an email to local educators who worked in the school. I understand that participants will be selected on a first-come first-served basis.

Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. Interviews will take place in the local public elementary school. Interviews and follow-up clarification of transcript will be limited to one hour each.

Voluntary Participation: I have been told that my participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that all volunteers must be over age 18 and have specific knowledge regarding the case study school. No teachers who report directly to the researcher will be interviewed by the researcher. I am free to ask questions regarding this research study or any rights as a participant in the study and may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or repercussions.

Benefits/Risks: I have been told that there are no direct benefits or risks to me because I participate in this study. I understand that there will be no costs to use as a participant, nor will I receive any financial rewards. I may find satisfaction in that my perceptions may be used by decision making bodies that are researching when examining alternative school structures.

Confidentiality: I have been told that all participants interviewed in this research study will be given a pseudonym to protect their identity. Any volunteer participant who currently is a direct report to the researcher...
will be interviewed by a professional researcher. The researcher will receive the questioner’s scrambled transcript without any identifying links to the participant. The professional questioner will make all contacts with the participant including reviewing transcripts. Transcripts of interviews will be maintained by the researcher in a secure location. None of the volunteers interviewed will be named in the study, nor will the case study school be named in this research or other documentation.

**Consent Signature**: Prior to signing this consent form, I had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this research study and my participation in this research study. I have been told that I may address any additional or future concerns regarding my participation in this study to the following researcher or to Dr. Shirley Freed, Chair of the Educational Leadership Department, at Andrews University. My signature indicates that the questioner has thoroughly explained the research study, and further, has explained each section of this document to me and that I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in this research study.

**Contact Information:**
Please refer questions or concerns to:

Dr. Shirley Freed (Chair of the Education Department at Andrews University)
Phone: 1-888-717-6247 or email Freed@andrews.edu

Participant’s Signature ___________________________ Witness ___________________________
Date: ___________________________ Witness ___________________________
Location: ___________________________ Witness ___________________________

“I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained the potential risks and benefits of this study.”

Investigator’s Signature ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
APPENDIX I

SCHOOL-WIDE HOMEWORK POLICY AND GUIDELINES
Dear Parents:

The staff at the Blossburg schools developed a school wide, consistent approach to homework for our students. Recent research suggests that repetition plays a significant part in learning. It is our intent to provide meaningful reinforcement activities to help all students attain high levels of academic success. The following revised guidelines will be in effect for this school year – 2005 / 2006.

Please review these expectations with your child(ren) and encourage their compliance. It would help assure your child’s success if you would provide a quiet work place and a regular homework time. Your supervision and attention to this segment of your child’s education can really make a difference.

**HOMEWORK POLICY AND GUIDELINES**

1) **Homework and classroom assignments are due at the time the teacher asks for them.** Partial credit will be given for partially completed assignments. If a student does not hand the assignment in on time, he or she will complete the assignment that night for 50% credit. If the assignment is still not completed, the student will be required to serve an after school academic detention to complete the work and receive 0% credit.

2) **Students will come to class prepared with the materials needed for that day.** Students will not be permitted to leave the classroom to get the materials they have forgotten, nor should they be calling home to have parents / grandparents bring forgotten items to the school. This only fosters irresponsibility.

3) **A Homework Heading is required at the top of all student generated work.** It must include:

   - NAME
   - DATE
   - TEACHER
   - SUBJECT / ASSIGNMENT

   Papers without a complete heading will not be scored.

Please sign and return this form to the school to acknowledge your receipt of this communication.

Signature of Parent / Guardian  Date

Sincerely,

Your Partners in Education

The Blossburg Staff and Administration
APPENDIX J

SINGLE SCHOOL CULTURE SURVEY
Appendix J

Single School Culture Survey

Circle the response that express how you feel about each statement

1. The same rules are in effect across the campus.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

2. All students must be treated with dignity and respect.
3. Students should be taught the skills and behaviors necessary for success.
4. Staff members should encourage motivation through positive interactions and building relationships with students.
5. Student misbehavior provides a teaching opportunity.
6. Teachers should carefully structure their classroom in ways that prompt responsible student behavior.
7. Teachers should overtly teach students how to behave responsibly in every classroom situation.
8. Teachers should focus more time, attention, and energy on acknowledging responsible behavior than on responding to misbehavior.
9. Teachers should preplan their responses to misbehavior to ensure that they will respond in a brief, calm, and consistent manner and not lose instructional momentum.
10. There is a belief that both teachers and students can improve self-efficacy and develop skills to perform at high levels.
11. There is a belief that lack of student achievement requires change in instructional strategies.
12. There is a belief that all adults are responsible for the academic growth of all students.
13. Students know their academic targets
14. Data is feedback about performance and how close students are to their targets.
15. Students understand that they develop and get smarter through the application of effective effort.
16. There are adults on campus that will support students’ social and emotional growth.
17. Students are in the company of adults that will listen to them.
18. All students have at least one adult they feel connected to.
19. There is a sense of community at school.
20. Students are made to feel that they are valuable contributors.
21. Students have opportunities to lead activities, such as students government, peer mediation, and/or participate in drug and violence prevention, peace-promoting initiatives, community service, mentoring, etc.
22. Students learn language, attitudes, and behaviors to prevent substance abuse and violence.
23. Students are afforded the opportunity to engage in career exploration.
24. Students are afforded opportunities to develop special interests in the arts, physical education, and leadership.
REFERENCE LIST
REFERENCE LIST


Adler, A. (February 26, 2007). Personal Interview. School District of Palm Beach County Department of Safe Schools, Palm Beach, FL.


Callahan, R. (1962). *Education and the cult of efficiency: A study of the social forces that have shaped the administration of public schools*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Campbell, R. (2003). *Safe and orderly schools*. Division of School Safety, Department of Safe and Orderly Schools. Jackson, MI.


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VITA
ALBERT P. LINDNER

Present Position

May 1991 to present: Southern Tioga School District, Blossburg, PA

Building Administrator
- Advocate for children
- Manage multiple sites
- Develop, implement, and supervise curriculum
- Maintain a safe and orderly learning environment
- Supervise personnel: teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff
- Manage building budgets
- Initiate and support substantive educational change

Education

1984 Frostburg University Frostburg, MD 
Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction
1983 Frostburg University Frostburg, MD 
Master of Science in Administration and Supervision
1983 Frostburg University Frostburg, MD 
Supervisor of Elementary Education Certificate
1982 Frostburg University Frostburg, MD 
Secondary Principal Certificate
1983 Frostburg University Frostburg, MD 
Elementary Principal Certificate
1972 California University of PA California, PA 
Master of Science in Guidance and Counseling
1972 California University of PA California, PA 
Elementary School Guidance Certificate
1969 California University of PA California, PA 
Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education

References available upon request.