Education Doctoral Dissertations in Leadership   School of Education

4-2013

Where Have All the Robins Gone? Power, Discourse, and the Closing of Robbinsdale High School

Mark E. Mertens
University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

Where Have All the Robins Gone?

Power, Discourse, and the Closing of

Robbinsdale High School

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Mark E. Mertens

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

April 2013

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

Where Have All the Robins Gone?

Power, Discourse, and the Closing of

Robbinsdale High School
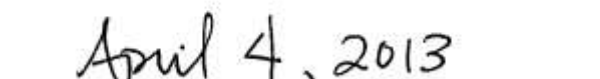
We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee

_____
Sarah J. Noonan, Ed.D., Committee Chair

_____
Seehwa Cho, Ph.D., Committee Member

_____
Robert J. Brown, Ph.D., Committee Member

April 4, 2013
_____
Final Approval Date

ABSTRACT

This descriptive historical case study, presented as a sort of means of coming to terms with the past, details a 1980 to 1982 declining-enrollment decision-making process which led to the closure of one of three high schools in the suburban, midwestern Robbinsdale Area Schools. Following the district's expansion from a first-ring suburbia with small-town roots to include further westward second-ring additions, this school-closing dilemma provided fertile ground for a conflict pitting the old middle and blue collar classes on the district's east side against the new middle and professional classes on its west side.

History, tradition, community identity, and community bonds locked horns with modernity, as educational, cultural, and class issues, as well as administrative missteps, including participative democracy run amok, all intertwined during the year-long battle over which high school to close. Although all sides placed great faith in scientific, factual, and objective outlooks, it seemed impossible for these to calm the underlying forces. The concluding triumph of the new middle class over the old middle class through the unexpected, last-minute 1982 closure of the district's flagship school, Robbinsdale High, brought with it a sense that an injustice had occurred, one based on power and privilege, leaving lasting scars on a community.

An expansive literature review offers an historical overview of school consolidation, including rural consolidation, over the past 100 years, with specific attention to the management of declining enrollment in the late 20th century. The study incorporates this previous research on school consolidation, the views of 41 interview participants, as well as the critical theoretical perspectives of Habermas (1975), Foucault (1980), Apple (1990), Eagleton (1991), and Brookfield (2005), to inform and analyze this school-closure process. The story is portrayed as a social and critical history of struggle within a community, with particular focus on class interests,

power, and the control of discourse.

The study concludes that within school-consolidation decisions, leaders should reconsider the value of smallness, respect the limitations of technical rationality, balance business and efficiency models with social and human considerations of fairness and equity, and honor the sacredness of place, local culture, values, history, and tradition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing is a struggle against silence.
Carlos Fuentes

Commenting on the very difficult work of writing, author and Nobel Prize recipient Carlos Fuentes once characterized the endeavor as "a struggle against silence," a sentiment no doubt shared by many dissertation writers. I would like to acknowledge the following persons who helped me break through the various periods of silence encountered along the multi-year journey in bringing the Robbinsdale High School research project to its fruition.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee. Original committee chair Dr. Tullio Maranhão helped focus my dissertation proposal, encouraging me to write what he called "an analytical dissertation." His recommendations to take a look at Richard Bernstein's review of social and political theory and to research the ideas of Terry Eagleton and Michel Foucault on ideology, legitimation, and power were greatly facilitative to data analysis.

Committee member Dr. Seehwa Cho pointed me to further invaluable research by Michael Apple and his breakdown of power and ideology within education. Dr. Cho, a former student of Apple's, suggested that his insights into the corporate and business mind-set enveloping educational decision making would be informative for the Robbinsdale case study. She also introduced me to the historical educational research of Joel Spring.

Committee member Dr. Robert Brown encouraged me to conduct a set of interviews with the various actors in the story in order to help fill in the historical data gaps and to clarify some questions raised by the review of documents. This suggestion brought to light a number of interesting vignettes, helped the story come alive, and provided additional perspectives to

understanding the community conflict.

Dr. Sarah Noonan who graciously accepted to take over as committee chair following Dr. Maranhão's untimely passing believed in a vision for a broader, historical review of school-closure literature. This review brought to light the previous research of Michael Berger, William Boyd, Alan Peshkin, and Ross Zerchykov on school consolidation in the late 1970s and early 1980s and helped paint a picture of what was happening nationwide during the time period of Robbinsdale High's closure, providing important background regarding the kind of decision-making process ultimately used in its selection for closure. The critical rural school-consolidation research of Alan DeYoung, Craig Howley, and David Reynolds from the 1990s helped to place consolidation in larger theoretical constructs, developing historical, social, and political components vital to a deeper understanding of school closures. The theoretical frameworks surrounding their case studies offered useful models for analyzing my own research.

Dr. Noonan also recommended Stephen Brookfield's expansive historical review of critical theory, its guiding principles, and its usefulness in adult education. This is quite likely the most thorough and yet accessible work to date on critical theory. Dr. Noonan offered numerous editing suggestions and was my self-described cheerleader as well as a patient and committed advisor in helping to put this final product together.

The dissertation committee is, of course, only a part of a larger support team within the School of Education's Leadership, Policy, and Administration Department at the University of St. Thomas. The staff philosophy and program design allow adult working professionals like me the opportunity to pursue advanced studies and research of the highest caliber while encouraging us to braid theory with real-life application and engage in leadership as reflective practice. Being part of the doctoral cohort has been a rich and rewarding experience both personally and

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents....

and to all who loved Robbinsdale High School.

INTRODUCTION

There are people that will carry this to their grave.
School board member

In the year 2000, the Robbinsdale Area Schools (District 281) was in the process of reshuffling programs for better utilization of space and facilities. In a spring meeting, the school board of the 14,000-student, first-ring, suburban school district west of Minneapolis, Minnesota, decided to move one of the middle school programs into the former, vacated Robbinsdale High School (RHS) building, in order to partially occupy the then mostly empty RHS at the beginning of the next school year. District 281 had closed Robbinsdale High 18 years earlier, in 1982, when the district downsized from three to two high schools, and the building had been mostly vacant over the ensuing 18 years.

Later, at an August, 2000 school board meeting, a parent who had recently moved into the district presented a reasonable request during the school board's listening hour. The parent's request concerned removing the name of the old high school from the bricks of the outside wall of the building because the building would now be housing middle school students and had been void of high school students for over 18 years. "'Is there any way to get the name of the high school off the building?... I don't think the name matters much'" (S. Webber, 2000). According to the local newspaper reporter, someone in the audience muttered in response, "'What are they gonna do? Get someone to go over there with a ladder when no one's watching in the middle of the night to chisel it off?'"

After some discussion, the board arrived at a consensus that for the time being, a banner indicating the presence of the middle school program could be hung over the entrance to the building, but the banner should not cover the words, "Robbinsdale Senior High School." The

same parent observed sometime later,

> They're very worried about what the citizens of the old high school would feel about taking the name off the building. The school closing still gets brought up. I don't know what happened [back then]…but it's amazing after 20 years it still arises.... It still comes up when they're trying to get a referendum passed…. I'm amazed how the district tip toes around it—amazed. It's been twenty years and the kids now are paying for something that happened 20 years ago.

Reflecting on his tenure, a former District 281 superintendent commented, "It's a wound that never has healed…. There wasn't a day that went by that someone didn't bring up the closing of Robbinsdale High School."

"When you mention 'the high school closing,' nobody says, 'What?' Everybody knows what you're talking about, even 20 years later," stated the area's state senator. "It's not history, but a fact that's constantly present," concluded the most recently departed superintendent.

The closure of a high school, with the ensuing merger of that school into other established buildings, can reasonably be expected to cause some turmoil in a school district. On one level, few residents would wish the closure of "their" high school. But there is something more to the story of the closing of Robbinsdale High—something different, unique, and deeper. Other neighboring Minneapolis suburban districts had closed high schools during the same time period, including Edina in 1980, Golden Valley in 1980, Hopkins in 1982, and Bloomington in 1982. Each of these closures had generated a comparatively short-lived disturbance in its district. The closure of Robbinsdale High in 1982, on the other hand, still provokes spirited discussion to this day among those present to witness its demise.

District 281 had three high schools prior to 1982—Robbinsdale, Cooper, and Armstrong high schools (see Appendices D and E). Robbinsdale High, built in 1956 to replace the nearby original high school, served the municipalities of Robbinsdale, Crystal, and part of Golden Valley. It was the namesake of the district. With further westward suburban expansion,

construction on Cooper High School (CHS) was completed in 1964, serving the New Hope area. Due to increasing housing development, Armstrong High School (AHS) opened further westward in 1970 and served the Golden Valley and Plymouth areas. Following the impressive growth in student enrollment during the 1950s and 1960s, the district suffered an abrupt and dramatic enrollment decline throughout the 1970s, during which time district leaders made decisions to close a number of elementary school buildings and one of the four junior high buildings.

In early 1981, the school board set itself on a time line to close one of the district's three high schools by the end of the 1981-82 school year. After a year of input, advice, and recommendations from the administration, the teaching staff, the public, and a panel of outside experts, after numerous board meetings lasting until well after midnight, after proposals to close each one of the high schools at some time during the process, after many deadlocks and tied votes, and with only a month to go until the end of the school year, the school board finally voted in an unexpected decision to close Robbinsdale High. The erupting furor, amidst accusations of socioeconomic favoritism, led to the election of three new school board members in record voter turnout. The community newspaper received more letters to the editor than its editors could ever remember. The Robbinsdale community mounted legal challenges which were eventually argued before the Minnesota Supreme Court. Residents introduced numerous proposals, to no avail, to reopen the school. They circulated petitions, forcing a vote on recalling a recently-approved and much-needed excess levy referendum—causing reservation among district officials over many years to attempt passing any further referenda.

A former district teacher and administrator described the closing decision as "'probably the worst school closing...anywhere in the state of Minnesota.... Nobody went through the

process Robbinsdale went through'" (Lee, 2007, para. 3). The tumultuous process which led to the closure of Robbinsdale High was clearly a divisive period in the district's history, leaving a decidedly negative impact and compelling district officials to carefully navigate the repercussions still felt over 20 years later.

The story of the closing of Robbinsdale High has woven its way in and out of my own life over quite a few years. I was personally unaware of the school closing at the time it took place, only learning of it after being hired as a teacher at Cooper High School, some years after Robbinsdale's closure—but stories were still fresh in the minds of teachers. Committee reports, such as the "School and Community" report, which I helped edit during my first year at Cooper High, described the development of a socioeconomic chasm between the populations served by the district's two remaining high schools, with Cooper registering significantly lower on almost every socioeconomic indicator. After transferring to the more affluent Armstrong High a few years later, I decided to further examine the socioeconomic disparities between Cooper and Armstrong for some doctoral-level coursework. This led to research on the formation of the revised 1982 attendance-area boundaries, which, in turn, brought me to the 1982 closure of Robbinsdale High.

As I dug deeper into the historical events surrounding Robbinsdale High's closure, the complexity of the topic and the richness of the story became increasingly evident, convincing me this was indeed a worthy topic for a dissertation research project and piquing my curiosity with some unanswered questions: What were the challenges involved in leading a school district during a period of enrollment decline following a period of growth? How did community politics and social class shape the process and the outcome of this school-consolidation drama? What were the forces and who were the players, both visible and invisible? How did the focus of

power and control shift over time? What were the dominant hegemonic ideas—the dominant and competing discourses that played out? Which ideas were used to win? Were there any strategies that would have worked to gain support from all areas of the district? What made this particular school closure so messy? Why did the Robbinsdale community so strongly resist the closure of its high school, and why did this continue to be a festering issue in District 281 over many years? What can be learned about the nature of educational leadership through researching the closing of Robbinsdale High School? The story of this traumatic period captured my imagination and led me to document the history of a high school closure and analyze the event and its aftermath as a social and critical history of struggle within a community.

I have divided the study into the six customary dissertation sections: introduction, review of literature, methodology, data, data analysis, and conclusion. The introduction section presents some background information and a short summary of the Robbinsdale High school-closure controversy. It also frames the research around some guiding questions and then defines a number of school-closure terms.

The extensive review of literature is comprised of six parts, the first part giving a broad overview of the literature, the next four parts presenting the findings, and the last part situating my study within the current corpus of literature. The selected literature focuses on school consolidation as a means of addressing enrollment decline, school-closure decision-making processes and community reaction, and historical and theoretical perspectives on school consolidation, with particular attention to critical theory.

In the methodology section I describe how the research was conducted and how the three major categories of qualitative research data contributed to the study. I follow with a focus on historical research methodology and a discussion of the historian and the interpretive nature of

historical research, including personal bias.   The section concludes with a short survey of some of the major theoretical approaches used by historians to interpret historical work, including the overall theoretical framework and focus used in my own analysis.

Separated into 10 parts, the data section develops the different phases in the story of Robbinsdale High. Part one offers a short overview of the study, setting it within a national historical context. Part two covers a brief history of the school district from its birth over a hundred years ago to its apex in the 1970s, concluding with a phenomenological portrait of the three high schools—Robbinsdale, Cooper, and Armstrong—at the height of enrollment. In part three, the district begins closing elementary and junior high schools. Community coalitions begin forming as the district determines that one of the three high schools should be selected for closure in the near future. Parts four, five, and six then detail administrative, school board, and community action during the high school closure selection process. Parts seven and eight concern the fallout from the board's decision to close Robbinsdale High, while parts nine and ten feature efforts to appease Robbinsdale residents, including the eventual reopening of the building as Robbinsdale Middle School over 20 years later.

Data analysis is interwoven throughout the data section in a series of short "critical discussion" pieces placed at the end of each part of the story. A summarizing analytical portion follows the data section, exploring power, conflict, and leadership in the closure process and examining the long-lasting community turmoil.

The conclusion offers some broad practical implications to guide future action in school-closure decisions. I end with some thoughts on the nature of educational leadership that emerged from this research into the closure of Robbinsdale High School.

Definition of Terms

Closed-system decision process - a process for decision making within the public sector utilizing little or no public or community participation

Collective good - a good or burden that applies to everyone equally

Concentrated cuts - selective cuts to employees and units

Consolidation - the merger of two or more attendance areas to form a larger school generally involving the closure or alternative use of one or more schools

Differentially distributed decrement - a political good withdrawn in a selective manner, creating winners and losers

Differentially distributed increment - a political good portioned out in a selective manner, creating winners and losers

Diseconomies of scale - new or enlarged costs due to increased size of operations

Dispersed cuts - across-the-board cuts

Distributive policy – a policy through which resources are parceled out in a manner such that the losers and the recipients do not experience direct confrontation

Economies of scale - the reduction of unit costs as operation size increases

Efficiency cuts - selective cuts to employees and units

Elementary district - a school district which only operates elementary schools, generally K-8

Equity cuts - shared, distributed, across-the-board cuts

High school district - a school district which only operates high schools, generally 9-12, with an attendance area often overlapping one or more elementary districts

Independent district - a district deviating from and separate from the surrounding school district configuration, often formed by a choice of local taxpayers or an accident of geography

Interdistrict consolidation - the merger of two or more districts to form a larger district

Mothballed building - a minimally maintained shuttered building

Non-operating district - a district containing a nonexistent or very small student population, operating no schools of its own and contracting for educational services from an adjacent school district

Open-system decision process - a process for decision making within the public sector utilizing considerable public or community participation

Operating district - a district in which there are functioning schools

Redistributive policy – a policy through which resources are parceled out by direct choice as to who will be indulged and who will be deprived

Reduction in force - the laying-off of employees

Retrenchment - organizational cutting of expenses

Separable good - a good or burden that benefits or harms one segment of the community

Unified district or **unit district** - the result of interdistrict consolidation between one or more elementary districts and high school districts

Uniformly distributed increment - a political good portioned out in an equal manner, imparting shared gratification

Uniformly distributed decrement - a political good withdrawn in an equal manner, imparting shared pain

The most traumatic period in our district's history.
Superintendent Hood in 1981 on the
upcoming senior high school closure process

I can only guess the debris about to hit the fan if anyone
suggests they close down Robbinsdale High School.
Community newspaper editor

A part of me died when they closed Robbinsdale.
Robbinsdale resident

The life of the district is at stake.
Teachers' union president on the upcoming
vote to recall the excess levy referendum

Justice always takes a long time to reign.
Robbinsdale resident
after failure of recall referendum

A district class war began which remains to this day.
Robbinsdale resident reflecting
on the school closure 10 years later

It's not history, but a fact that's constantly present.
Superintendent Mack
commenting over 20 years later

REVIEW OF LITERATURE PART 1
OVERVIEW AND FOCUS

If I have seen further,
it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.
Isaac Newton

This study concerned an historical reconstruction of the difficult and contentious 1982 closing of Robbinsdale High School, one of three high schools in the Robbinsdale Area Schools, with subsequent analysis of the accompanying and unusually high degree of community turmoil and political repercussion associated with the closure process. I reviewed school closure and consolidation literature to establish the historical context for this study and also to summarize the scholarship with regard to school consolidation and closure decisions during the second half of the 20th century.

An in-depth review of literature from the decade prior to the Robbinsdale closing decision seemed particularly beneficial to understanding the social, political, and economic conditions of the time period, as well as the challenges faced by school administrators and board members involved in school closures during the early 1980s. Additionally, a review of the dominant educational philosophies and practices associated with school administration and school district governance provided important background information to help analyze administrative and board mindsets and to discern other forces influencing the consolidation decision-making process during this time period.

Thus, from the onset of research, I envisioned a more expansive review of literature, both to gain an historical perspective and also to contribute to the scholarship with regard to school closure and consolidation decisions in the mid to late 20th century. After describing my search strategy in the next section, I follow with a summary of the organization of the entire 200-page

literature review, which has been divided into six parts, this first part consisting of a broad over view of the literature, the next four parts presenting the findings, and the last part situating my study within the current corpus of literature. I conclude this first part with an executive summary of the findings in the rest of the literature review.

Search Strategy

I began literature review research by conducting an Educational Resources Institute Clearinghouse (ERIC) database search, using descriptors such as "school closing," "consolidated schools," and "declining enrollment." These were searched separately and in various combinations, on the elementary and secondary educational levels, including all publication types, from the beginning of ERIC's database through 1974, and then in five-year increments through 2009. This database search revealed over 1,000 journal articles and documents. The historical period encompassing most of the Robbinsdale Area School's school closures, from 1978 to 1983, corresponded to the peak in the literature, from 1975 to 1985 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Number of Articles or Documents With Associated ERIC Descriptor

Time period	"School Closing"	"Consolidated Schools"	"Declining Enrollment"	Total**
Pre1975	8	23	6	31
1975-1979	146	33	303	374
1980-1984	164	64	259	382
1985-1989	37	58	62	137
1990-1994	31	59	26	105
1995-1999	40	57	19	99
2000-2004	20	39	8	62
2005-2009*	19	8	66	89

*July 28, 2009
**Total number of articles or documents that included one or more of these three descriptors

This search was performed on a number of occasions over the course of one year in order to check for any additions to the database. Additional research on other search engines was also conducted, but these revealed only a handful of additional material. I read over 1,500 journal and document abstracts in order to acquire preliminary familiarity with school closure and consolidation literature. Within this study, the term "school closure" will be used interchangeably with "school consolidation" since it is assumed that students from a "closed" building will be merged or "consolidated" with students from another building.

The body of literature was broad and varied, comprised of books, journal articles, conference papers or speeches, dissertations, and governmental guides and reports. Extensive case-study research and somewhat scarcer generalizable research utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods. Topics of study found in this preliminary review included the effects of consolidation on many different components of the educational enterprise, including school economic efficiency, school curriculum, student achievement and social adjustment, length of student transport, community cohesion, and school-community relations. A fair amount of literature also included social and political theoretical analysis. State educational department guides and manuals, promulgated to assist districts in managing severe enrollment decline during the 1970s and 1980s, have also been preserved for review in the ERIC database, as have a number of individual school districts' community task force reports from the same time period.

I narrowed down the 1,500 reviewed abstracts to a list of 200 works that merited closer scrutiny. About half of these were journal articles, the other half unpublished documents and a small number of books. The final list included journal articles from over 30 different journal publications. Some of the more prominent journals devoting significant coverage to school closure included *The American School Board Journal, Phi Delta Kappan, The Peabody Journal*

of Education, Education and Urban Society, The Rural Educator, and The Journal of Research in Rural Education.

My decision to incorporate rural school consolidation literature into the final review list contributed to its overly healthy size. Although the Robbinsdale Area Schools is comprised of seven municipalities and is considered a first-ring, suburban school district, some observers have described the City of Robbinsdale, (where Robbinsdale High was located), as possessing many small town attributes—a small town that happens to be in suburbia. It seemed that an understanding of small-town school closures would assist in better understanding this case study.

The citations and abstracts of these 200 articles and documents were recorded in my own personal computer database in chronological order. They were reviewed again and then divided and coded into categories by type of research, after which I moved into reviewing full text. In reviewing full text, I was able to retrieve only a limited number of articles and documents through open-access, on-line sources. I then proceeded to various media center venues to access the remaining bulk of information, mostly available in print, but some on microfiche or restricted on-line format. The University of St. Thomas Keffer and O'Shaugnessy-Frey libraries, the University of Minnesota Wilson Library, the St. Paul Public Library, and District 281 Media Services all provided access and assistance in retrieving information for the literature review.

Review Outline

The literature review is comprised of six parts: (a) overview and focus of the review, (b) school consolidation as a means of addressing enrollment decline, (c) school-closure decision-making processes and community reaction, (d) historical and theoretical perspectives on consolidation, (e) critical theory and school consolidation, and (f) implications for the

Robbinsdale case study. Because of the length of the review, over 200 pages, seven short summaries are provided as the review progresses.

School consolidation literature seemed to have developed around three foci, which I have organized into parts two through five of the review. One field of study concentrated on the merits or demerits of consolidation from a mixture of financial, educational quality, and community preservation viewpoints. Much of this discussion revolved around the effectiveness of consolidation as a way of meeting the challenges inherent in the late 20th-century environment of declining school enrollment. Conducted largely by professional, educational decision makers, such research was aimed at helping school districts and their leaders answer a preliminary question, "Should we use consolidation as a means of relieving fiscal pressures?" This literature is presented in part two of the review and provided a context for understanding the challenges the Robbinsdale district faced as it shifted from growth to decline, entertaining the option of closing school buildings to meet budgetary constraints.

Another locus of study detailed the specific decision-making processes used in various school districts' consolidation efforts, as well as the public's reaction to resulting school closures. Within this research, attempts were made to develop an ideal model for school-closure decision making during the late 20th century, one that would help mitigate adverse community reaction. These investigations were aimed at helping school districts and their leaders answer a secondary question, "How do we best go about consolidating and selecting the particular school buildings to close?" This literature is presented in part three of the review. Again, written mostly by professional educational leaders, the advice was often accompanied by case histories or "tales from the field," painting a picture of what was happening nationwide during the time period of Robbinsdale High's closure. Describing various districts' responses to declining enrollment,

local public reaction, and concurrent advice on school closures, mostly from the 1970s and 1980s, this literature helped place the Robbinsdale case study within the larger environment of school consolidation and provided important background regarding the decision-making process which was ultimately used in selecting Robbinsdale High School for closure in 1982.

A third concentration of study explored school consolidation from historical and theoretical perspectives. Mostly written by university academicians, this literature's intent was not to offer specific suggestions or concrete recommendations to educational decision makers, but rather to give them a deeper well of understanding from which to consider the previous two questions of whether or not to consolidate and how to best go about consolidating. Scholarly work that placed consolidation in larger theoretical constructs, developing historical, social, and political components vital to this deeper understanding of school closure, is the focus of the fourth and fifth parts of this literature review. This research provided a better understanding of professional advice literature on consolidation in the late 20th century, as presented in parts two and three of the review, by putting these in historical context and offering some ulterior motives behind the consolidation movement. Using theoretical tools, these researchers presented critique and analysis of school-closure decision making, community reaction, and consolidation's effect on community. The theoretical frameworks surrounding the case studies in this section offered useful models for conducting and analyzing my own research.

Part six of the review discusses the implications of the previous research on the study of the closure of Robbinsdale High School. In this last section, I explain where my research is situated within the current corpus of literature on school closure and consolidation, and then I summarize how the findings of my review of the literature have been incorporated into my analysis of the Robbinsdale case study.

Executive Summary

Enrollment-Decline Management Through School Consolidation

The decade preceding the 1982 closure of Robbinsdale High was defined by the culminating effects of a national mid-century phenomenon of baby boom followed by baby bust, a demographic event striking the grand majority of school districts (Bishop, 1979). Nationally, school enrollment peaked in the 1971-1972 school year and dropped by 10 percent during the 1970s. Suburban school districts that had experienced above-average increases in enrollment during the 1950s and 1960s found themselves in accelerated decline during the 1970s. Coupled with high inflation and a mistrust of governmental institutions in general, the 1970s and the early 1980s proved to be challenging times for school districts' administrative bodies (Eisenberger, 1975a).

At the start of the decade of decline, educational researchers viewed declining enrollment as just another challenge facing school district leadership. Competencies that had been acquired during periods of growth would be transposed to deal with decline (Eisenberger, 1974). By the turn of the decade, however, researchers began to question whether management principles that had worked during growth were applicable to the new era of decline. Dealing with shrinking enrollments and budgets created winners and losers. Questions of equity and entitlement arose (Boyd, 1983). In the move from distributive to redistributive policies, choices had to be made over whether cuts should be made equitably or efficiently, uniformly or differentially, in a dispersed or concentrated manner.

A tendency toward rigidity in school districts' organizational structure, led to abrupt change over the period of decline rather than gradual and stable downsizing (Berger, 1982a). During retrenchment, school districts sought to raise revenue by lobbying for additional state

funds, seeking voter approved increases in local tax levies, procuring grants from private foundations or governmental sources, and selling, leasing, or renting excess facility capacity. Districts sought to reduce expenditures by reducing staff, eliminating programs, and consolidating districts and schools. Consolidation usually meant school closures. Closed schools were sold, rented, re-used for other district purposes, or mothballed for possible future use. Because of their controversial nature, school closures were often used as a last resort.

The motivations for school consolidation have varied over time (DeYoung, 1995; Reynolds, 1999), including state curricular, safety, or desegregation requirements (often accompanied by state financial incentives), regional economic crises, and declining enrollment (either due to population shifts or a declining birth rate). The consolidation movement of the 1970s and 1980s was largely due to a declining birth rate.

The belief underlying these various stimuli was that larger schools could provide equivalent education at cheaper cost or better education at equivalent cost. Many advocates promoted the thought that consolidation would both increase efficiency and improve the quality of education (Sher & Tompkins, 1977). They believed that larger schools led to economies of scale, resulting in cost effectiveness through maximization of resources. Larger schools would also provide an increase in the number of programs, course offerings, and extracurricular activities. Better equipment and more specialized teachers would increase academic achievement.

Within educational circles, consolidation was mostly viewed as an undisputed sign of educational progress during the first half of the 20th century (Sher & Tompkins, 1977). However, criticism among educational professionals began to materialize during the 1960s and 1970s. Some submitted evidence that consolidation offered questionable efficiencies with no

guarantee of controlling costs, and that it sometimes even resulted in greater expenses. Even as the century came to a close, for example, it was determined that West Virginia's school consolidation policy of the 1990s, under which more than 25 percent of the state's schools were shuttered, had not saved taxpayers any money (Purdy, 1997).

Critics contended that, although economies of scale could be achieved in some areas through consolidation, diseconomies of scale also materialized (Sher & Tompkins, 1977), such as elevated transportation costs, increased vandalism, and greater costs for supervision and control. They argued that larger consolidated schools often had to raise class sizes or increase administrative work loads in order to achieve reduced costs. Spending less to obtain less service resulted in false efficiencies.

More modern facilities and greater teacher specialization would not necessarily lead to increased curricular or instructional quality, the critics asserted. There was a lack of consistent and convincing data showing improved academic achievement in consolidated schools. In fact, studies showed that increased school size was particularly damaging to the achievement of lower socioeconomic status students (Howley & Bickel, 2000). Monolithic bureaucracies that removed more direct governance from schools, larger class sizes and increased anonymity, alienation, and absenteeism among students, lower extracurricular participation, and wasted time in increased length of transportation were all seen to have a detrimental effect on academic achievement.

Additionally, school consolidation's effect on the relationship between school and community and on the role of school in sustaining community was raised as a concern (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005). It was argued that consolidation furthered racial or class divisions, weakened public support for schools, severed the connection between home and school, hastened community economic decline, and negatively affected community identity.

Critics contended that smaller was really the ideal for school size, and that, at some point, as schools became too big, they became more inefficient. Smaller size also was seen to offer better school climate, more personal attention, less bullying, better discipline, more extracurricular involvement, higher achievement (in many cases), and maintenance of community identity (Beckner & O'Neal, 1980).

Could an optimum school size or district size be discerned? There seemed to be no consensus, except that there were advantages and disadvantages to both bigness and smallness (Adams & Foster, 2002). The empirical literature showed evidence of positive, negative, and insignificant effects of consolidation on educational economy and quality, with context being an important determinant.

School-Closure Decision Making and Community Reaction

The closure of the local public school, whether during the consolidation of many one-room school houses in the early 1900s or during the suburban school closures of the 1970s, has often proved to be a divisive issue. Community conflict, law suits, lost school board elections, and defeated tax levies have often been the end result (Reynolds, 1999). Small-town, rural residents demonstrated particularly strong reactions to their local school's closure. They had been more socialized to feel part of a community, and thus, they mobilized to defend their community's assets (Peshkin, 1982). As a variety of case studies have shown, however, in some instances consolidation has appeared to be an attractive proposition to local residents. Noting the varying degrees of community hostility, some wondered if the process used for school-closure decision making could have any bearing on the degree of community acceptance of school closures.

The 1970s saw the emergence of a craftlore of professional consensus on how to temper community hostility and enact successful school consolidations. The consensus advocated an open-system approach with broad citizen participation, utilizing a decision-making process based on comprehensive, rational planning, problem-solving, and consensus-building (Zerchykov, 1982).

Advice givers recommended a series of steps to the process (Keough, 1978; Puleo, 1981; Sargent & Handy, 1974). 1. Soften up the community through personal interaction and an information campaign showing statistics on enrollment decline while promising improved educational quality through consolidation. 2. Engage in long-range planning utilizing a widely representative task force to develop a future master plan of the district including enrollment projections, needed facilities, and budget projections. 3. Develop school-closure criteria within the task force to evaluate school facilities through numeric weighting and composite score analysis in order to determine which facilities would best meet future needs. 4. Make a decision and recommendation from the task force to the board based both on the criteria and on consideration of any possible consequences.

At the end of the decade, some educational researchers challenged the professional consensus, pointing out that there were limitations to objective fact-finding, and that such an extended process often promoted coalition formation (Boyd, 1983). Studies indicated that comprehensive planning and community participation did not seem to reduce opposition to consolidation, and that there was a tendency for opposition to be greater in districts where planning was the most comprehensive (Berger, 1983b). Contrary to conventional wisdom, the more comprehensive and extended the planning process, the greater the opposition to school-closing decisions.

Critics also contended that the professional-consensus model underweighted the importance of neighborhoodness, and that it reflected middle- and upper-middle-class policy making effective during growth, but not applicable during decline in either blue or white collar districts (Boyd & Wheaton, 1983; Wood & Boyd, 1981). Some suggested that it was futile to try to quell community dissatisfaction at all, and that rage and anger were part of a natural grieving process. Others recommended resorting to across-the-board cuts, asserting that the damage to the community brought about by most school closures outweighed any purported benefits.

In the last two decades, new ideas on school-closure decision-making processes have been scarce, with many professionals advocating a continuation of the comprehensive, rational planning and consensus-building approach (Russo, 2006), others promoting a more modified rational-consensual approach, taking into account political feasibility, legitimacy, and pace in decision making.

Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on School Consolidation

The school consolidation movement constituted one of the most imposing governmental changes to occur in the United States during the 20th century (Guthrie, 1980). From 1930 through 1972, while the school-age population doubled, the number of school districts dropped by over 80 percent, and the total number of schools in operation dropped by over 60 percent. From 1972 to 1980, although national enrollment dropped by only 10 percent, an additional one third of remaining schools was closed. Throughout this period, school building enrollment size continued to grow. By 1990, half of all high schools enrolled between 500 and 2,500 students (Hampel, 2002). Through historical investigation and analysis, researchers were able to identify a number of motives behind the urban and rural consolidation movements in the first half of the

20th century. These included the advertised pretenses as well as ulterior forces.

On the surface, the marketing of rural consolidation utilized a two-pronged financial and pedagogical approach. Collapsing smaller districts and smaller schools into larger units, it was argued, would increase economic efficiency on the one hand, and increase instructional effectiveness on the other. Such arguments were disseminated by prominent educational professionals and academicians including Ellwood Cubberly and James Bryant Conant (Berry, 2004; Hampel, 2002).   Both in the short and long term, consolidation was often not able to live up to the profuse educational and economic claims made on its behalf, and many rural citizens were hesitant to embrace consolidation. However, since large, new rural schools were tangible symbols of the modernization sweeping all aspects of life in the 1900s, rural America ended up succumbing to the consolidation wave, hoping that the new resources would lead to increased learning and better chances of success for its children (Sher & Tompkins, 1977).

Other forces behind the consolidation movement were more clandestine, operating behind the scenes. Among these was the industrialization of the educational system, starting in urban schools in the late 1800s and rooted in classical economic thinking of the previous century (DeYoung, 1989b). Aided by the injection of business interests into urban school boards, along with the concept of meritocracy and the Municipal Reform movement, these industrializing tendencies resulted in larger, specialized, professionalized schools operating under bureaucratic structures which gave increasing power to administrators (Boyd, 1979; Spring, 2001). These administrators were formed in educational graduate schools steeped in theories of scientific management which taught that schools should be run as efficient business organizations.

Changes in urban schools were eventually duplicated in rural areas as city needs and interests turned into state and national interests which then came to displace rural concerns. The

urbanization of rural schools, characterized by increasing professionalization and bureaucratization, required larger buildings and school systems, while changing curricular focus, especially the move from technical to comprehensive high schools, brought about further rural consolidation (DeYoung, 2002). The state exercised expanding control over the reorganization of rural schools since bigger units were viewed as offering a more desirable conduit for state investment in the range of skills that would enhance national economic development. The launch of Sputnik and the advent of the Cold War added to the rural consolidation drive in the name of providing a technically better sort of schooling in a new era of international competitiveness (DeYoung & Howley, 1990).

As national school enrollment peaked and the 1970s decade of enrollment decline moved into full acceleration, Bernstein (1976) completed an appraisal of the then current state of social and political theory. By the 1960s, American social scientists had proclaimed the end of ideology in their disciplines, believing they had reached a firm empirical foundation. This empirical theoretical perspective to social science knowledge claimed to be objective, neutral, logical, rigorous, value-free, descriptive, and based on observation of fact. With roots in the early enlightenment and the positivism of Comte, the empirical theorist was a disinterested observer, viewing the social sciences as an extension of the natural sciences.

But the 1960s also brought about a radical critique of social science empirical thinking. Critics claimed that its foundations were rotten, that empiricism held hidden values, and that it still reflected an ideology, a disguised form of ideology that supported the status quo. They contended that there was an increasing gap between empirical knowledge and its utilization for creating a good and just society. A tension had developed between those, on the one hand, that pictured a close link between the natural or physical sciences and the social sciences, and those

that found increasing limitations in such a linkage (Bernstein, 1976).

Varying theoretical orientations, each rooted in earlier time periods, began to challenge the dominant empirical view of social sciences. One of the more important theoretical challengers, phenomenology, was of a more interpretative bent, while another, critical theory, was more critical in nature, especially the thinking coming out of the Frankfurt School. School consolidation research in the late 20th century incorporated all three major analytical perspectives: empirical, phenomenological, and critical analysis.

Was school consolidation effective at reducing costs? Did it improve academic achievement? These questions, examined in part two of the literature review, were most often analyzed using empirical methods. Empirical research and analysis helped to dispel "the myths" of rural school and district consolidation, showing that bigger was not always better (Purdy, 1997; Sher & Tompkins, 1977). Using statistical analysis, Bickel, Howley, Williams, and Glascock (2000) found that larger schools were associated with lower achievement among low socioeconomic status students. Adams and Foster (2002) concluded that the empirical literature on school district size showed evidence of positive, negative, and negligible effects of consolidation on educational economies and student performance.

Examined in part three of the review, empirical research and analysis also made up the bulk of studies attempting to determine the decision-making process best suited for minimizing adverse community reaction in consolidation. Using empirical techniques, Boyd (1982a, 1982b) determined that the rational-planning and consensus models of professional craftlore did not reduce tensions in white collar districts in decline. Berger (1982b, 1983b) also challenged the plan-and-agree paradigm, studying over 50 districts in decline and using statistical analysis to show that, on average, comprehensive planning and community participation did not help

mitigate opposition.

A different sort of analysis was required for areas of research focus examined in part four of the review, such as investigations into the role of traditions, values, and local culture in consolidation decisions, the meaning of a school to a community, and the issue of community identity. For further understanding of these richer and more in-depth topics, researchers largely turned to a phenomenological theoretical perspective. Especially useful for interpreting qualitative data, phenomenology was founded in the thinking of Schutz, Husserl, and Sellars. A shift of perspective brought focus on understanding human action with reference to the meaning that such action had for the agents. Phenomenological analysis was based on perception, interpretation, and experience, generating categories for understanding what the actors from their own points of view meant in their actions (Bernstein, 1976).

Two of the more expansive studies exemplifying phenomenological analytical methods were Peshkin's (1982) story of inter-town consolidation feuding in 1970s rural Illinois, in which he examined the meaning of a school to a community, and DeYoung's (1995) in-depth look at the circumstances surrounding the 1990s closure of one small-town West Virginia school, describing the social life of the school and its community during the last year of its existence. Other phenomenologically based consolidation research included rural Illinois interdistrict consolidation resistance (Ward & Rink, 1992), rural Pennsylvania high school consolidation efforts (Post & Stambach, 1999), and superintendents' perspectives on "in-school" versus "community" social justice following consolidation decisions (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005).

Critical Theory and School Consolidation

For further areas of research focus, found in part five of the review, such as determining

the political, economic, or ideological forces influencing consolidation decisions, the power relationships within the community and within the closure process, and the effects of consolidation on different segments of society, researchers largely turned to a critical analytical perspective. In contrast to other social and political theories oriented toward understanding or explaining society through a purely observational mode, critical theory's intent was to change society as a whole by engaging in a critique of domination and power, and, with an eye on the potential for human freedom and happiness, through the promotion of a more democratic, and socialist society. Based on the thinking of Horkheimer, Adorno, Weber, Althusser, and more recently, Habermas, Bourdieu, and arguably Foucault, critical theory was neo-Marxist, critical, and emancipatory in nature (Bernstein, 1976; Brookfield, 2005; Sim & Van Loon, 2001).

Critical social theory literature included a number of tenets applicable to a critique and analysis of late 20th century school-closure decision making, community reaction, and consolidation's effect on community. 1. Technical and bureaucratic rationality founded in positivistic and scientistic thought were overtaking moral and ethical commitment (Apple, 1990, 1995; Brookfield, 2005). 2. Ideological and hegemonic forces, embedded in legitimatory systems, had led people to become complicit in perpetuating a societal and institutional organization that often did not function in their best interest, benefiting the few against the well-being of the many (Brookfield, 2005; Eagleton, 1991). 3. Power and knowledge had become increasingly intertwined, with power structures supported by dominant discourses or regimes of truth. Furthermore, as authoritarian power had become partially replaced by self-imposed disciplinary power, power had become omni-present (Brookfield, 2005; Foucault, 1977, 1980). 4. The development of authentic, participative, and democratic communication had become threatened by the values of capitalist society and a loss of social solidarity (Brookfield, 2005). 5.

Advanced capitalism tended to promote a cascading series of crises: economic, rationality, legitimation, and motivation (Habermas, 1975).

As early as the 1980s, critical issues of educational equity were noted in urban school closures following the decade of decline. Economically advantaged white students and their parents had been the winners, while minority and working-class students and their parents had been the clear losers in school consolidation. Evidence showed that school-closure policies were neither color blind nor free of class inequities (Dean, 1982, 1983; Valencia, 1984). Three of the more expansive studies utilizing a critical theoretical approach included DeYoung and Howley's (1990) assertion that a state legitimation crisis was behind West Virginia's 1990s consolidation push, Carspecken's (1991) evaluation of power as mediated through community-school relations, pedagogic practice, and national education policies during a 1980s working-class occupation of a school proposed for closure in Liverpool, England, and Reynolds' (1999) place-based and class-based analysis of one-room country-school consolidation in 1920s rural Iowa.

Also widely addressed and subjected to intense critique within a critical theoretical framework was the scientific-management, business-oriented approach to educational decision making and educational leadership, both generally and specifically within school consolidation. Through research which turned a skeptical eye to a non-partisan, technical-rational, expert-centered view of decision making that emphasized efficiency and industrial notions within educational change, the industrialized schooling framework, one of the primary catalysts behind more than a half-century of consolidation, was put into dispute (Apple, 1990, 1995; Smyth, 1989b).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE PART 2
ENROLLMENT-DECLINE MANAGEMENT
THROUGH SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION
IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

What's the hardest animal to
kill in the world? A school mascot.
Anonymous district administrator

Literature in the ERIC database involving school closure in urban areas began to appear in the mid-1960s, mainly in relation to desegregation, but also with the inclusion of some urban Catholic school closures. In the early 1970s, as the last of the baby-boom generation started moving through metropolitan school systems, professional journal articles addressing public school closure and consolidation in urban and suburban areas began to emerge, mostly due to declining enrollment. These included a profusion of literature on enrollment forecasting in the mid-1970s, followed closely by publications on strategies districts could use to respond to the fiscal pressures brought on by enrollment decline, one such strategy being school consolidation. This triggered ongoing research over the ensuing 40 years into the effectiveness of school consolidation from fiscal, educational, and community livelihood perspectives.

This part of the review considers such literature in two sections: (a) managing declining enrollment, with a focus on public school districts' reorganization and retrenchment efforts and the strategies being recommended during the 1970s and 1980s to address enrollment decline and resulting fiscal crisis; and (b) arguments supporting and opposing school consolidation, concentrating on research into the effectiveness of using consolidation as a means of addressing fiscal crisis, as well as research on some of its unintended effects viewed from a mixture of educational quality and community preservation stances. A short summary is provided at the end of each section. Conducted largely by professional educational decision makers, the intent of

this research was to help guide the action of other professional educational decision makers as they pondered the effectiveness of using consolidation as a means of relieving fiscal pressures. This literature helped paint a picture of what was happening nationwide during the time period of Robbinsdale High's closure, offering a better understanding of the Robbinsdale case study within the larger environment of school consolidation. This historical edge to the review assisted in arriving at an appreciation of the challenges Robbinsdale district officials faced as they entertained the option of closing school buildings to meet budgetary constraints brought on by the district's shift from growth to decline.

Managing Declining Enrollment

"'*Enrollment is a local phenomenon, in each district a unique configuration* of birth rate, population migration, age of community, and other factors'" (Florio cited in Dean, 1981, p. 3). Among the thousands of school districts within the United States, while some are experiencing a loss of students, others may be facing an increase in enrollment. The severe enrollment decline affecting the Robbinsdale Area Schools during the 1970s and 1980s was not an isolated local occurrence, however. It was the result of a national mid-century phenomenon of baby boom followed by baby bust, striking the grand majority of American school districts.

Economic and Demographic Changes of the 1970s

Bishop (1979) reported that in 1950, there were 28 million pupils in grades K-12 nationwide. By 1960, enrollment was up 52 percent to 43 million. Between 1962 and 1972, elementary enrollment increased an additional 11 percent, while high school enrollment increased an additional 38 percent. Overall enrollment would peak at 51 million students in the

1971-1972 school year, with high school enrollment peaking four years later. Total national enrollment would then drop by 10 percent during the 1970s.

The end of the post World War II baby boom proclaimed itself through a dramatic reduction in the birth rate. R. Andrews, Soder, and Eismann (1974) reported that in 1957 there were about 123 live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44. By 1973 the number had been cut almost in half to about 69 live births. A number of reasons were offered for the end of the baby-boom generation of students, including women's liberation, improved methods and greater use of contraception, postponement of marriage, postponement of childbearing after marriage, and smaller families overall (Dean, 1981).

The student enrollment peak and subsequent decline in the state of Minnesota mirrored the national trend for the 1970 time period. Inner-ring suburban districts, however, such as the Robbinsdale Area Schools, those that had recorded above-average increases in enrollment during the 1950s and 1960s, would find themselves in accelerated decline during the 1970s. Robbinsdale had registered an enrollment of over 28,000 at the beginning of the 1970s but would end the decade with about 17,000 students, a nearly 40 percent decline. Sieradski (1975) surmised that suburbs had been populated in quick fashion by families of similar age groups during the baby boom, and that those same homeowners were keeping their homes after their children had gone through school, leaving fewer housing units available for newer families. Of those homes available, many were too expensive for young families to buy or rent. Thus, many suburbs were hit particularly hard during this period of decline in population of school-age children.

For school officials, the problem of declining enrollment was compounded by a period of high inflation throughout the 1970s, coupled with a general suspicion of governmental

institutions. Eisenberger (1975a) stated,

> Concomitant with retrenchment and no growth, our era is also said to be a time characterized by a lack of faith in the fiber of public officials and a lack of confidence in the fabric of public institutions. The public disrobing of Nixon, the loosely-threaded weave in the cloth of our government, the stark nudity of Watergate, and the recent CIA exposures have subjected the ready-to-wear mantle of all public figures, superintendents included, to the scrutinizing eye of a custom-tailored public. (p. 2)

School district officials faced an increasingly challenging administrative environment as the decade of the 1970s wore on. How would educational leadership differ under conditions of decline as opposed to growth? What new tools could be used to effectively manage declining enrollment?

Decline Versus Growth

Early on in the decade of change from growth to decline, some educational researchers such as Eisenberger (1974, 1975a) viewed declining enrollment as a challenge not particularly distinguishable from others that school district leaders had already faced, such as building new schools, addressing integration, and managing attacks from left and right. The competency, expertise, and confidence that had been built around the challenges of the 1950s and 1960s, a period of growth, would translate into competency to deal with declining enrollment. It was thought of as just one more challenge for educational leaders. Eisenberger and Keough (1974) advised school officials to view declining enrollment and its accompanying fiscal retrenchment as essentially a "people problem," rather than a nuts-and-bolts issue. This people problem would require skill and effort in the area of human behavioral relations by attending to the psychological-emotional concerns of parents, teachers, principals, and children. This was especially true when dealing with school building closures.

Eisenberger and Keough (1974) pointed out that teachers were not only concerned about

a loss of jobs in this new period of decline. In the case of building reassignment, teachers were also apprehensive of losing established reputations and being accepted by a new faculty and staff. Principals were also concerned about job loss, or in the case of reassignment to a new building, they were anxious about the loss of a staff with which they had developed a working rapport, the loss of established community acceptance, and the need to recreate a reputation. Board members were concerned about maintaining their good reputations and protecting the leadership positions they had built. They were apprehensive of facing a possible publicly stated loss of confidence at election time, all the more likely when tied to the specter of school closures.

Parents had used the local school and its activities as an avenue for meaningful involvement and personal need fulfillment. They had spent long years building good personal reputations in the local school, carving out spheres of influence, volunteering in classrooms, and helping in after-school activity clubs. In the case of their children being assigned to new buildings through school closures, "what [parents saw] is the threat of losing this personal investment and having to begin all over again the process of building reputation, influence and acceptance in a new school" (Eisenberger & Keough, 1974, p. 11). Parents were not mostly fighting to save a building from closure, they were responding to the hierarchy of human needs. School building closures, in particular, "demand the utmost skill, care and effort in the area of human behavioral relations" (p. 10).

Eisenberger (1975a) produced a filmstrip for school officials entitled, *Dwindling Enrollments and School Closings: S.T. George and the Dragon*. Dr. George, the superintendent of a mythical district, faced the dragon of school closings. He faced an emotional and angry public as he clutched enrollment charts and graphs. But then Dr. George came to the following realization:

School closings are people problems, first and foremost. At this point in the story, Dr. George employed a variety of people-oriented involvement techniques. And, finally, in the end, S.T. George [walked] off into the sunset, arm in arm, with a friendly dragon. All fairy tales have happy endings. (p. 4)

Eisenberger concluded, "School closings are people problems,...community involvement [is] crucial" (p. 4).

Later on in the 1970s, however, rather than viewing the change from growth to decline as just another administrative challenge, both Eisenberger and Keough began to highlight some of the differences leaders were facing under the new period of decline compared with the prior period of growth. Keough (1978) characterized this change for school officials.

In growth, the passage of time tends to balance errors of judgment in resource allocation; in decline, time compounds them. Growth holds out promise of career advancement; decline portends job consolidation. Growth encourages and provides for multiple priorities; decline necessitates focus on only a few. In varied and for multiple reasons decline management will challenge the most able leader or administrator. (p. 40)

Keough warned against using short-term solutions, emphasizing the need for long-range thinking and planning by developing a master plan. He encouraged ample community input into decision making, including newsletters, coffee hours, and community task forces. Likewise, Eisenberger (1978) conceded that district leaders would need to acquire new skills and perspectives that were more appropriate for decline. In addition to advising public hearings, citizen task-forces, and long-range planning, she recommended that district leaders use simulations and case studies in order to develop skills, unity of purpose, and consensus building. These would give leaders advance preparation in tackling the difficult decisions lurking on the horizon.

By the turn of the decade, other researchers were describing the era of declining enrollment as one differing significantly from the era of growth. They questioned whether management principles that had worked during times of growth were appropriate and effective at all in the new era of decline. Berger (1982b) wrote, "Retrenchment policies inevitably require

selective sacrifice.... In growth, benefits are preserved or increased, whereas decline raises the delicate issue of who will bear the costs of the retrenchment. No amount of planning or participation can alter this reality" (p. 338). Boyd (1983), commented, "There is wide agreement among analysts that politics, policymaking, and management [during] decline differ significantly from their characteristics under growth conditions" (p. 255).

Boyd (1983) saw declining enrollment and shrinking budgets as creating winners and losers, with no extra resources available to buy off losers with payments on secondary issues. Increased participation from citizens, who now felt a personal stake in decisions, was more difficult for leaders to manage. Questions of equity and entitlement arose while morale decreased. Administrative staff was often the first to be cut back in cost-saving measures, even though systematic planning and analysis were more important than ever. Families with children in schools were now the minority in many districts. "The pressures of decline thus bring out the obverse of Lasswell's (1936) famous definition of politics as 'who gets what, when, and how.' Who *loses* what, when, and how is now often the central question" (p. 255).

Drawing on previous research by Lowi, Boyd (1979) characterized the change from growth to decline as a movement from "distributive" to "redistributive" policies. Distributive policies, such as pork-barrel programs, parceled out resources so that the losers and the recipients would never come into direct confrontation. Redistributive policies, such as progressive income taxation, or cutting *X* to preserve *Y*, involved a direct choice as to who would be indulged and who would be deprived. Furthermore, redistributive policies could become especially problematic when the indulged and the deprived included broad social classes.

In a slightly more detailed analysis, Cibulka (1983) identified four ways to distribute a political good. Cibulka specified that a good's impact could be felt by all (uniform) or just by

some (differential). He also specified that the good's impact could be a gain (an increment) or a loss (a decrement). Periods of growth entailed "uniformly distributed increments." Under this scenario it was easy to find winning coalitions, since everyone benefited equally. "Differentially distributed increments," also found under growth periods, were less easy to implement, but became possible when another increment was offered in exchange to those groups not initially benefitting. Periods of decline entailed "uniformly distributed decrements," which were less easy yet to implement, but since everyone was losing equally, they were perceived as fair. "Differentially distributed decrements," also found under periods of decline, were the hardest to implement, since one group was singled out for deprivation, suffering a loss in order to offer a gain to (or to at least hold harmless) the rest of the community. School closures fell under this category.

Berger (1983a) described periods of enrollment decline as offering district officials an unhappy choice between "equity cuts" or "efficiency cuts." Equity cuts, which entailed shared pain, distributed cuts across the whole organization, without taking into account the impact on its long-term survival. "[They] are easy to enact and avoid the unpleasant task of singling out certain parties for sacrifice, but they penalize efficient units and reward inefficient units and thereby threaten the survival of the organization as a whole (Levine, 1978)" (p. 7). Efficiency cuts were selective cuts to employees and units, cuts beneficial to organizational survival.

> [Efficiency cuts] increase the likelihood of organization survival (by reallocating precious resources from marginal to more central units/persons), but they require a costly analysis of an agreement on which units/persons are most essential to the organization's survival in the long run. Thus, these types of cuts are likely to be much more controversial and divisive. (Levine cited in Berger, 1983a, p. 7)

School closures fell under this category. Berger's analysis was similar to Boyd and Wheaton's (1983) "dispersed cuts" or "concentrated cuts," the former described as across-the-board cuts,

minimizing conflict and weakening the organization, the latter described as concentrated cuts, like painful surgery, generating intense opposition, but more conducive to long-term organizational survival.

Managing in Decline

During the 1970s, similar to current practice, a large portion of many school districts' budgets was derived from state government aid, based on student enrollment. Although some revenue-generating strategies could be employed to offset reduced state financing, (such as asking for an increase in local school funding through taxpayer-approved referenda), enrollment decline invariably meant downsizing school districts for a new environment of fewer students. The ensuing cost-cutting measures were commonly referred to as "retrenchment." Berger (1982a) described the challenge facing school administrators at the time as one of having to "'unlearn yesterday' and 'invent tomorrow'" (p. 3). Berger studied 53 declining enrollment school districts for the ten-year period following their peak in enrollment. Using a survey method with closed-ended questionnaire checklist followed by statistical analysis, he looked at how these educational organizations had scaled down during the 1970s, formulating a theory of five stages in decline.

In the "pre-response" stage, from zero to two years out from their enrollment peak, districts assumed that the decline in enrollment would only be temporary (Berger, 1982a). In the "emerging awareness and buying time" stage, two to four years out, school officials began drawing down existing surpluses, obtaining short-term loans, and slowing down the rate of budget increases. "Alarm and relatively safe responses" set in four to six years into declining enrollment. An understanding began to emerge that what was thought to be only a temporary

enrollment decline would now be permanent. This awareness led to alarm, followed by raising

fees, proposing referenda, eliminating summer activities, and cutting back in art and music.

School boards established citizens' committees on facility use and requested advice from outside

experts. There was a belief that, although requiring sacrifice, fiscal problems were solvable

through rational analysis and participatory processes.

"Crisis and confrontation" described school districts' responses six to eight years into

decline (Berger, 1982a). When technical rationality and participatory processes were not

reducing tensions, administration turned increasingly to school closures, deep program cutbacks,

and teacher lay-offs. "Save Our Schools" coalitions formed and teacher grievances increased.

There was a feeling that the "one big happy family" was falling apart. School boards would

make controversial decisions, maybe reversing their positions now and then. Boards would take

action where there was least political resistance and then justify action in rational economic

terms. A "post-crisis equilibrium" was achieved in the last stage of declining enrollment, about

eight to ten years out. At this point decline and fiscal stress had become routinized. People were

resigned to the inevitability of the situation. Some board members, administrators, teachers, or

parents left their school districts. Districts had scaled themselves down.

Berger (1982a) found that the school districts in his 1970s research showed a tendency

toward rigidity in organizational structure which led to abrupt, revolutionary change over the

various phases of decline, rather than gradual change amid relative stability.

> When educational organizations experience the fiscal threat of enrollment decline and
> inflation, they adjust to adversity by allowing certain excesses and problems (e.g., too
> many staff, too many facilities, too many programs) to build up. This rigidity, in turn,
> does *not* lead to incremental change on a piecemeal, continuous basis. Instead, late in the
> decline cycle there is a crisis which results in a significant change across a large
> proportion of structural and strategic variables. This revolutionary adaptation enables the
> district to reach its new equilibrium at a smaller scale of operation. (p. 17)

Revenue generation.

Some educational professionals encouraged school districts to regard enrollment decline

as an opportunity to improve educational quality. Bishop (1979) suggested that districts use

excess building space to expand programs for libraries, arts, full-day kindergarten, and

community education, or to broaden the range of handicapped children served. Most districts,

however, were not in a fiscal position to expand programs. At best they were searching for

revenue-generating ideas to simply maintain existing programs.

Some of the more notable revenue-generating possibilities included selling, leasing, or

renting currently vacant school facilities to other public institutions or private enterprises.

Although some grumbled that school districts were not real estate companies, Bussard (1981)

noted, "Regardless of how people feel, the school district *is* 'in the real estate business' as soon

as it has surplus space" (p. 35). Districts could also lease or rent parts of currently occupied

buildings as a source of income. After severe enrollment decline, the Seattle school district hired

a property manager and within a year had secured short- or long-term leases in 19 closed

buildings as well as 55 leases for joint occupancy in school buildings still in use. This ended up

generating net revenue of over one million dollars per year (Narver, 1983).

Lobbying the state for additional funds or increasing local school taxes became the other

prevalent revenue-generating possibility to aid in financing education in an era of decline.

Shakeshaft and Gardner (1983) recommended achieving favorable votes on local tax referenda

by concentrating on those district residents most likely to vote for approval. They also

recommended some less utilized sources of potential additional revenue for school districts, such

as expanding existing markets and entering into new markets. These included: (a) cradle-to-

grave education (prenatal, parenting classes, weekend and evening courses, special programs for

senior citizens); (b) partnerships with the private sector (financially and educationally sound training programs to respond to the needs of business and industry); (c) new programs for truants and dropouts; and (d) funding from private foundations or government sources for the development of model or exemplary programs.

Expenditure reduction.

For most districts, additional revenue generation alone would not solve the fiscal pressures of declining enrollment and inflation faced during the 1970s and 1980s. Cost reductions became a necessary component to the solution. The primary options for addressing expenditures were reducing staff, cutting programs, and consolidating facilities. Since the largest portions of school districts' budgets were staff-related (often 70 percent or more), cutting back on staff became a necessary factor in any serious attempt at overall cost reduction. The reduction of staff could be commensurate with the decline in enrollment, or staff reduction could go even further, increasing average class sizes. Further staff reduction could be accomplished by eliminating specific programs or consolidating facilities. A staff reduction policy did not come without associated problems, however. Boyd (1983) noted that as staff-size contracted, younger teachers left the profession, teachers shifted away from their main area of competence for job security, and an aging teaching force became susceptible to overload and burnout.

Pankake and Baily (1986) set out to determine what superintendents in 135 districts experiencing enrollment decline were recommending to manage fiscal stress. Among 32 options, the two most highly recommended by the superintendents in the survey were preventative maintenance and custodial in-service training. It is fair to say that school officials tended to put off for as long as possible the unpleasant, yet mostly inevitable, task of cutting teachers, cutting

programs, and closing schools. Of these three, school closures were usually implemented as a last resort. A prevalent joke circulating in educational circles asked, "'What's the hardest animal to kill in the world? A school mascot'" (Russo, 2006, para. 10). Of the 15 suburban school districts in decline studied by Boyd (1982a), the two with the highest degree of fiscal strain and substantial loss in enrollment had not closed even one school.

Putting aside controversial school-closure decisions, district officials still had many other specific measures at their disposal to address expenditures as enrollment declined. In addition to across-the-board cuts, educational professionals from the 1970s and 1980s advanced many proposals (see Table 2) to help school districts reduce their expenses, or to slow their increase. What follows is a concentrated amalgamation of the recommendations of many writers.

Table 2

Administrative Proposals for Organizational Expense Reduction

1. Facilities and Educational Organization

   Defer maintenance
   Redraw school boundaries
   Change the grade organization of the district
   Realign space by renovating buildings or adding new additions

2. Curriculum

   Combine related courses
   Offer courses on an alternate-year basis
   Hire staff with multiple certifications
   Offer interdisciplinary courses
   Use ungraded, cross-age elementary classrooms
   Use technological communication links
   Cut specific curricular programs
   Cut extracurricular activities

3. Employee Costs

    Implement a hiring freeze
    Hire part-time teachers
    Share teachers among schools
    Hire teachers jointly between districts
    Use library support personnel for multiple purposes
    Ask parent volunteers to run elementary libraries
    Use secretarial support for multiple purposes
    Use teams of custodians to rotate between schools
    Encourage leaves of absence
    Offer early retirement incentive plans
    Keep salary increases low
    Lay-off personnel (reduction in force)

4. Management

    Decentralize budget accounts
    Pair schools into one administrative unit
    Utilize principals as part-time teachers
    Utilize staff for administrative responsibilities

Later recommendations included outsourcing some custodial, teaching, and management responsibilities.

Consolidation.

The closure of schools through consolidation was also an important component of cost-saving measures. Consolidation was a more contentious proposition because, as will be discussed later, some researchers questioned its effectiveness at cost reduction, and the general public often objected strongly to the loss of a local school. Consolidation, defined as the merger of two or more attendance areas to form a larger school, sometimes occurred within a single district and sometimes across one or more districts. Entire districts were consolidated when the two attendance areas to be merged were located in separate districts. "Interdistrict"

consolidation was mostly a rural phenomenon, but some suburban districts, such as the

Robbinsdale Area Schools, were built through such consolidation, mostly, however, at a time

when they were still considered rural.

Interdistrict consolidation occurred among the various categories of districts which made

up the educational system (Mullins, 1973). An "operating" district was one in which there were

functioning schools. A "non-operating" district was one in which there was a nonexistent or very

small student population, so the board of education operated no schools of its own. It contracted

on a tuition basis with an adjacent school district to educate its children. At times a non-

operating district would merge with an operating district.

Some districts were "elementary" districts, operating only elementary schools up to

eighth grade. Other districts were only "high school" districts, but geographically overlapping

one or more elementary districts. Citizens would pay taxes separately to the elementary district

and to the high school district. At times, a number of elementary districts would consolidate, or

they would merge with a high school district to become a K-12 "unified" or "unit" district. The

American Association of School Administrators stated that the unified, K-12 school district, with

its coordinated educational program, had proven to be the best system of school governance,

since taxation, policy making, and administration were under the control of a single local agency

(Adams & Foster, 2002).

"Independent" districts were those that deviated from the normal pattern of school district

configuration, often formed by a choice of local taxpayers, or sometimes by an accident of

geography. In midwestern states, school districts were originally formed and based on

government-plotted, 36 square-mile townships. Any town with a population of over 100

residents within the township, however, retained its own school district, independent of the larger

geographical township school district (Reynolds, 1999). The Robbinsdale Area Schools, for example, is still designated as an independent school district. At times a township and an independent district would consolidate.

The consolidation of entire districts could be state-mandated or voluntary. Sometimes they did not involve any school closures, limited to a reorganization of boundaries, services, transportation, and administration. At the very least, the governing boards and administrative staff would be merged into one. At other times, one or more schools were closed during the interdistrict consolidation process. In 1980, for example, Robbinsdale's neighboring school district to the south, the suburban Golden Valley district, merged with the neighboring suburban Hopkins school district. Golden Valley's high school was closed in the process.

Consolidation within a single district necessarily entailed the closure of one or more schools. Sometimes one school would close and merge with one or more neighboring schools. This was the case with Robbinsdale High School's closure. Sometimes two or more schools closed. They would merge with one or more existing schools, or they would all move into a vacant or newly constructed building.

As thousands of schools were closed during the 1970s and 1980s, districts faced decisions on the future use of their empty school buildings. Some empty schools were offered for sale or lease to governmental organizations such as neighboring school districts, or city, county, and state agencies. They were used for such purposes as community centers, libraries, child care programs, adult education and recreation programs, vocational-technical education, expanded college programs, chemical dependency clinics, free health clinics, food shelves, senior citizen services, and regular or special education programs. Other closed schools were offered for sale or lease to private firms. They were used for such purposes as private schools,

motels, apartments, hospitals, clinics, malls, real estate offices, and office storage units. One superintendent, tired of the controversy surrounding school consolidation, joked about the future use of a school that had recently been closed in his district. "My recommendation may be to turn it into a home for old, exhausted superintendents" (Grenis, 1976, p. 58).

Some closed schools were boarded (mothballed) for possible future needs. Others were re-used by districts for purposes such as adult education, alternative schools, or districts' central offices. R. Andrews et al. (1974) telephoned 49 metropolitan districts throughout the United States, asking what they had done with their closed elementary buildings. Slightly over one fourth of closed schools had been leased to other governmental agencies, one fourth had been offered for sale, and one fourth had been re-used for other district purposes.

Summary

The decade preceding the 1982 closure of Robbinsdale High was defined by the culminating effects of a national mid-century phenomenon of baby boom followed by baby bust, a demographic event striking the grand majority of school districts (Bishop, 1979). National enrollment peaked in the 1971-1972 school year and dropped by 10 percent during the 1970s. Suburbs that had experienced above-average increases in enrollment during the 1950s and 1960s found themselves in accelerated decline during the 1970s. Coupled with high inflation and a mistrust of governmental institutions in general, the 1970s and the early 1980s proved to be a challenging time for school districts' administrative bodies (Eisenberger, 1975a).

At the start of the decade of decline, educational researchers viewed declining enrollment as just another challenge facing school district leadership. Competencies that had been acquired during periods of growth could be transposed to deal with decline (Eisenberger, 1974). By the

turn of the decade, however, researchers began to question whether management principles that had worked during growth were applicable to the new era of decline. Dealing with shrinking enrollments and budgets created winners and losers. Questions of equity and entitlement arose (Boyd, 1983). In the move from distributive to redistributive policies, choices had to be made over whether cuts should be made equitably or efficiently, uniformly or differentially, in a dispersed or concentrated manner.

A tendency toward rigidity in school districts' organizational structure, led to abrupt change over the period of decline rather than gradual and stable downsizing (Berger, 1982a). During retrenchment, school districts sought to raise revenue by lobbying for additional state funds, seeking voter approved increases in local tax levies, procuring grants from private foundations or governmental sources, and selling, leasing, or renting excess facility capacity. Districts sought to reduce expenditures by reducing staff, eliminating programs, and consolidating districts and schools. Consolidation usually meant school closures. Closed schools were sold, rented, re-used for other district purposes, or mothballed for possible future use. Because of their controversial nature, school closures were often used as a last resort.

Arguments Supporting and Opposing School Consolidation

Declining enrollment has not been the only catalyst for school consolidation. As will be further developed under historical perspectives in part four of the review, throughout the history of American public schools, even under conditions of stability or growth, many smaller school buildings were closed and merged into sometimes newer and generally larger facilities (DeYoung, 1995; Reynolds, 1999). The basis for such action was often increased societal educational and curricular demands that were financially easier to fulfill under consolidation.

Other causative factors included state desegregation or building safety mandates. State curricular requirements were often the motive for consolidation in rural districts. They generally operated smaller facilities than urban and suburban districts, and compliance with such state curricular mandates or equitable education standards often made consolidation the only option for many rural districts. Sometimes the state offered financial incentives to rural districts to consolidate, or it directly conditioned their funding on consolidation.

Another impetus for consolidation was diminished resources. Decreased educational funding was sometimes due to declining enrollment, but at other times unrelated, the result of national or regional economic crises (DeYoung, 1995). The final driving force for consolidation was the underutilized building space resulting from enrollment decline. A reduced student population in a district could often be traced to a declining birthrate or the aging of the community, but at other times it was the effect of population movement, such as rural to urban migration, or more recently, urban flight to suburban areas. Whatever the reason, consolidation brought about the creation of more populated and often larger educational facilities serving larger attendance areas. School consolidation has generated both advocates and critics among educational professionals and within the general public. How effective was it to close schools as a means of resolving financial problems? Were there any unintended effects? Were the costs worth the benefits?

Advocates of School Consolidation

Advocates of consolidation contended that by creating a larger student body through the merger of two or more schools, one could provide an equivalent quality of education at a cheaper cost. Here the emphasis was on lowering costs, or at least slowing their increase. The

maintenance of educational quality, while holding the line on costs, tended to be the focus of urban and suburban districts during the change from growth to decline. Other proponents maintained that consolidation could provide an improved quality of education at an equivalent cost. Here the emphasis was on educational quality. Improving educational quality for similar costs was the focus of rural districts throughout the 20th century, as they strived to keep up with educational advancements in urban districts.

At the base of both arguments, similar education for less cost, or better education for similar cost, was the notion of efficiency and increased productivity through *economies of scale* (Sher & Tompkins, 1977). Some even asserted that economies of scale, (or the reduction of unit costs as size increases), could bring about the best of all possible worlds—better education for less cost. The insertion of economic theory into educational practice will be further discussed under historical perspectives in part four of the review. In summary, the main rationale held by supporters of school consolidation was increased operational efficiency and enhanced educational quality. As Dean (1981) explained, those in favor of consolidation believed that small schools were economically inefficient and offered inferior educational opportunities.

Increased operational efficiency.

Interdistrict consolidation (the merger of two or more districts) even without the closure of any schools, was specifically championed by supporters of consolidation within professional educational circles. They claimed that larger districts simply brought about more economical and efficient operations due to reduced administrative staff along with such factors as lower costs from bulk purchasing and lower costs from combined transportation. When it came to actual consolidation of school buildings, proponents contended that larger schools were more cost

effective because they maximized resources through economies of scale. This provided for fuller

utilization of teachers and facilities as well as reduced administrative and maintenance costs.

Little savings could be found in transportation, food services, maintenance, and operations until

schools were consolidated.

> "It doesn't cost any less to put 50 students on a bus than it costs to put 70 students on a bus. So until you can reduce entire bus runs, you will not make a great deal of savings in transportation. The same thing is true in food services, where it doesn't cost a great deal more to make 130 lunches than it does to make 100. It doesn't cost any less for a custodian to sweep a room that has 23 students in it than one that has 30 students in it. It still takes 18 minutes." (Sealey cited in Sieradski, 1975, p. 9)

One superintendent stated the obvious. "Fewer buildings mean less dollars spent on fuel,

maintenance and personnel" (Grenis, 1976, p. 59). Post and Stambach (1999) noted that during

one school consolidation decision-making process, a Pennsylvania superintendent kept a large

sign posted above his desk which read, "49,901,459 over 20 years." This was the amount of

money, he presumed, that would be saved by moving students to one centrally-located high

school. The superintendent in one Ohio district that had closed its high school and consolidated

with its neighboring district reported that residents in much of the new district enjoyed a

decrease in taxes following the merger, while other residents' taxes remained at a fairly

consistent level over the ensuing eight years of the study (Self, 2001).

Enhanced educational quality.

The interdistrict consolidation of previously separate elementary and secondary districts

into one K-12 unit district was also highly embraced by many educational professionals. They

maintained that it reduced confusion and increased articulation and continuity of curriculum as

students moved through grade levels (Mullins, 1973). The consolidation of smaller schools into

larger schools also offered educational benefits. Proponents maintained that larger schools could

offer more up-to-date equipment, both in the building and on the playground, and could provide a broader, more comprehensive curriculum through an increased number and diversity of course offerings and educational programs, as well as a wider range of extracurricular offerings (Sher & Tompkins, 1977). Larger schools could support more competitive teachers' salaries and greater teacher specialization, which in turn enhanced instruction and brought about higher levels of academic expectation. Administrative services and school support services, including those for students with gifted or special needs, could also be strengthened through larger schools.

The belief that educational quality could be improved through consolidation had gained traction as far back as the turn of the century. One professor of rural education and sociology (Foght, 1917) argued that rural school consolidation would bring about schools with more modern equipment, better teachers, greater efficiency, and a level of education more comparable to that enjoyed by city dwellers. Historical research into rural education of the 1920s (Reynolds, 1999) provided further detail on the belief among educational professionals at the time that consolidation would improve rural education and offer educational opportunities equal to those available in urban areas. A 1920s Iowa newspaper article reported on the state education superintendent's speech in a small town.

> "[He] contrasted one community in which the small relic of pioneer times stood, with its old time equipment, unattractive yard and necessarily limited educational advantages, with another in which the modern consolidated structure stood, offering its scholars the best teachers, the best equipment, and courses in agriculture and domestic science." (pp. 118-119)

More recently, during the 1970s, another superintendent (Grenis, 1976) expounded on the educational benefits of consolidation, stating,

> The clustering of children and educational resources in one place has immediate educational benefits. It allows the balancing of class sizes, sharing of educational materials, better use of specialists, easier supervision of program and a general increase in the depth of the program through its concentration in fewer buildings. (p. 59)

Benton (1992) described the consolidation of six small Arkansas school districts, each with about 150 students. During the process, all high schools were closed and consolidated into one newly constructed building of 325 students in 1988. In addition to increased course and activity offerings, student test scores improved, the number of dropouts declined, and more graduates attended college. A study of interdistrict consolidation at 25 sites in Iowa (Kemis, Schnelker, Sorensen, & Simonson, 1994) showed that in districts that had experienced a school closure during the process, respondents felt that the closure had positively impacted the educational program, particularly in choice of courses, access to technology, and extracurricular activities. Self (2001) reported that prior to his rural high school's consolidation with a neighboring district's high school in the 1990s, the high school had offered 39 courses, whereas the combined high school offered 87. Prior to consolidation the high school had offered nine organizations. The combined high school offered 20, including football and wrestling. Superintendents in a more recent study (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005) reported higher overall quality of education, broadened and enriched curriculum and programs, and increased offerings of activities following their interdistrict school consolidations.

One of the criticisms of smaller secondary schools was that they had less variety in social, economic, and ethnic status among the student body, limiting the opportunity for contact with others from different backgrounds. The small high school supported a sort of cultural impoverishment due to a lack of student contact with different kinds of people. Thus, an additional purported benefit of consolidation, reiterated by Beckner and O'Neal (1980), was that larger schools would bring about increased in-school cultural diversity, offering better social education. Superintendents interviewed by Alsbury and Shaw (2005), following interdistrict consolidation, affirmed this perspective. They reported expanded socioeconomic and racial

diversity followed by enhanced student awareness and understanding of other viewpoints. Alsbury and Shaw concluded that consolidation enhanced opportunities for "in-school social justice." One additional educational benefit of consolidation, conveyed by Mullins (1973), was that since in rich school districts, residents paid less for more, while in poor districts, residents paid more for less, interdistrict consolidation would promote the sharing of wealth. Some of the inequities between neighboring rich and poor districts could be eliminated if they combined through consolidation. It would help level the playing field of educational opportunity.

Critics of School Consolidation

Within the general public, critics of school consolidation had existed in sizeable numbers over an extended time period. Reynolds (1999) detailed the disagreements among rural residents over the perceived benefits or harms from school consolidation within and between their townships as early as the 1920s. The emergence of a body of research among educational professionals critical of consolidation, however, did not materialize until the 1960s and 1970s, when some began questioning their own profession's long-standing advocacy of the two key purported benefits of consolidation—educational quality and financial savings. Some researchers claimed that the advantages of consolidation were minimal after all (Sher & Tompkins, 1977). Some began to identify specific disadvantages of large schools and positive aspects of smaller schools, such as a more personal climate and less student alienation.

Some researchers then began venturing outside the confines of the school building and the school district as an institution, raising a new concern, the effect of school consolidation on the community. What effect did consolidation have on a community's economic activity, its overall property values, and its support for education? What were the implications for

neighborhood well-being, community identity, and the important connection between a sense of

place and children's educational achievement?

> Noted educator Daniel Davies (1991) summed it up when he said that one of America's biggest mistakes in the organization and conduct of public education was the construction of bigger and bigger school buildings and the consolidation of school districts. Davies declared that in the name of efficiency, everyone forgot the child. (Egelson, 1993, p. 4)

Disputed economic savings.

"[School closures are] an appealing solution: neat, consistent with the American belief

that bigger is better, and seemingly a logical way to cut costs. The closing of schools sounds

right" (Shakeshaft & Gardner, 1983, p. 493). By digging a little deeper, however, critics

contended that consolidation, (whether interdistrict, in-district, rural, urban, or suburban), offered

questionable efficiencies with no guarantee of financial advantage in controlling costs. In reality,

it often resulted in greater expenses and increased school taxes.

A review of data from the 1920s (Reynolds, 1999) found that what country farmers

feared most—increased taxes—was often the end result of consolidation projects. At that time,

proponents of consolidation argued that consolidation would lower the costs of rural education,

but later, in the face of evidence to the contrary, that argument shifted to whether consolidation

was worth the additional costs. In some instances, tax levies per acre of farmland increased three

to four times after consolidation.

Guthrie (1980) pointed out that from 1930 to 1970 schools had become increasingly

larger nationwide as the number of schools was reduced by 60 percent and the number of

students doubled. Yet, in the aggregate, it appeared that consolidation had not dampened costs,

as expenditures per pupil increased fourfold within the nation over those 40 years, even after

discounting for inflation. "Evidence in favor of cost savings associated with larger size schools

and school districts is, at best, ambiguous" (p. 126), he concluded.

In the early 1970s, R. Andrews et al. (1974) telephoned 49 metropolitan districts that had recently closed elementary schools. Districts were located throughout the United States, most with enrollments of over 10,000 students. One third of districts had made no projections on cost savings before closing schools. Other districts had estimated in-building cost savings ranging from $30,000 to $140,000 per school per year, but only a quarter of districts had actually followed through to demonstrate actual cost savings. Of those that had done so, one third calculated that fewer dollars had been saved than had been expected, and the other two thirds concluded that they had saved no money or had actually increased their costs.

Later, Valencia (1984) reviewed the literature and found meager data to support savings from school closures following interdistrict consolidation, with most consolidated districts unable to document the amount of money saved. More than half of districts that had calculated savings found no savings or even additional costs.

In a 19 interdistrict-consolidation study from 10 states in the early 1980s (Streifel, Foldesy, & Holman, 1991), researchers looked at revenues and expenditures from three years prior to and three years after consolidation. They found the only significant savings to be in the category of administration, which was a relatively small part of budgeting. They concluded that there was no reason to expect financial savings or increased revenues as a result of consolidation, and that the financial impact of consolidation on individual districts appeared to be variable.

A review of literature by M. Andrews, Duncombe, and Yinger (2002) found that, after three decades of empirical research, there was no consensus on the effects of size on costs. "In short, despite massive consolidations of school districts in the United States, there is little convincing evidence on how consolidation actually affects school districts in the long-run" (p.

256).

More recently, rural school superintendents interviewed by Russo (2006) stated that cost savings should not be the main point of emphasis in interdistrict consolidation, with most superintendents doubting that cost savings were significant. Russo reported that a 2004 Goldwater Institute study in Arizona had concluded that interdistrict consolidation would be unlikely to produce the hoped-for fiscal savings, and that it was a marginal reform, best implemented on a limited, case-by-case basis.

One of the more astounding documented cases of undelivered savings occurred in West Virginia, where between 1990 and 2000, as part of a concerted statewide consolidation policy, 202 schools were closed and merged with other schools (Purdy, 1997). In the first five years of the process, West Virginia had closed more than 25 percent of its schools and yet had virtually the same pupil-teacher ratio, indicating that no teaching positions had been eliminated and that no appreciable savings had been realized in professional personnel. "Half a billion dollars has been spent building large schools based on 'economy of scale' numbers, and produced no demonstrable savings" (p. 176). In a number of counties, not only had the promised savings from consolidation never materialized, for the first time some districts were running deficits due to the defeat of tax levies in the wake of consolidation.

Later in West Virginia's experiment, Purcell and Shackelford (2005) reported that school transportation costs statewide had doubled in 10 years, even though the state was bussing 25,000 fewer students. West Virginia was spending more of its education dollars on transportation than any other state. At that point, more than a billion dollars had been spent on school consolidation, and the claims of saving taxpayers millions of dollars through school closings and personnel cuts had never occurred, even at the state's own admission. "The executive Director of the School

Building Authority...acknowledged in September 2002 that the closings did not save the taxpayers any money" (p. 7).

Educational researchers offered a variety of explanations to account for consolidation's inability in many cases to deliver the promised cost savings. Some conjectured that, concurrent with the merging of smaller schools into bigger schools, districts often responded to a demand for more programs and services, requiring more specialized staff, which in turn required increased salary levels. Others contended that even when no new programs were added, which was often the case under periods of decline, consolidation did not significantly reduce the number of teachers, with pupil-teacher ratios remaining at similar levels. Costs relating to teaching staff were the largest part of a district's budget, and thus, school closings reduced per-pupil costs very little, if at all.

Some researchers (Sher & Tompkins, 1977) focused further on economic principles, reviewing the notion of economies of scale, defined previously as the reduction of unit costs as size increases. "Since economies of scale were being widely touted in much of the private sector (including agriculture), consolidation advocates found it reasonable and convenient to assume that these scale economies would also exist in public sector activities such as education" (p. 46). Sher and Tompkins maintained that researchers had failed to acknowledge the other economic phenomenon, *diseconomies of scale*, defined as new or enlarged costs due to increased size of operations.

Most notable among diseconomies of scale were transportation costs. Consolidated schools drew from a larger attendance area and had the potential of increasing capital costs for new busses, salaries for drivers, and operating costs for fuel and maintenance. These had to be carefully considered under any proposed consolidation scenario. Sieradski (1975) remarked,

> The best solution to surplus space may very well be simply to keep the school with a small student body. Especially in sparsely populated areas where closing a school would mean busing students long distances, the best alternative could be a modern version of the old one-room school house. (p. 18)

Other diseconomies of scale included higher rates of vandalism and increased capital expenditures in larger facilities. Some diseconomies of scale were probably due to the need for more coordination and control which increased costs for supervision and monitoring as schools became larger (Bickel et al., 2000). Increased transportation, staffing, and capital costs often offset other savings. Sher and Tompkins (1977) were able to show that smaller high schools in Vermont actually had lower average costs per pupil than larger schools.

In those cases where expenditures were reduced following consolidation, Sher and Tompkins (1977) characterized much of the cost savings as "false efficiencies." They observed that consolidated high schools often had to lay-off professional staff, both teachers and administrators, and raise pupil-teacher ratios in order to even approximate the level of operating expenses found in smaller schools. Savings in administrative costs were an example of false efficiencies, because less money was being spent to obtain fewer services. Fewer administrators for the same number of students meant less time for guidance, assistance, and attention per student. Raising pupil-teacher ratios, likewise, resulted in less individual attention per student from the teacher. Combining whole districts to cut administrative expenses (one superintendent rather than two) also resulted in less service. A superintendent in a small, one-town district had more time to devote to each of the individuals and groups served, compared to a consolidated district spread over a number of towns.

> Spending less to attain the same level of performance is efficient. However, spending less to attain less is a corruption of this concept leading only to false efficiencies.... Originally, economy of scale was intended to apply only to products and it was assumed that quality was held constant. Applying this argument to people undermines the assumption of consistent quality and, thereby, invalidates the use of this concept. (pp. 53-

54)

Other costs often overlooked during consolidation included the insurance, maintenance, security, and minimal utility expenses required to maintain empty, mothballed buildings. Also ignored was the consequence of possible diminished support for school bond or tax levies following consolidation, as well as the cost of interest on bonds associated with any consolidation that included construction of a new building. Some researchers even argued that any calculation of consolidation's costs should also include those indirect costs borne by society, such as increased parental and student personal transportation costs, to include productive time lost for parents and students during these greater transportation distances. As West Virginia's consolidation process progressed, the number of children riding buses for more than two hours a day doubled between 1992 and 1996 (Purcell & Shackelford, 2005). Some students in West Virginia were spending up to four hours a day on a bus (Slavin, 2006).

Uncertain educational improvement.

> It has long been argued that consolidation improves the quality of education. Facilities are newer and better equipped; teachers are better educated and more specialized; there are more choices available for students, such as foreign languages, music, art, and vocational courses. Because of these resources, students learn more and have a better chance in life. This argument has two stages: first, that consolidated schools provide more and better resources; and second, that those resources improve learning and life chances. (Sher & Tompkins, 1977, p. 57)

Critics of consolidation contended that although larger schools often offered more modern facilities and greater teacher specialization, this did not automatically denote better curriculum or instructional quality. Critics strongly challenged the claim that consolidation led to increased academic achievement. Challenges to the purported educational benefits of consolidation targeted three areas: (a) curricular quality, (b) academic achievement, and (c) overall educational

quality of life.

Early on, between 1972 and 1974, a student opinion survey was administered to students in a rural Illinois school district, where five high schools were being consolidated into one newly constructed high school. The survey showed that during the year before consolidation, students did not anticipate a better learning atmosphere or an improved quality of instruction in their soon-to-be larger school. Student opinion was unchanged after a year of attending the new consolidated high school (*Student Interest Inventory*, 1975).

Sher and Tompkins (1977) analyzed data gathered by James Bryant Conant, a well-known advocate of high school consolidation during the 1950s. Conant had asserted that high schools with fewer than one hundred students in a graduating class could not offer a comprehensive curriculum or a comprehensive educational program. A comprehensive program was considered to be one that provided a good general education for all pupils as future citizens of a democracy, allowing the majority of students to develop useful skills, and offering advanced academic subjects (like foreign languages and advanced mathematics) for those students capable of advanced study. The researchers found that Conant's own data showed that school size was actually a very poor indicator of comprehensiveness. They maintained that, over time, smaller schools tended to obtain many of the same resources as larger ones.

A later study of West Virginia schools (Purdy, 1997) found that although larger schools did offer more courses than smaller ones, more courses were not the equivalent of a more comprehensive program. The study concluded that above the 400-student enrollment level there was little difference in curriculum comprehensiveness.

One of the more recent studies on educational quality looked at the correlation between monetary success in later life and the size of K-12 schools previously attended in early life.

Berry (2004) attempted to assess the impact of the school consolidation movement on the quality of students' education during the period of greatest consolidation from 1930 to 1970. Pulling from the 1980s census data on income, Berry looked at earnings of white males born during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s in the 48 mainland states. Controlling for the effects of a rural upbringing, he found that students educated in states with smaller schools fared better in the labor market. They had better wages as adults. Increasing a state's average school size by 100 students was associated with a nearly four percent decline in earnings for a high school graduate. He concluded that the growth in school size from 1930 to 1970 had led to a decline in school quality.

Although course offerings and instructional materials were sometimes enhanced under consolidation, there seemed to be a lack of consistent and convincing data showing improved learner outcomes. Many studies showed no benefits to student achievement in consolidated schools, and some even showed lower achievement, especially in high-poverty communities.

Early on, Stephenson (1973) set out to determine if a newly-consolidated school in southern Appalachia could bring about increased levels of academic performance and higher occupational and educational aspirations compared to a nearby non-consolidated school. Could a large, new, well-equipped complex educational system impact rural students beyond what could be expected from a smaller neighborhood rural school? Following one cohort through the first three years of the newly-consolidated school and using questionnaires, interviews, and school records data, he found that compared to the non-consolidated school, few, if any, major differences existed on the available achievement and aspirations measures. Later, Sher and Tompkins (1977) reported that achievement levels of students in small schools were generally equal to, or higher than, those of students from larger schools. Looking at Vermont high schools,

they found little or no correlation between school size and students' chances of enrollment or success in college.

In the early 1980s, one suburban Chicago school district consolidated elementary, junior high, and high schools. Data from before and after consolidation showed no measurable change in students' grades or standardized test scores in the larger schools (Ebmeier, 1986). In a 1990s comparison of 40 community-based rural schools and 40 consolidated rural schools using quantitative methods (Hough & Sills-Briegel, 1997), no existing differences in student achievement could be discerned.

Rather than comparing overall achievement in consolidated and non-consolidated schools, Howley (1996a) dug deeper, looking at the effect that consolidation might have on the achievement of students based on their socioeconomic status. Starting in a small state, he examined the relationship of school size to the achievement of students of varying levels of socioeconomic status in West Virginia, studying data prior to the state's 1990 consolidation wave. Using quantitative methods and statistical analysis, he found that smaller schools enhanced the achievement of poor students, whereas larger schools enhanced the achievement of affluent students.

> "Large schools are not just *dysfunctional* for impoverished students, but...they dramatically *compound* the educational disadvantages that inevitably threaten impoverished students. They seem actually to harm students who already confront more than their share of threats. Doing no harm, of course, is the key tenet of competent professional practice." (Howley cited in Purdy, 1997, p. 178)

Bickel's et al. (2000) review of consolidation literature and ensuing research seemed to confirm Howley's (1996a) findings, concluding, "A growing body of empirical research...holds that school size is negatively associated with most measures of educational productivity. This includes measured achievement levels, dropout rates, grade retention rates, and college

enrollment rates" (p. 7). Focusing on a larger state in further study of the effect of consolidation on the achievement of lower socioeconomic students, Bickel et al. reviewed data from over 1,000 high schools in Texas. Data analysis showed that as school size increased, the mean measured achievement of schools with disadvantaged students declined. Additionally, small classes in large schools did not diminish the adverse consequences of bigness. Seven separate previous analyses conducted in seven different states had reaffirmed that as schools got larger, average achievement among low socioeconomic status students suffered.

Moving on to a more encompassing multi-state investigation, Howley and Bickel (2000) studied 13,600 urban, suburban, and rural schools in 2,290 districts in the geographically diverse states of Georgia, Ohio, Montana, and Texas. They analyzed 29 sets of standardized achievement test scores from various grades, examining these in relation to school size and community poverty level. Previous research had clearly established the negative effects of poverty on student achievement. Their research questioned whether smaller schools could weaken this relationship by reducing the damaging effects of poverty on achievement. Data analysis showed that smaller schools did help students from less affluent communities narrow the academic achievement gap between them and students from wealthier communities. Students in less affluent communities performed better when they attended smaller schools, and the lower the income in the community, the more student achievement was improved by smaller schools. In all four states, smaller schools cut poverty's "power rating" by between 20 and 70 percent, depending on grade level.

> The less affluent the community served, the smaller a school should be to maximize the school's performance as measured by standardized tests....
> If improving student achievement as measured by standardized tests and narrowing the achievement gap between children from the most affluent and the least affluent communities is a policy goal, states should consider adopting policies favoring smaller schools, especially in the least affluent communities.

States concerned about reinvesting in deteriorating school facilities should not be eager to increase school size in most instances, if higher achievement, especially in poorer communities, is a goal. (pp. 10-11)

One of the hypotheses cited for consolidation's deficiencies in boosting academic achievement was that larger school districts created monolithic bureaucracies, removing more direct governance of schools. Streifel et al. (1991) found increased student achievement after the colossal New York City district decentralized into 32 smaller sub-districts. More recently, even rural superintendents were careful not to claim that achievement would increase under rural interdistrict consolidation (Russo, 2006).

Another reason cited for disappointing student achievement results was that through consolidation, big could become too big, more difficult for school staff to handle, bringing on more in-school social conflict along with increased discipline, drug, and dropout problems, each affecting academic performance. Some researchers surmised that the differences in school climate encountered between small rural schools and their larger consolidated counterparts could also have an impact on achievement. Larger schools often had higher pupil-teacher ratios and larger class sizes, bringing on a loss of individual attention for students. In large schools, students could become faceless figures in a vast education mill, facing anonymity in a largely impersonal climate. The result could be a sense of uselessness and powerlessness, accompanied by higher levels of alienation and absenteeism. Researchers noted that urban schools were moving back to "schools within schools," and non-graded elementary schools were back in fashion.

Even if consolidation could be shown at times to increase, or at least not to harm, academic achievement, critics contended that weighing the quality of education should go further to include social impact and other measures of educational quality of life for students. Reynolds

(1999) stated that during the early 1900s there was an initial tendency for rural students experiencing the shift from the one-room country school to the consolidated school (often in a nearby town) to experience disorientation and a profound unhappiness. Studying suburban consolidation, Ebmeier (1986) found that when a school was closed, transferred students in general reported lower extracurricular participation rates than non-transferred students.

Consolidated rural high schools were generally effective in integrating the voices and needs of the various communities they served, however, students from host communities ended up feeling the most ownership (Feldman, 2001). "Students from the outlying communities were welcome to take part in this ownership to a certain degree, and after a varying 'initiation' period, but never to the full extent that students in the community of the school's location" (p. 22).

Considering length of transportation as a component of educational quality of life, Howley (2001) looked at rural elementary schools' transportation practices in five geographically diverse states. He found that the longest bus rides widely violated the professional norm of a 30-minute maximum duration for one-way rides. Eighty-five percent of schools exceeded the 30-minute standard, and 25 percent exceeded 60 minutes, often on mountainous or unpaved roads. Correlations between longest ride and size of attendance area were substantial.

> As rural schools have consolidated, they have become more centrally located and have enrolled more and more students. As a result, the geographic domain served by them has also expanded.... All else equal, it would be logical to speculate that rural school consolidation *produces* longer average bus rides. (p. iv)

Longer bus trips also meant a greater possibility of student conflict on busses, greater safety risks from increased speed and additional miles traveled, increased inhalation of diesel fumes and carbon dioxide gases, and increased sleep deprivation from early home departure times. All these could lead to increased stress and possible psychological harm (Purcell & Shackelford, 2005).

Detrimental effect on community.

Until the mid-1970s, professional educators simply ignored community-based arguments against consolidation, or otherwise denied their legitimacy (Reynolds, 1999). But eventually researchers began taking a closer look at the impact of consolidation on the relationship between school and community. School closures could compromise community support for schools and school-community connections, both important factors for children's academic success. Outside the school walls there also existed important political, social, and economic ramifications. Combining districts often resulted in the loss of local control through the domination of more politically powerful portions of the new district.

School closures could also generate new community conflicts, such as town against country-side, or big town against small town. In urban areas, closures had the potential to inflame racial or class divisions. Additionally, the school itself was often seen as essential for community viability and community identity. It was argued that most people would never support the removal from the community of other important primary institutions such as economic, political, emergency services, religious, or media organizations. Schools were just as important. Critics challenged consolidation's effect on community life on three grounds, contending that it led to (a) severing of the home-school link, (b) further economic decay, and (c) loss of community identity.

The consolidation of schools meant students were transported farther (sometimes very far) from home and community, severing the connection between home and school, between school and community. Critics argued that the further the educational organization was from the student supply base (the local community and family) the greater was the perception of a large, uncaring, independent, and remote school. Reynolds (1999) described this perception in rural

farming areas as far back as the 1920s, with the closures of many one-room country schools that had previously been mostly within walking distance of family farms.

> For rural [country] people subscribing to the neighborhood system of family farming, the loss of a school entailed more than simply shattering some nostalgic sense of neighborhood or place. For them, removing the country school from the rural neighborhood also meant that the education of rural children became entrusted to an arbitrary unit of civil society under the aegis of the state and severed the direct tie between the school, the family, and the rural neighborhood. (pp. 56-57)

The outcome, then and now, could be a reduction in parental and community involvement with the school. DeYoung (1989a) believed that consolidation and centralization were eroding "social capital," defined as strong support for the mission of public schooling by local parents and community, which he and others deemed as important to the enhancement of educational opportunities for students. B. Williams (1998) also noted a growing isolation of schools from community, as educative life became increasingly disengaged from the life of the local place it served. Stressing the importance of a sense of place within education, or as he called it, "the genius of place," Williams remarked, "It may, in fact, take a whole village to educate, as well as raise a child" (p. 68). Fanning (1995) considered the community through the school to be important in assisting children with grounded knowledge, which in turn informed and was informed by technical knowledge. "Small, rural towns and urban neighborhoods can offer community naturally. Schools can offer only certain aspects of community. When the school is an interwoven part of the community, both are potent educators" (p. 5).

Critics further contended that the separation of school from community through school closures resulted in weakened public support for schools. In a study of 25 mostly interdistrict consolidations in Iowa (Kemis et al., 1994), respondents in districts that had not closed a high school during the process showed more positive perceptions of educational quality than respondents in districts that had closed a high school. The literature is full of examples of school

districts that faced a loss of community support following a school closure, often manifesting itself in public rejection of requests for increased local tax levies or school bond issuances.

Critics also feared that community economic decline would begin after the loss of a local school. A reluctance of families with children to move into the area might develop, bringing on decreased demand for homes and declining property values. A threat to community economic development could also result with a decline in business, a drop in income, or a loss of jobs. Although some studies showed no urban neighborhood deterioration (H. Johnson, 1978), others indicated the opposite. R. Andrews et al. (1974) telephoned 49 metropolitan districts from throughout the United States that had closed elementary schools in the near past. Although less than half of school officials felt they were in a position to make judgments concerning the impact of the closures on surrounding neighborhoods, most of those that commented had observed negative trends in the areas where schools had been closed. Forty percent of districts had conducted formal or informal evaluations on neighborhood impact from the school closures. They reported that neighborhoods had diminished in viability after the schools had closed and that support for public education had diminished as a result of the closures.

Rural communities often showed greater negative community impact from school closures than urban areas. In rural areas, the local school was often the largest employer in town. Dreier and Goudy (1994) looked at Iowa school consolidations over the previous 60 years. Data analysis revealed that half of the communities with a high school had made significant gains (five percent or more) in population over two or more decades, and within the same time frame, three fourths of communities without a high school had lost population. They also concluded that communities without a high school had lost population faster when compared to all the towns losing population. Another study looked at North Dakota communities that had lost their

school, comparing them with communities that had kept their school during consolidation processes (Sell, Leitstritz, & Thompson, 1996). Communities with a closed school believed retail sales and the number of businesses had declined because of the school closure. Quality of life scores, which had not differed between communities before consolidation, were considerably lower in communities where the school had been closed during consolidation. In interviews conducted by Alsbury and Shaw (2005), superintendents from rural districts created from interdistrict consolidations reported an exodus of residents and businesses from communities with a school closure, as well as a loss of administrative positions and a lingering sense of animosity from those communities and their parents.

For many communities, the school was a central focus of community pride, often serving as the community center. Critics of consolidation considered the loss of such a facility to be detrimental to community spirit, bringing on reduced social cohesion and loss of community identity. Urban, suburban, and rural districts were all interested in avoiding the hard reality of community economic decay, whereas the soft, mostly symbolic, but nonetheless real and important issue of community identity was more concerning to smaller, mostly rural, districts and communities. In his study of 1920s rural school consolidation, Reynolds (1999) described the importance of even the one-room schoolhouse in contributing to neighborhood and community identity for country farmers.

> The schoolhouse was almost invariably the only genuinely communal property a rural neighborhood possessed and served as an important reminder of the social cooperation necessary for family farming to remain viable socially and economically. The boundaries of the country school district...tended to delimit the boundaries of rural neighborhoods, if only by default. (p. 27)

Interviews and field observations by Peshkin (1982), from a prolonged consolidation process in rural Illinois during the 1970s, led to the conclusion that personal and community

identity were important components to understanding criticism of school closures. In a small rural town, he concluded, residents identified with their particular community, whose history and boundaries distinguished it from its neighbors. People were socialized to feel that they were members of that community. The school helped give meaning to such questions as, "Who am I?" and "What is this community?" The school had a high place in a complex order of elements that contributed to identity. Residents had spent most of their formative years and one fifth of their living years in continual contact with their local school.

Studying a 1990s rural Pennsylvania high school consolidation, Post and Stambach (1999) set out to uncover the interests, perceptions, and values of those parents who rejected the concept and practice of consolidating their children into larger schools. Using interviews and surveys mailed to 550 parents, Post and Stambach discerned that these parents wanted a no-frills education with smaller classes, where teachers personally knew students and parents. The home-school relationship was important to them. They viewed school as the heart of the community, and they recognized the importance of high schools for community identity. "In this view, even the most technologically sophisticated school, or one which offers the widest range of curricular options, can not replace the value associated with a rural community school" (p. 110). They concluded,

> One thing is certain: arguments about district organization...do not turn only on issues of money, as advocates on both sides are wont to maintain. They depend upon values and experiences communities collectively bring to deliberations about school district organization. (p. 115)

A frequently published researcher on rural school consolidation in the Appalachian area also found a strong connection between schools and community identity. DeYoung (2002) described how rural high schools were more than instructional sites. For over one hundred years they had also been social centers for youth, often operating as dating and marriage markets.

They offered interscholastic athletics, debate societies, bands, orchestras, basketball, football teams, fundraising, and social events for the local community. All of these contributed to community identity. In older days, rural high schools even operated under the philosophy that sport and other community-oriented programs were part of their educational mission. "A centrally located and well attended high school facility signified civilization and culture in the mountains or on the prairie and refuted the idea that citizens had to be living in metropolitan America to be important" (pp. 10-11).

In interviews, superintendents from mostly rural consolidated districts reported that parents facing the closure of their local school were fearful that their community values and identity would become marginalized, or even invisible (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005). There was a lingering sense of animosity from those communities that had lost a school. It was the final blow, hastening community demise and engendering hard feelings that would not go away. "'When a school closes, a community loses a part of its soul'" (p. 115), stated one superintendent. The interviews supported observations by other researchers, that local communities were tied to their cultures, their children, and their schools. The community school represented autonomy, vitality, local control, tradition, and identity. The threat of school closures was one of the greatest concerns of the rural community, followed by the reality of lost community identity. Researchers questioned whether, because of school consolidation, rural community culture and heritage might be left only as remnants in history books.

Smaller as ideal size.

Both critics and advocates of consolidation were interested in research that might lead to the confirmation of an ideal district size or school size, based either on cost efficiency or

educational quality. Reviewing studies on urban school district size in Canada, Coleman (1971) reported that a cost curve seemed to exist wherein costs decreased as district enrollment increased up to a certain point. Beyond that point, costs began to increase with increases in enrollment. Although unable to discern a universal breakpoint, Coleman concluded, "Large school systems seem prone to high levels of cost per student" (p. 10).

One of the difficulties in discerning what ideal urban district size might be from a cost efficiency point of view was that this required a cross-district study of costs and system size. In doing so, one had to assume that, within the various districts, administration was equally competent, educational services were fairly similar, decisions were made with similar sets of values, and salary costs were fairly similar. None of these could be easily assumed. Literature reviewed by Streifel et al. (1991) from the 1960s through the 1980s seemed to indicate a K-12 school district enrollment of 5,000 was optimal for financial efficiency.

At the building level, various reviews of literature also seemed to point to a U-shaped relationship between per-pupil costs and school enrollment, with very small and very large schools being the most expensive to operate. In a survey of school officials, R. Andrews et al. (1974) found 85 percent believed optimum elementary school size to be between 300 and 700 students. Studies reviewed by Streifel et al. (1991) seemed to indicate optimum financial efficiency for K-8 schools to be an enrollment level of between 300 and 800 students, and for high schools an enrollment in the 500 to 1500 student range, while a later review of the literature (M. Andrews et al., 2002) found that production function studies showed moderately sized elementary schools of 300 to 500 students, and high schools of 600 to 900 students may optimally balance economies of size with the negative effects of large schools. Bard, Gardener, and Weiland (2006) reported that although some studies concluded smaller schools were

somewhat more expensive on a cost-per-student basis, when one considered the higher

percentage of students they graduated, they were less expensive than medium or large schools

because dropouts were more likely to be unemployed or receive welfare, and more likely to be in

prison. They concluded, "From reviewing the literature, it appears that there is not an ideal or

optimal district or school size that is universally agreed upon" (p. 43).

Although conclusiveness on ideal school size was proving elusive, smaller school

research flourished as the 20th century came to a close, offering some justification to critics of

school consolidation. Some of the purported advantages of smaller schools were more personal

attention for students, less bullying, better discipline, more extracurricular involvement, shorter

bus rides, and maintenance of community identity. Computers and distance learning via

television also made it easier for small schools to keep up their quality of instruction.

Anthropologist Edward Hall (cited in Skenes & Carlyle, 1979) commented on one of the earlier

studies on smaller schools undertaken by Barker and Gump during the 1960s in Kansas.

> "In small schools, students participated more, it meant more to them, they were more
> tolerant of others, they formed closer, more lasting relationships, were more effective in
> group processes, could communicate better, performed six times more in responsible
> positions…they were absent less often, were more productive, were more articulate, and
> found their work more meaningful. In other words, the small schools produced better
> citizens, who tended to be more satisfied with their lives and were more competent in
> every way." (Hall cited in Skenes and Carlyle, 1979, p. 48)

Valencia (1984) reiterated Barker and Gump's conclusions from their 1960s study. "'A school

should be sufficiently small that all of its students are needed for its enterprises. A school should

be small enough that students are not redundant'" (p. 5). Like-minded researchers felt that if the

principal and teachers did not know most of the students, the school was probably too big.

In their 1980 literature review, Beckner and O'Neal reported some of the characteristic

strengths of smaller schools: smaller pupil-teacher ratio, greater potential for individualized

instruction, more recognition of the importance of each student, more human contact, reduced frustration and alienation, less time needed for discipline, closer faculty-administration relations, closer relations among teachers, closer teacher-student relations, closer teacher-parent relations, greater participation in decision making by teachers and students, greater student participation in activities, and greater sense of community and school loyalty. Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) recounted a situation in one small midwestern town where people were joining together to save a small school, while in a neighboring district, teachers were expressing their belief that all such small schools should be closed. Ironically these same teachers were simultaneously working on creating their own "schools within a school" to attempt to make them smaller.

In the eyes of smaller school advocates, the climate in larger schools contained some definite drawbacks, as Hampel (2002) explained.

> For students [in large schools], there was always time outside of the classroom—minutes and hours when no adult knew or cared what they were doing. It was easy to sneak out of a large school and perilously easy to sneak in drugs, guns, and other horrors. For teachers, life was lonesome when they rarely saw their fellow teachers and hardly knew the administrators....(and parents with the will and means to send their children to private schools consistently preferred schools a fraction of the size of the public alternatives). (p. 362)

Hampel noted that studies of smaller schools in urban areas had reported higher test scores, lower dropout rates, less student anonymity, better safety, and stronger faculty collegiality.

Even the U.S. Department of Education recognized the importance of the small school environment in increasing academic success, student satisfaction, graduation rates, and at the same time decreasing a school's discipline problems (Purcell & Shackelford, 2005). Likewise, a 2005 National Rural Education Association Task Force reported that smaller districts had higher achievement, as well as better affective and social outcomes (Russo, 2006).

Summary

The motivations for school consolidation have varied over time (DeYoung, 1995; Reynolds, 1999), including state curricular, safety, or desegregation requirements (often accompanied by state financial incentives), regional economic crises, and declining enrollment (either due to population shifts or a declining birth rate). The consolidation movement of the 1970s and 1980s was largely due to a declining birth rate.

The belief underlying these various stimuli was that larger schools could provide equivalent education at cheaper cost or better education at equivalent cost. Many advocates promoted the thought that consolidation would both increase efficiency and improve the quality of education (Sher & Tompkins, 1977). They believed that larger schools led to economies of scale, resulting in cost effectiveness through maximization of resources. Larger schools would also provide an increase in the number of programs, course offerings, and extracurricular activities. Better equipment and more specialized teachers would increase academic achievement.

Within educational circles, consolidation was mostly viewed as an undisputed sign of educational progress during the first half of the 20th century (Sher & Tompkins, 1977). However, criticism among educational professionals began to materialize during the 1960s and 1970s. Some submitted evidence that consolidation offered questionable efficiencies with no guarantee of controlling costs, and that it sometimes even resulted in greater expenses. Even as the century came to a close, for example, it was determined that West Virginia's school-closure policy of the 1990s, under which more than 25 percent of the state's schools were shuttered, had not saved taxpayers any money (Purdy, 1997).

Critics contended that, although economies of scale could be achieved in some areas

through consolidation, diseconomies of scale also materialized (Sher & Tompkins, 1977), such as elevated transportation costs, increased vandalism, and greater costs for supervision and control. They argued that larger consolidated schools often had to raise class sizes or increase administrative work loads in order to achieve reduced costs. Spending less to obtain less service resulted in false efficiencies.

More modern facilities and greater teacher specialization would not necessarily lead to increased curricular or instructional quality, the critics asserted. There was a lack of consistent and convincing data showing improved academic achievement in consolidated schools. In fact, studies showed that increased school size was particularly damaging to the achievement of lower socioeconomic status students (Howley & Bickel, 2000). Monolithic bureaucracies that removed more direct governance from schools, larger class sizes and increased anonymity, alienation, and absenteeism among students, lower extracurricular participation, and wasted time in increased length of transportation were all seen to have a detrimental effect on academic achievement.

Additionally, school consolidation's effect on the relationship between school and community and on the role of school in sustaining community became a concern (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005). It was argued that consolidation furthered racial or class divisions, weakened public support for schools, severed the connection between home and school, hastened community economic decline, and negatively affected community identity.

Critics contended that smaller was really the ideal for school size, and that, at some point, as schools became too big, they became more inefficient. Smaller size also was seen to offer better school climate, more personal attention, less bullying, better discipline, more extracurricular involvement, higher achievement (in many cases), and maintenance of community identity (Beckner & O'Neal, 1980).

Could an optimum school size or district size be discerned? There seemed to be no

consensus, except that there were advantages and disadvantages to both bigness and smallness.

> Thus, on the whole, the empirical literature on school district size harbors evidence of positive, negative, and negligible effects of consolidation on students' performance and educational economies. Advocates, opponents, and others all can find support in this record.
>
> The lesson in this research literature for policy makers should be: assume nothing and analyze much when considering proposals for school or district reorganization. Purported benefits of larger organizational units do not materialize automatically. Context is important, and issues of efficiency, cost, student performance, educational climate, and community relations must be addressed. (Adams & Foster, 2002, pp. 837-838)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE PART 3
SCHOOL-CLOSURE DECISION MAKING
AND COMMUNITY REACTION
IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

The politics of school closings really is
far more a divide-and-conquer
than a plan-and-agree process.
William Boyd

The previous part of the literature review looked at school officials' overall management of declining enrollment and researchers' discussions on the merits or demerits of using consolidation as part of retrenchment, considered from a mixture of financial, educational quality, and community preservation viewpoints. Beginning in the late 1970s and continuing into the next two decades, literature in the ERIC database showed a developing interest in the specific decision-making processes used in consolidation efforts, as well as the public's reaction to school closures. Within this research, attempts were made to develop an ideal model for school-closure decision making, although some researchers offered reservations to a one-size-fits-all model. This research included a fair amount of opinion and advice literature, often written by school district leaders who focused on school-closure decisions made under their tenure. These works were nonetheless considered empirical, since knowledge was based on district leadership's personal observations and experiences.

This part of the review considers such literature in two sections: (a) a survey of community reaction to school closures during the late 20th century through a series of case-study synopses from around the nation; and (b) school-closure decision-making processes advocated around the time period of the Robbinsdale school closures, (as well as criticism of these approaches), and a description of more recent thought on managing decisions with regard to school closure and consolidation. A short summary is provided at the end of each section.

Written mostly by professional educational decision makers, the intent of this research was to help school officials achieve school board and community acceptance of consolidation and to help them identify the specific school buildings to close while keeping the school district as unified as possible. This literature provided important background to the decision-making process which was ultimately used in selecting Robbinsdale High School for closure in 1982. It also gave an increased appreciation for the contentious community reaction from residents of the City of Robbinsdale.

Community Reaction to School Closures

Studying rural schools in the early 20th century, Reynolds (1999) reported that between 1906 and 1925, 70 cases opposing school consolidation were heard by the Iowa Supreme Court. At the end of his tenure leading a large suburban district through the 1970s decade of declining enrollment, Cuban (1979) deemed school closures to be one of the most politically visible and divisive public issues to face American education since school desegregation. Even as the century drew to a close, Ward and Rink (1992) likewise stated, "Few public policy issues touch the heart of a community more than the loss of the local public school through reorganization or consolidation of school districts" (p. 11).

Public dissatisfaction with school closures has been well documented in the literature. Examples abound of community conflict, law suits, lost elections, and defeated referenda. On the other hand, DeYoung (1995) noted that consolidation did not always bring on enormous community opposition and has often been an attractive proposition throughout 20th century America. This section considers the reaction of citizenry to consolidation in a series of short synopses that offer a geographically diverse sampling of specific school closures over the last

three decades of the 20th century. Divided into cases from rural, urban, and suburban districts, examples include varying degrees of community resistance to school consolidation.

Rural Samples

Peshkin (1982) related the story of a previously consolidated Illinois unit district and its decision to close two of its five towns' elementary schools in 1975. One town, pseudonym Killmer (population 900), strenuously resisted this decision. Killmer Concerned Citizens brought posters and banners to school board meetings in protest of their elementary school's proposed closure. They fought back through electing new board members, defeating a referendum, initiating court litigation, and sporadically taking students out of school. Eventually the town seceded from the district, teaming up with its nearest neighbor to fight the domination of the largest of the five towns (population 2,000). The secession case was argued before the Illinois Supreme Court who ruled that Killmer could not secede. The school board eventually reopened the closed elementary schools in 1977.

The Arkansas Educational Standards Act was the impetus for one rural Arkansas interdistrict consolidation (Benton, 1992). The Act required tiny districts to offer courses they normally would not offer, such as music, languages, and advanced mathematics. Five school systems, each with about 150 students, agreed to consolidate. A smaller sixth also petitioned to leave one system and join the new consolidated district. In 1986 a school bond referendum to build a new consolidated school passed with a 67 percent affirmative vote. Construction was completed in 1988 on the new consolidated facility that housed an elementary school of 425 students and a high school of 325 students.

In 1990, citizens of the West Virginia school district of Randolph County revolted and

successfully defeated a proposal to consolidate two outlying public schools, one of which was the smallest K-12 school in the state, with only 50 students (Roberts, 2001). The early 1990 vote by the board to close both small schools was seen by school officials as a necessary step toward procuring funds from the state to build a new high school in the county seat, where six of the 14 school buildings in the mountainous school district were located. Citizens from the closed schools viewed the decision as an educational enhancement in the largest town in the county at their expense, and they were angered when the board chose not to meet with them nor consider any of their proposed alternatives. They contacted experts from a Kansas university who attested that school size had minimal effect on student performance and that the longer bus rides over mountainous, narrow, winding roads would be too high a risk for any benefits.

Citizens proposed cutting the central office's budget or pursuing regional school affiliations with neighboring counties. They mobilized, retained legal counsel, and elected two school board members from outlying areas in May of 1990. In the same month, the West Virginia State Board of Education, in its evaluation of the proposal, refused to accept the plan to consolidate the two small schools. The state board ruled that the proposal would result in loss of individual instruction, loss of community, potential psychological damage, wasted time in transport, and that it would detract from education, substantially harming the individuals and communities involved while realizing little or no gain. The school board modified the proposal, leaving both schools open (Roberts, 2001).

A 1992 rural interdistrict consolidation that included the town of Mendon, Ohio, was described by Self (2001). A preliminary study was completed showing that, through consolidation, Mendon students would have more educational opportunities and residents would save tax dollars. Interviews with 635 district residents (90 percent of residents) showed strong

support for consolidation with one of two neighboring districts. A ten-member task force sent a letter to surrounding school districts to determine if there was any interest in consolidating with Mendon. The county board eventually made the decision to consolidate Mendon with one of its neighboring districts. Eight years later, about 90 percent of teachers and about 80 percent of parents were pleased with the consolidation, even though a high school had been closed in the process.

DeYoung (1995) told the history of school consolidation in Braxton County, West Virginia. In the 1930s the county had 150 schools feeding into three high schools. By the mid-1970s over 125 had been closed. By 1987 only eight schools were left, including four elementary, three middle schools (located in the three former high schools), and one consolidated high school built in 1969. DeYoung focused on the history of Burnsville High and Burnsville Middle School, located in the town of Burnsville on the banks of the Little Kanawha River, from which the school derived its nickname, "Little K."

In 1920, "Little K" was a prestigious graded school in a sea of rural one- or two-room school houses. As the population of Burnsville dropped from 1,200 to 400 over the next 75 years, the school encountered a number of changes. In 1969 the high school portion was merged with two other community high schools into one new Braxton County High, some distance away, leaving "Little K" as a middle school and an elementary school. The consolidation registered considerable community anger, and in its aftermath, the communities hardly seemed to recognize the new high school. The athletic teams talked about and featured in local papers were mostly those from the local eighth grades of the middle schools. In 1992 the town's middle school and the two other middle schools were merged into one new Braxton County Middle School, built next to the county high school. The main building of "Little K" shut its doors. There was less

public outcry during the second consolidation which DeYoung (1995) attributed to enlightened district leadership.

Clinton County, Pennsylvania was home to a robust 1996 anti-consolidation effort researched by Post and Stambach (1999). A group of four rural districts, each with its own high school, had consolidated in the 1960s, keeping their four geographically separated and socially distinct high schools. One high school in particular, Sugar Valley High School, had fought consolidation efforts over a number of years. The district had settled a lawsuit with proponents of the school in 1979, stating that the district did not intend to close the high school as long as an acceptable education could be provided at a spending level not out of proportion with other schools in the district. In 1996, the school board voted 5-4 to close the high school and merge it with another. Parents organized candlelight prayer vigils and joined hands around the school. They called the action illegal and undemocratic, filing lawsuits to block the closure. After the lawsuits were dismissed, some parents applied for a charter school grant, and 37 parents decided to home-school their high school children.

Urban Samples

Van Leer and Boren (1979) recounted different phases in a prolonged downsizing of Salt Lake City's school district, where enrollment dropped from around 42,000 to less than 25,000 between 1958 and 1978. Prior to 1969, the district had closed six schools, with parents helping to make decisions through committees. Under a new superintendent, between 1969 and 1973, 14 more schools were closed, this time with limited parental contribution to the process. The district was confronted with bitter citizen outcry, prompting one board member who decided not to seek reelection to remark, "'I am a bruised, battered and confused politician'" (p. 53).

Following the superintendent's resignation, a new superintendent then began a two-year educational process with seven public hearings to help citizens realize the necessity of closing schools. "'Once the neighborhoods realized the necessity of closing schools...they accepted it'" (p. 55), he commented. He began a people-oriented program, putting together committees, one for elementary and one for secondary, to look at more school closures. In 1975, the district closed three junior high schools and reorganized the grade pattern. The transition was the smoothest the district had seen (Brody, 1976).

With seven high schools in operation, Richmond, Virginia began an unusual urban consolidation process in 1979 (Green, Belsches, & Mladenoff, 1980). That fall, after looking at a number of different options put forward by a community workshop group, the board voted to consolidate the seven high schools into three complexes with enrollments of 3,500, 2,400, and 1,900. No school buildings were closed in the process, and all seven buildings continued to house high school students. One of the new complexes was formed from two of the former high schools, the second was formed from another two, and the last was created from the remaining three high schools. Due to the public relations effort of the district, public anger was greatly diminished.

One of the more dramatic examples of community protest to urban school closure was described by Carspecken (1989, 1990, 1991). In 1981, the city council of Liverpool, England decided to close Croxteth Comprehensive School by the summer of 1982 as a cost-savings measure due to citywide declining enrollment. Croxteth was the only non-religious secondary school in a working-class neighborhood of about 12,000 with high unemployment. The neighborhood did not support the party in power on the council at the time, and the school was chosen for closure largely due to political calculations. Residents began a protest movement

which lasted over three years. Protest was initiated using legal and institutional tactics, such as lobbying, letter writing, and offering alternative suggestions. Later, after an experienced union organizer assumed leadership of the group, residents used more militant tactics. Engaging in civil disobedience, they occupied government chambers, blocked some roadways which ran near the school, and stormed two radio stations to talk live over the airwaves.

Residents' actions drew sympathy from local and national media, and shortly thereafter, in a large majority vote, the Liverpool council reversed its decision and decided to create a new school in the buildings of the old. The national British government, however, vetoed the city council's plan and ordered the closure to go through anyway, leading to additional protests. A few days before the summer closure date, residents began an illegal occupation, moving into the school building, barricading windows and doors, and creating an overnight picket. The city council decided not to send in the police for fear of a sympathetic public. The residents ran the school themselves with a fairly comprehensive educational program for the 1982-1983 school year, aided by volunteer teachers and activists sympathetic to their goals. Near the end of the school year, a newly elected opposition party on the city council reopened the school, restoring state support by including the reopening in a package of reforms which the British government desired. The school continued operation under regular governmental control (Carspecken, 1991).

Suburban Samples

Keough (1978) highlighted the case of East Meadow, Long Island, a middle-class suburban district outside of New York City. Because of early development, enrollment had peaked in 1963, somewhat earlier than most suburban districts, at 18,500 students. By 1974

enrollment had declined to 12,300. According to long-time practice, the district's annual budget was put to a vote every year. The community could approve or reject the district's proposed budget. If defeated, the board would then make cuts and resubmit the budget to another vote. Because of an aging population, the budget was defeated on the first try every year between 1972 and 1975. In 1973, the superintendent recommended closing an elementary school which was operating at 25 percent of capacity. Savings would come from the resulting cutback in teaching, administrative, and custodial staff, as well as building operational costs. A state bureau would rent the facility. There was community and teacher outcry, but the board closed it anyway. In 1975, the board voted to close another elementary school. Parents took 200 students out of the school, staged a two-hour rally in front of the building, and then moved on to the superintendent's office. Residents elected new board members who reopened the school in time for the school year, but then the new budget, that included money to keep the school open, was defeated.

In a 1970s Lexington, Massachusetts school consolidation process, two different community cultures were discernible (Dumanoski, 1979). One was comprised of older, established, fixed-income residents who were hesitant to support increased taxes. The second included newer Harvard and M.I.T. employees more supportive of increased educational funding. Residents called it a "town versus gown" rift. With enrollment peaking in 1969 and expected to drop almost in half by 1981, the superintendent hired an architect in 1974 to review all schools in order to discern if all facilities were offering equal opportunity. Based on the architect's report, a decision was made that some schools should be closed. The board appointed three citizens' committees. One committee offered a different sequence of school closings. One committee challenged the administration's premise that smaller, older buildings were more expensive to

operate. One committee challenged the assumption that the quality of education would improve if older buildings were closed. The board began closing buildings anyway, including the older ones, with less community outcry once the decision had been made. One parent, reversing an initial hostile reaction, reflected, "'Don't fight for the building, fight for the school system'" (p. 141).

Hosler and Weldy (1977) detailed the preparations made for the closure of one of three high schools in suburban Chicago. The Niles Township District, including the suburb of Skokie, had three high schools—Niles East, Niles West, and Niles North. After carefully studying the district's demography and conducting appropriate public involvement through information campaigns, public hearings, and dialogue with interested community groups, in the spring of 1975, the board decided to close Niles East. At the time, the high school housed 2,300 students with projections of only 1,500 by 1980. The board slated the high school for closure in 1980, five years into the future. Although there were some concerns from parents, rather than fighting an opposition movement, most of the district's efforts were then directed into planning a smooth transition for the merger of Niles East into Niles West and Niles North.

The East Syracuse-Minoa district, on the eastern edge of Syracuse, New York, was comprised of a collection of various neighborhoods, including urban neighborhoods, residential areas with small-town atmospheres, first-circle suburbs, and rural communities (Hess, Martin, Beck, Parker, & Lagoe, 1979). Some of the elementary schools maintained the identities of their surrounding areas, while other schools had been superimposed on existing residential areas. In 1978, a task force recommended the phased-in closing of two elementary and two middle schools. The two-time defeat of the 1978 budget referendum had put more pressure on cost savings and general efficiency. By December of 1978, the board had voted to close two middle

schools and reorganize the elementary structure. "It was a stunning success for positive planning" (p. 12).

Divoky (1979) reported citizens' reactions to a high school closure in the prestigious suburban Palo Alto, California area. Through 1978, the school district had closed seven elementary schools and one junior high. There had been massive community involvement in the decision-making process that led up to preparing for the closure of one high school, Cubberly High. However, in 1979, a group of citizens requested that a referendum be held on whether or not the high school should be closed. When the request was not granted, they filed suit in the county's Superior Court. The judge ruled that districts were taking legislative action in closing schools, that such actions were thus subject to a public vote, and that a referendum must be held. The ruling was the first in California history to assert that school board actions must be subjected to a vote. The state's Court of Appeals quickly overturned the ruling, declaring that school systems are administrative agencies of the state, whose actions are not subject to referenda votes. The California Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal that sought to force local boards to hold a referendum before closing schools. The court stated that a board's decision to close a school was an administrative act not subject to a referendum (Board of Education v. Superior Court, 1979). The district closed the high school.

One of the more contentious suburban high school closures (Ebmeier, 1986) occurred in greater Chicago's Wheaton Area School District, a district with a K-12 enrollment of 10,000 housed in 17 school sites. The community was mostly white collar and politically conservative, including two different incorporated cities, and small segments of other municipalities. Residents were generally supportive of education, but in the late 1970s three straight property tax referenda rate increases were soundly defeated. In 1978, the board closed two elementary and

one junior high school due to financial difficulties from inflation, labor costs, and declining enrollment. In 1982, the district started on a course to close one of the district's two high schools, another junior high, and another elementary, and to then convert to a 6-8 middle school pattern. After numerous meetings and studies, the board voted 6-1 to close Wheaton Warrenville High School. Events were covered extensively by the media.

Parents from Warrenville said the closure was evidence of "'the continuation of a historic and systematic discrimination against the Warrenville community'" (Ebmeier, 1986, p. 3). They formed "Citizens United for Education" to fight the closure. Parents filed for secession and the formation of a new K-12 school district encompassing the attendance area of the high school. The secession petition was signed by 75 percent of eligible voters in the attendance area. They also filed for an injunction to block planning and implementation of the district's reorganization plan. A hearing before the Regional Board of School Trustees, whose approval was necessary, began in the spring of 1983, with the school scheduled to close that summer. After heavy media coverage, huge partisan crowds, 36 hearing dates, 37 witnesses, 249 exhibits, and 4,000 pages of transcript, the Regional Board voted 5-2 not to allow the formation of the new district. An appeal was denied, a second appeal was made and denied, and the high school was closed.

Summary

The closure of the local public school during the late 20th century often proved to be a divisive issue. Community conflict, law suits, lost school board elections, and defeated tax levies were often the end result. Explaining the reaction of small-town, rural residents to the local school's closure, Peshkin (1982) stated, "Since they are socialized to feel they are members of that community, they may mobilize to defend their community's rights; blessed with a

territory, they may become territorial in their reaction to perceived transgression" (p. 4). As a variety of case studies have shown, however, in some instances consolidation appeared to be an attractive proposition to local residents. Noting the varying degrees of community hostility, some researchers wondered if the process used for school-closure decision making could have any bearing on the degree of community acceptance of school closures.

School-Closure Decision-Making Processes

During the 1970s decade of decline, as presented in part two of the literature review, educational leaders faced an array of options to address declining enrollment and financial stress. These included increased revenue generation, on the one hand, mostly from increased local tax levies, and decreased spending, on the other hand, mostly through staff reduction, but also through school closure and consolidation. Also discussed in part two, the benefits of consolidation were somewhat ambiguous both from a financial savings and an educational quality point of view. Additionally, consolidation included some decidedly negative side effects in regards to community cohesion. As the previous collection of case study synopses demonstrated, community reaction to school consolidation was often one of widespread disapproval, sometimes to the point of impairing the educational mission of the school district.

Given the difficulties inherent in consolidation and yet the desire of school officials to utilize all measures at their disposal to address a very difficult financial environment, the 1970s decade of decline was also understandably replete with literature offering various approaches for school officials to enact successful school consolidations, including discussion of nuts-and-bolts issues and step-by-step guides. Given that some closures were accompanied by less controversy than others, it was thought that perhaps an ideal process could be determined for managing the

conflict associated with school closures. This section of the review looks at decision-making processes formulated to help school officials achieve school board and community acceptance of consolidation and to identify the specific school buildings to close while keeping the school district as unified as possible.

Much of the literature could be described as a cookbook of recipes on how to avoid community anger, with such titles as, "How to Close a School Without Spilling Blood," "How to Close a School Without Enraging the Public," and "Civilized Strategies for Closing Schools." Eisenberger (1974) tempered any enthusiasm for definitive solutions to avoiding community upheaval altogether, however, remarking, "You cannot make people love you by closing their neighborhood school; you can only minimize how much they will hate you" (p. 34). The literature on school-closure decision-making processes showed evidence of changing themes over the past 40 years. During the 1970s, to be reviewed in the first part of this section, an emerging professional consensus developed, specifying that successful consolidation should include heavy doses of objectivity, rationality, and factual data, coupled with extensive community participation. This was followed by a period during the 1980s, reviewed in the second part of this section, in which educational researchers questioned the dominant model of the 1970s. The last part of this section looks at approaches from more recent time periods.

Prevailing Model of the 1970s

Grenis (1976) described three basic administrative styles in closing a school: (a) "the hit-man style," in which the superintendent simply announces that the school will close in the summer and the children will be reassigned to neighboring schools; (b) "the crystal-ball style," in which the superintendent announces that the school will close four years from now due to

predictions of future declining enrollment; and (c) "the multi-committee style," in which the

superintendent asks the community and its many vested interest groups to study the problem,

after which various reports are gathered, studied, synthesized, and developed into one

recommendation.

> Candidly, this permits the superintendent to select the strongest aspects of each
> recommendation to form the final recommendation to the Board of Education. By its
> very nature, the composite proposal is guaranteed to make everyone unhappy—the very
> essence of a good compromise. (Grenis, 1976, p. 59)

In a more nuanced description, Bishop (1979) depicted the following five general

decision-making techniques for dealing with enrollment decline and school closures, running the

spectrum from a "closed-system" approach with little or no public or community participation, to

an "open-system" approach with considerable participation: (a) unilateral board decision, (b)

chief school administrator's decision, (c) use of a consultant or consultant teams, (d) use of an

advisory committee with citizen and/or professional staff, and (e) use of a community task force.

Literature from the 1970s included examples of school districts utilizing processes from various

positions on the spectrum—some more closed-system and others more open-system.

The school-closure processes in St. Louis, Missouri (Colton & Frelich, 1979) exemplified

a closed-system decision-making approach, first during the 1930s and later during the 1970s.

During the 1930s, a survey team used score cards to rate school buildings, recommending the

closure of 31 schools and the construction of nine new ones. The team conducted their work

without the views of citizens. Likewise, during the 1970s, St. Louis school officials made little

attempt to initiate comprehensive citizen participation and public information programs in order

to secure support for a new round of closures. A similar closed-system process was utilized in

New York City (Dean, 1982), where 90 of about 1,000 schools were closed during the late 1970s,

with many more projected to close throughout the 1980s. Closure recommendations were made

by a building review committee which did not hold public meetings. Additionally, the members

of the committee were not known to the public, and it issued no public reports or other literature

describing its operations.

After citizens in one suburban Michigan district squabbled over which schools to close,

the school board offered all 20 of its schools for sale on the open market. Schools to be closed

would be those that could be sold. Within six months three elementary schools were sold, two

becoming local churches, and one a commercial office building (Mayer & Steenland, 1984).

Most of the literature, however, highlighted examples of open-system approaches to

school closure. Professional advice heavily favored such an approach, and as the 1970s

progressed, one could discern the emergence of a professional consensus of professed best

practices toward school consolidation which included ample opportunity for citizen participation

in the process.

Craftlore of professional consensus.

After surveying consolidation literature from the 1970s into the early 1980s, Zerchykov

(1982) wrote,

> We have discovered the emergence of a definite professional consensus, a "craftlore" of
> writings about good practice in retrenching. This advice is typically found in
> professional association periodicals and is codified in handbooks, often sponsored by
> professional associations and/or state education agencies....Much of it is written as
> observations...from the "firing line." (p. xii)

Reviewing the professional advice literature, Zerchykov (1982) found that advice givers had

certain maxims. First, districts should realize cost-savings by reducing excess capacity (closing

schools) before cutting programs, thus preserving the integrity and quality of school

programming. Second, school-closure decisions should be part of a district-wide master plan,

taking into account data on future enrollment. This would allow retrenchment decisions to be pro-active, based on rational planning, rather than reactive, made in response to momentary political pressures or crises. School officials should involve the community in this long-range planning. The goal was to achieve community consensus on the need for school closure by building community-wide ownership of a financial stress problem for which school closure was the only solution. Finally, according to the professional literature, decisions on which specific school(s) to close should be made by establishing a district-wide task force or advisory committee to help propose criteria for selecting the school(s) best suited for closure. Such criteria should not emphasize merely closing those schools with the greatest enrollment loss, but rather closing schools that would maximize cost savings and minimize the adverse impact on communities and educational programming.

Zerchykov (1982) summarized, "We only note these major themes underlying the advice: unity and clarity of purpose; accurate and objective information; and rationalized cost-accounting procedures" (p. 167). The strategy promoted by the advice literature was one of broad citizen involvement in policymaking using a process based on rational planning, problem-solving, and consensus-building. It was supposed to provide agreement and high-quality decisions.

Overall guidelines.

Setting the stage for this advice on process, the professional-consensus literature acknowledged that school closures were traumatic events for district citizens, given that closures often signified the decline of a community and its culture, and the loss of community pride and local identity. School closures were even difficult to enact in normally transient suburbs, where

closures symbolized the passing of a community's youth and vitality. Nevertheless, the belief was that this trauma and the ensuing community conflict could be controlled by intelligent leadership from the school board and district administration (*Planning for Declining Enrollment*, 1976).

Advice givers offered a common word of warning that any plan for shrinking a district should, at the very least, maintain the current level of educational services and, when possible, the plan should even offer improvements to the quality of education. The case needed to be made to district residents that retrenching for fiscal stability would bring about increased quality of education. Educational quality and school closures were to be viewed as mutually compatible, rather than mutually exclusive. Relating his experience as superintendent during Salt Lake City's retrenchment, M. Thomas (1980) stated, "Improving the quality of education is the most powerful way of obtaining public support for closing schools" (p. 21).

M. Thomas (1980) stressed that as part of a school-closure proposal, money formerly used for the operation of a school after its closure should be proposed to be reallocated for direct services to students, such as reduced class sizes, gifted programs, or special programs in music, art, or dance.

> The basic reason for closing schools is to improve the quality of education. There is no purpose in consolidation if it does not provide better education....
> One thing to remember is that unless enough schools are closed to improve educational opportunities, the effort will not be accepted by parents. Consolidation must be sufficient to save enough money to provide additional student services. Quality education and better schools are the reasons that make sense to parents. (p. 24)

Any decision-making process, according to Sargent and Handy (1974), should also include the following broad guidelines: (a) agreed on goals and objectives; (b) a factual base of enrollment projections and physical facility needs; (c) analysis of the factual data; (d) a set of possible solutions (such as grade reorganization, new construction and/or school closure); and (e)

a choice among the alternatives, including justification, time sequence, and cost analysis as compared to other alternatives. Especially important were the facts and the numbers. Having a good grasp on the facts and the numbers would help thwart emotionally-laden responses and lead to reliable factual analysis and well-based justifications. "Know your numbers. Not by district totals only, but by individual schools; not for only this year and the next, but for the next five to ten. Above all, be able to defend your projections" (p. 49).

Softening up the community.

Under these broad guidelines, the professional consensus recommended that the first step in a school-closure decision-making process should be to engage in changing citizens' attitudes toward enrollment decline. "Educating the '<u>parents</u>' of the students to fully understand—is your goal" (Pound, 1976, p. 1), stated Roseville, Minnesota's school board chair. This education of the public involved getting parents to believe that the choice facing the district was, on the one hand, one of curtailing programs and course offerings or, on the other hand, one of closing schools. As Fowler (1978) put it, "The pain of closing schools is less severe than the pain of having inadequate money to operate the District" (p. 3). Many specific recommendations were offered for this campaign of communication, education, and "softening up" of the community.

Eisenberger (1974, 1975b) and Eisenberger and Keough (1974) were among the first to submit specific ideas for the purpose of easing tensions and preparing the public for possible school closures. On the personal level, they recommended using neighborhood coffee hours to communicate with parents and holding face-to-face or telephone interviews to solicit opinions. Within the broader community, school officials were encouraged to establish open channels of communication by talking to local realtors, civic leaders, and municipal officials, in an attempt to

build credibility and confidence. Further surveying of the community and school staff could be accomplished by mailed questionnaires. Such activity would show that the board and administration were willingly and actively seeking readings on the attitudes of their constituents.

Districts could also hire public relations specialists and spread the word in many other ways, such as through district newsletters and carefully selected local radio stations, television stations, and newspapers. Formats could include interviews, forums, or panel discussions. Holding off-the-record briefings with reporters and giving them personal time for special or private interviews could also be helpful. One of the main objectives to such communication was to present statistics showing the decline in district enrollment, because only after this was digested could talk begin about the closure of particular schools.

Long-range planning.

The next step in the professional-consensus school-closure process was to engage in long-range planning that would lead to a future district master plan. Brody (1976) recommended a long-range plan that looked five to ten years into the future. Such a plan should clearly establish the district's goals, showing the public the direction in which any change would take the schools and the community. It should include extensive data gathering, including future enrollment projections, in order to establish programs needed, facilities needed, and budget constraints which were likely to exist. Data should be consistently updated and reviewed, with goals and educational policies refined in light of the new findings.

An open process, one which had integrity and credibility, was recommended during the development of the long-range plan. This included extensive involvement of an informed public. Brody (1976) maintained that problems would occur if citizens felt the administration or board

had withheld facts, had made up its mind beforehand, had not considered alternatives to closing

buildings, or had violated the integrity of citizen involvement during the process. "In the end,

most school officials agree, a real respect for the community's opinions, and a sensitivity to all

groups involved—students, parents, teachers, administrators—are necessary for any successful

school closing" (p. 35).

A task force with the widest possible involvement, functioning as an advisory group to

the board, would help develop the plan. The task force could include citizens from religious,

civic, political, and business circles, as well as parents, teachers, students, administrators, and in-

house professionals. Eisenberger and Keough (1974) contended that such direct community

involvement was preferable because people would tend to support what they had a hand in

creating.

> It is much wiser to seek them out from the beginning and help to guide their actions by
> providing accurate, up-to-date information, rather than to have them insisting upon a
> search through old board of education minutes for statistics which substantiate their own
> point of view and cast doubt upon seemingly arbitrary board action. (p. 16)

Task force membership could be formed through a volunteer process or through board

appointment. Leadership of the task force could come through election from within the group or

through board appointment. An outside consultant or a central office administrator might serve

as leader.

The type of task force and its time commitment would depend on the level of community

awareness of the problem (Eisenberger, 1975a). An "in-depth seminar" over two weekends

would be best when school closure was already a well-known and understood reality in the

district. A "study group," meeting once or twice a week over six to eight weeks, was best when

school consolidation was not as well known, but had been discussed for some time. An

"extended study committee," meeting once or twice a month over a year, was recommended

when school consolidation was barely a reality in the district. The task force should use a study-report-recommend form, in which members would research the problem and make recommendations to the board in report format.

The task force should be given a charge, either something broad, such as "to study the problem and make a recommendation," or something more narrow, such as "to recommend one school consolidation plan." Other charges to the task force might include such specifics as to project enrollment, provide a precise and accurate description of each facility, determine capacity for schools, research the needs and projection of space or room requirements, set up criteria for closing schools, calculate the cost of maintaining and operating each building, provide alternative plans and options, recommend which schools should be closed, report on savings and any added costs from closure, establish a priority for closure, or recommend subsequent school uses. The superintendent should meet frequently with the committee chair to provide assistance, but neither the board nor the administration should unduly influence the group. Eisenberger and Keough (1974) stated, "The success of any Task Force is contingent upon the open-mindedness of its members and their ability to analyze facts and make recommendations free of bias and unencumbered by public pressure" (p. 16).

Hiring professional consultants to operate alongside or within the task force was also advocated (Pauline & Pitruzzello, 1982). The public should perceive them as being completely impartial, and the public would perceive them as more credible if they were not from the area, thus removing any bias of knowledge of local school affairs. These outside consultants would serve as effective lightning rods for disgruntled citizens' criticisms. The consultants could have more of a hand, or less of a hand in developing actual plans for reorganizing the school system. If a final report were requested, it should include three or four recommendations for reorganizing

and consolidating the school system. The consultants should present their findings and recommendations at a regularly scheduled board meeting.

Formation of criteria.

The professional consensus recommended that at some point in the process, the task force should develop basic school-closure criteria. Puleo (1981) suggested that the task force first articulate the reason, in sentence form, for school closure, such as "saving the greatest amount of money while moving the fewest students possible and closing the school with poor physical facilities" (p. 2). Then the task force would identify those factors which were supportive of the general reason. Puleo recommended a "multifactor method" of up to 10 factors, beyond which the process could become cumbersome. Since some factors were likely to be more important than others, each factor should be assigned a relative value or weight, even though weighting could be viewed as judgmental and might be open to question.

> [The multifactor method] seeks to bring the elements of objectivity, explicitness, and concern for reasonable technical standards within a coherent conceptual framework. In this sense, it is an attempt to bring a methodology, a sense of comprehensiveness, to an educational problem that too often in the past has been approached by degrees of subjectivity, incompleteness, and vagueness.... The approach is...an attempt to bring to the decision-making process an objective body of data characterized by a degree of validity and reliability. (p. 1)

These factors, or criteria, should be quantifiable for the most part, and data collected should inform the agreed-on criteria. Each building should be given a score from one to five, or one to ten, on each criterion, then multiplied by the weighted index, and finally tallied to provide an overall building score for each building. The overall building scores would identify the building(s) to be closed.

Although recognizing that each district was unique, Eisenberger and Keough (1974)

identified five categories of criteria that would be of interest to most districts during a school-closure process: (a) geographic location—closeness of school to the neighborhood, presence of major physical barriers, socioeconomic, racial and ethnic mix, transportation costs; (b) academic excellence—"Parents are not willing to let their children be moved from a 'good academic performance' school to a school down the road with a 'lesser academic' reputation. It is virtually impossible to close 'the good school'" (p. 38); (c) present/capacity enrollment—"The [low enrollment] school is frequently in the most affluent section of the community...this presents another very real problem" (p. 38); (d) facility condition—age, flexibility for educational program, cost to maintain (heat, electricity, other utility usage), need for major capital outlay; and (e) re-cycle ability—feasibility for re-sale or lease.

Keough (1978), along with numerous other advice givers, recommended that a comparative profile of buildings be developed using a rating system that scored each building on the weighted criteria. The belief was that a numeric rating provided objectivity to the process. "The use of a criteria/weighting system helps people make rational decisions about a highly emotional topic" (p. 29), stated Keough.

In a manual for assisting with declining enrollment, the Minnesota State Planning Agency provided an example of one Minnesota school district's weighted school-closing criteria (*Planning for Declining Enrollments*, 1976). The district's criteria had been divided into three general categories: (a) student, staff and community factors; (b) physical facilities factors; and (c) financial factors. The most highly weighted factors within each corresponding category were displacement of students, special supportive facilities, and maintenance cost/square foot. The district had then followed a scoring and ranking protocol. "After the Board of Education had approved the system, the data were collected, criteria applied, and composite weighted scores for

each building were prepared. The school with the lowest composite score was closed" (p. 61).

A school-closure criteria survey (*School Building Utilization*, 1979), completed by Minnesota school district officials and staff from the metropolitan area in and around Minneapolis and St. Paul, showed that school district personnel ranked six broad categories of criteria in the following order, from most important to least important, when considering a school building for closure: (a) physical condition, (b) adequacy in filling program needs, (c) financial considerations, (d) geographic and demographic considerations, (e) other considerations (including subjective and emotional issues), and (f) opportunities for alternative uses.

Making a decision.

According to the professional literature, by using the criteria format, a decision could finally be rendered based on objective data such as enrollment projections, results of facilities analysis, and probable savings. After scoring each building on numerous criteria, multiplying by the weighted value, and adding up the points for each building, and after checking, rechecking, and then checking again all data for errors, a tentative decision should be made to close the building with the lowest score. Crowe (1979) warned to proceed with caution at this point, however.

> But hold everything. One of the errors made most frequently is to decide to close the school identified in a process similar to the one just described. Alas, the world we work in is less than perfect, which leads to the next essential step. (p. 21)

The possible consequences of the decision should be considered before issuing the final report.

A list of problems that might result from the decision should be generated (Crowe, 1979). These might include people in the community who were fiercely loyal to their neighborhood schools, employee groups who feared job loss, or authorities outside the district who might seek

to overturn the decision to appease an irate neighborhood group. A number from one to ten should be assigned based on the severity of the problem at each school, and a number from one to ten should be assigned based on the probability of the problem occurring at each school. Multiplying the two would provide a risk assessment at each building. By considering each building's multifactor criteria score and taking into account each building's risk assessment, the chosen option should be the one with the greatest merit and the smallest threat.

The task force could now issue its report, making recommendations as to which sites to close, explaining the rationale for the selection, and summarizing the positive effects of the decision. Many copies of the report should be distributed to maximize public exposure. Public meetings should be held to discuss the report, to identify any further information needed, and to develop alternative solutions if necessary. The final solution should be presented at a general public meeting. Further discussion and final action should be taken at an official board meeting. M. Thomas (1978) underscored the importance of developing consensus for the final solution. It was important to get the school board, the superintendent, and the employees on board, including the media if possible, because the public would take advantage of any crack in support. "The more decisive the action, the more credibility in the minds of everyone" (p. 7). The administration should quickly implement the board's decisions.

Descriptive case histories.

School-closure literature from the 1970s and 1980s included numerous descriptive case histories focusing on specific districts' decision-making processes to address declining enrollment. A sample of these decision-making processes from the states of Minnesota, Virginia, Missouri, and Washington shows that these unique responses to unique circumstances

included many elements of the advice offered by the professional consensus, but with some variation.

Unspecified district, Minnesota, 1976.

The Minnesota Planning Agency held a two-day workshop with 25 Minnesota superintendents to find out what had worked best during their retrenchment processes up to that point (*Planning for Declining Enrollments*, 1976). The common findings were integrated into a hypothetical case study, and published in a handbook to aid Minnesota districts with the challenges of declining enrollment. The manual detailed the course of action that this hypothetical district had taken to emerge from the retrenchment process in good shape. First, district officials had collected, analyzed, and interpreted data on five-year enrollment projections, five-year income and expenditure forecasts, school plant facilities capacity and operating costs, and staff salary schedule distribution and retirement dates.

Officials had used the data to assess the problems and had then presented the assessment to the school board and to teachers. They had also informed the community of the district's situation and the alternative courses of action, using radio, television, and newspapers to regularly tell the district's story. Officials had developed recommendations for balancing income and expenditures and had also offered the school board some alternative approaches to decision making, such as hiring professional consultants or establishing a citizens' advisory committee to suggest alternative solutions. They had involved the staff and the community in setting priorities and making decisions using public hearings, and upon the school board's approval, by asking for the public's participation in developing and recommending alternative solutions.

Arlington, Virginia, 1973-1978.

Cuban (1979) detailed the retrenchment process in Arlington, Virginia, a wealthier

suburban district outside Washington, D.C. In 1973 the board had appointed a citizens'

committee to look at the "'causes and the nature of the decline in pupil enrollment'" (p. 370).

Cuban had been hired as superintendent a few months after the committee's report, and one of

his main tasks would be to develop an orderly process for making consolidation decisions.

Deviating somewhat from the professional consensus, Cuban commented,

> I felt that consolidation questions could not be answered solely on either educational or
> cost-efficiency grounds. I believed that conflicting values of board members, staff, and
> the community on this issue made a decision to close a school primarily a nontechnical
> judgment. The citizens' report, ironically, took the traditional viewpoint of professionals
> that mergers were technical problems that could be resolved once the costs and benefits
> were laid out. I, on the other hand, saw technical pieces to the issue but essentially
> viewed the question as one involving competing sets of values. (p. 372)

Cuban (1979) held 16 work sessions with the board and opened the meetings to the

public. Cuban believed that the board needed to be moved through a policy discussion which

would allow board members to state their value preferences while interacting with citizens. "The

staff's aim was to offer the board a rational framework for their diverse values to be openly

stated and their competing values to rub against one another, permitting differences to be

accommodated" (p. 372). Through these discussions it became apparent that the board valued

educational concerns, such as program flexibility more than efficiency concerns, thus reversing

the value rankings stated in the citizens' committee report. The board felt that when comparing

buildings, significant cost differences should be justified by significant program strengths. The

board also rejected building underutilization as a criterion for merger. By the end of 1974, a

number of issues had coalesced, and the board had produced a set of criteria and had approved a

consolidation policy and decision-making process for annual use in reviewing all elementary

schools.

"Thus, each fall after 1975, merger candidates were identified and debated. Work

sessions, superintendent recommendations, public hearings, angry parents, and board decisions

unfolded each year in an annual rhythm that—there is no other word—upset the community"

(Cuban, 1979, p. 374). Through this process the district closed a number of elementary schools.

It also decided to close two of six junior high schools by moving from a 7-9 junior high pattern

to a 7-8 intermediate school pattern. The junior high closures turned into more difficult

endeavors.

> In determining which two schools should be closed, the full force of community anger,
> reaching vitriolic heights, seized groups of parents.... Between January and June 1977 a
> pitched battle of letters, memoranda, position papers, heated exchanges at public
> meetings, and verbal attacks upon board members and staff marked the erratic progress of
> work sessions, hearings, and regularly scheduled board meetings. When I recommended
> the two junior highs that should be closed, the ire of parents in those areas erupted and
> flowed like lava. (Cuban, 1979, p. 376)

Through waves of community anger, the board supported the superintendent's

recommendations. In Virginia, school board members were appointed by the county board, and

during the 1976 and 1977 county board elections, candidates opposing the school-closure policy

lost both times. Throughout the late 1970s, the county board continued to fund school operations

at levels that showed no displeasure for the policy of school mergers. The percentage of parents

who felt schools were good to excellent actually increased, from 74 percent in 1972 to 81 percent

in 1978, as schools began to close, and the percentage of students enrolled in public schools rose

from 70 percent in 1971 to 76 percent in 1977. The superintendent's contract was up for renewal

in January of 1977, and he was reappointed to a four-year term by the school board on a 5-0 vote.

Raytown, Missouri, 1978-1981.

Orrell (1983) described how schools were closed in Raytown, Missouri, a suburban community outside Kansas City. In 1978, after a ten-year enrollment drop from 16,000 to 10,000, the school district hired a consulting firm to prepare a ten-year demographic forecast. The firm projected that enrollment would drop to 8,500 by 1984 and possibly to 8,000 by 1988. The consulting firm urged the board to (a) prepare a comprehensive facilities evaluation, (b) prepare estimates for district resources over the next 10 years, (c) assess alternatives to address declining enrollment, (d) develop a community task force, and (e) consider the possibility of a different grade organization. The board hired the consulting firm to complete these duties, reasoning that it would provide more credibility to the results and reduce potential public anger toward the board and administrators if it were necessary to close schools.

The consulting firm provided three different grade-organization options offering various elementary and junior high school closures, and the board presented the firm's report to the public. In the public meeting, questions were mostly answered by the consulting firm, not the administrators. The board then appointed a 17-member citizens' committee to review the report and make a recommendation. The committee recommended a phased-in middle school configuration, closing two elementary and one junior high school, leaving the district with nine elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. By the fall of 1981 the plan was fully implemented, and the district proceeded to sell one vacant elementary building, lease the other, and use the vacated junior high for other district purposes.

In this decision-making process, the demographic and facilities utilization studies (including options for closure and new attendance areas) were completed by the consulting firm. Public discussion of the firm's report was facilitated by administrators and the consulting firm.

The consolidation plan was recommended by a citizens' committee, and the school board

approved the committee's plan.

     Seattle, Washington, 1974-1981.

     A number of researchers have analyzed the decade-long attempt of Seattle school

officials to deal with enrollment decline during the 1970s. From a peak enrollment of 99,000 in

1962, by 1971 enrollment was down to 80,000. Weatherley, Narver, and Elmore (1983)

described the Seattle school district as one possessing strong neighborhood identification and a

history of citizen participation in school affairs. Eidell (1983) described it as having a larger than

average population of well-educated, middle-class residents. Eidell contended that the Seattle

school board did not deal with its enrollment decline problem in a timely manner, taking no

action until 1974, 10 years after decline had begun.

     In 1974, the school board asked administration for a school-closure plan. At that point,

the board made no attempt to develop a comprehensive plan and did not explore other courses of

action, merely asking administrators to name some schools for closure, and only considering

facility utilization and physical condition of buildings (Eidell, 1983). No educational program or

human factors were taken into account, the community was not informed in advance of the need

for closures, and no provisions were made for alternate use of closed buildings. The

administration's plan called for the closure of seven schools, and the board adopted and

announced the plan. The district's plans were thwarted and the board reversed its decision

following challenges from neighborhood groups. Educational leaders were discredited for

technical errors and narrowness of thinking, losing the advantage of being considered experts on

school-closure decisions. After this bungled attempt at consolidation and after the defeat of a

subsequent excess levy request in which the district lost 40 percent of operating funds, the same

process was used again in 1976 to try to close schools. The board voted to close five schools,

and the decision was again challenged by citizens who took the matter to court. The court

ordered the buildings reopened for lack of an environmental impact study.

Weatherley et al. (1983) attributed some of the Seattle officials' school-closure

difficulties to the rise of community action groups. Having managed to keep a middle-class

population in its schools, Seattle still had many strong, highly individualistic neighborhoods,

with parents who had technical and political sophistication and the time to volunteer many hours

of effort to develop and change school district policy.

> Traditionally, the district had based its decisions on technical expertise; now citizens were
> questioning the experts and exerting organized political action. The board...was signaling
> a basic inability to handle the neighborhood-based politics of school closure. The district
> administration persisted in the view that school closures were essentially a problem of
> building logistics—adjusting building capacity to shifts in enrollment without regard for
> community responses. (p. 15)

Over the decade, enrollment dropped almost in half to 46,000, and by the late 1970s, the district

was operating the same number of buildings as it had 20 years earlier, but with only half the

enrollment.

Finally, in 1978, a district planning commission was established to develop

comprehensive plans for handling the district's problems. Part of citizens' opposition to school

closures throughout the 1970s had rested on the argument that the district was not exploring

options for joint use or reuse of excess school space. As part of the comprehensive plan, citizens

wanted the board to consider sharing and leasing excess space. Citizens felt that closed public

schools should continue to support community life as day care centers, community clinics, or

senior citizen centers. They contended that leasing excess space could even raise revenue for the

district. The district acquiesced and the debate shifted toward the broader policy and

administrative issues of managing school district property.

Earlier in the decade, the district had maintained that leasing space would not be profitable, and that there were too many legal, financial, and technical barriers. The change in the district's attitude toward use of excess space was a pivotal point in the decision-making process (Narver, 1983).

> When the debate shifted from contention about school closures to opportunities for property management, the problems of retrenchment were redrawn. The possibilities for collaboration and joint effort provided the vehicle to move away from argument and recrimination. The board and administration realized that excess space could be an asset rather than a liability. Citizens learned to redirect their energies toward developing options rather than just protesting. (p. 223)

In 1979, after a completed facilities utilization study, the board closed five schools, and in 1981, after adopting a long-range plan, 14 of Seattle's remaining 112 schools were closed, including two high schools, one middle school, and 11 elementary schools. Four more schools would close the following summer. The district hired a property manager, and by 1983, most of the 25 closed buildings were under short- or long-term leases, and an additional 55 property leases for joint occupancy were established in schools still in use, generating net revenue of over one million dollars. Surplus space was being leased by art centers, energy projects, community service agencies, folk-dancing groups, preschools, day-care centers, youth service programs, a Montessori school, a light opera program, a ballet company, and a museum. The school closures had finally received public acceptance, and political tranquility had been achieved.

Typical scenario.

The professional-consensus literature promoted the use of enrollment predictions and long-range planning within a logical, rational, and objective decision-making process to arrive at a decision as to which buildings would best serve a district's future needs. Taking into account

educational quality and cost efficiency, a decision could then be made to close school buildings. An open-system approach was preferred, with district leaders sharing information and seeking community participation in the process. Powers' (1979) research outlined a typical urban or suburban declining enrollment decision-making scenario at the time, one no doubt played out in hundreds of communities across the United States. However, Power's typical scenario described a more erratic process than that anticipated by the professional consensus.

First, some enrollment decline would be noted within a district. The board would order enrollment projections. From these, the board would decide that organizational changes might be warranted. The board would name an advisory committee to look at such actions as redrawing boundaries, consolidating schools, and eliminating any programs that would not harm overall educational quality. School district professionals would provide the committee with direction and information, often playing a controlling role in any committee recommendations. The recommendations would generally reflect the board's priorities, but not always. Actions often recommended were to close some elementary buildings, increase class sizes, eliminate some electives, move ninth grade to high school, move sixth grade to junior high school, and refrain from hiring any new teachers.

The recommendations would be made public and a public meeting would be scheduled to solicit reaction from affected citizens. The climate of the meeting would be tense. Some community groups would then plot strategies to sway the board, such as taking the district to court or organizing public demonstrations. Schools slated for closure were often those from vulnerable neighborhoods with little political clout, often poor or working-class neighborhoods. Charges of racism or elitism would be leveled. The board would go ahead with the plan anyway and would brace for the public's reaction. The potential for introducing any new educational

opportunities into the plan was mostly overclouded by a sense of financial crisis.

The outcome of Powers' (1979) typical scenario description, as well as those of a number of published case studies, was at odds with the result envisioned by the professional-consensus model, one of broad-based agreements and high-quality decisions. Zerchykov (1982) pointed out that the professional-consensus precepts appeared credible since they included experience and anecdote from the firing line, but they often lacked reference to generalizable research evidence. There was, in fact, very little generalizable research on the processes of responding to decline and on the impact of those responses. As the decade of the 1970s came to a close, some researchers began to challenge the craftlore of professional advice, some undertaking more generalizable statistical study and analysis in order to support their critiques.

Challenges to the Dominant Model

Nuttall (1976) was one of the first to report some complications with the professional-consensus decision-making model for retrenchment. The school board of his suburban district established a citizens' advisory committee to gather information and to suggest various alternatives for dealing with declining enrollment. All meetings were open to the public. The committee met weekly over six months, sometimes drawing 300 citizens to its meetings, and finally submitted a 144-page report to the board. The board proceeded to close one elementary school. Rather than having produced agreement and unity of purpose, the decision-making process resulted in four incumbent board members losing their seats in the ensuing elections, allowing a cost-conscious and neighborhood-schools coalition to take over the board. It was the first time in over a hundred years that more than one incumbent had been defeated.

The new board rescinded the closure of the school and ordered drastic reductions in

administrative budgets instead. As a member of the citizens' advisory committee, Nuttall (1976) was able to discern the value systems of committee members and plot them on a value space, allowing him to see groupings and to detect expected coalitions. Sets of values included concerns for total cost, school quality, and neighborhood schools. In this case it appeared that an open-system process had facilitated coalition formation.

In 1977, a year later, two school board members reported additional complications with the professional-consensus model. Morgan and Wofford (cited in Zerchykov, 1982) joined a team to look at retrenchment decisions proactively, before they rose to a crisis level in their district. Involving citizens in a serious way, the team set up a task force of 26 members including board members, administrators, faculty, citizens, and students. The task force developed three cost reduction strategies and presented them at a series of open meetings, followed by small group discussions and questionnaire responses. The proposals failed to gain support. Retreating from significant change, the task force offered three watered down alternatives instead.

Finding no constituency for cost reduction, the task force ended up giving something to everybody, which ended up costing more money, not less. At the end of the three-year effort, Morgan and Wofford (cited in Zerchykov, 1982) disappointedly commented,

> "What we learned is that citizens did not see the system in the same way and could not agree on what parts to cut. We learned that we could not locate a consensus for retrenchment. It did not exist out there waiting for us to discover and understand it." (p. 187)

They also recognized the limitations of using objective fact-finding to address looming budget problems, noting that a corporate management approach could not define the ends of education. Likewise, "'cost benefit analysis cannot decide who pays for educational opportunity—that's a question of public policy, of social justice'" (pp. 183-184).

Citizens' committees could also be unpredictable, as a case from Berkeley, California demonstrated (Jessner, 1979). In 1977 the school board created a facilities committee to recommend which schools to close. The committee spelled out the criteria to be used, but then went a step further than most citizens' groups, stating that the effect of a school closure on the community was as important as the other categories within the criteria. In its interim report, the committee also wrote that closing a school site would not generate immediate savings of any magnitude, and that long-term savings would most likely to come with more efficient use of personnel. This upset some board members, one stating that the committee had "'run wild and amuck'" (p. 115) and adding that the committee had been told to study which schools to close, not whether to close any schools at all.

Questioning consensus and comprehensive planning.

In light of these and other literature, three researchers in particular, Zerchykov (1982, 1983), Boyd (1979, 1982a, 1982b, 1983), and Berger (1982b, 1983b), began to challenge the dominant "plan-and-agree" paradigm of professional-consensus advice on managing declining enrollment. Their criticisms were directed toward the prescribed strategy of broad citizen involvement through a process of rational planning, problem solving, and consensus building, which would supposedly lead to agreement and high-quality decisions in a relatively peaceful environment.

Although the precepts of more rationality and more participation were congruent with the norms of modern educational administration and civic culture in general, Zerchykov's (1982) exhaustive literature review showed a number of contradictions between the professional advice and the evidence, with case-study evidence highlighting a number of difficulties in applying the

consensus' prescriptions. Boyd (1983), who had researched numerous suburban school districts

facing fiscal constraint, concurred with Zerchykov.

> The approach recommended in the literature for facilitating school closure decisions—the rational planning model, with an emphasis on consensus building through widespread participation—is not only ineffective in most cases but also counterproductive, in that it often exacerbates conflict.... In essence, it turns out that the politics of school closings really is far more a *divide-and-conquer* than a *plan-and-agree* process. (p. 257)

Boyd discerned that the secret of school closings was "*concentrated cuts judiciously targeted* to

minimize the likelihood of the formation of resistance coalitions" (Boyd, 1982b, pp. xi-xii).

Part of Boyd's (1979) understanding was built on the distinction between "collective" and

"separable" goods. An action that assigned a collective good or burden was applied to everyone

equally. An action that assigned a separable good or burden, on the other hand, resulted in a

benefit or harm to one segment of the community (Olson cited in Boyd, 1979). An action that

was separable in nature, such as a school closure, divided a community. It provided reasons for

citizens in a particular neighborhood to mobilize and organize politically. The common, public

interest derived from such an action, the collective good, such as greater efficiency of school

operations, would be overridden by those separate interests, and it provided little incentive for

political mobilization. Commenting on Boyd's analysis, Zerchykov (1983) noted,

> Typically, a proposal for closing a school takes the form of an *immediate* and "separable" harm to some, and a *potential* "collective" benefit to all. In this situation...do expect opposition from the specific interests threatened and do not expect...support from the publics that *potentially* benefit collectively. That is why focused cutbacks, like closing schools, though they may be more rational on fiscal and pedagogical grounds, are more politically difficult to implement. (p. 180)

The plan-and-agree process could not effectively address the threat to a neighborhood of a

separable harm such as a school closure. Additionally, some supposed that the participatory

process would serve to crystalize and subsequently polarize special interests, that parents and

teachers would generally be more loyal to their schools than to the district as a whole, and that

consultants would be viewed as mere pawns of the board.

Rather than rely on single case-study evidence, Berger (1982b) designed a research project that would provide more generalizable conclusions. Berger studied 53 districts that had experienced enrollment decline over a 10-year period from 1970 to 1980. Using a survey method with a closed-ended questionnaire checklist followed by statistical analysis, Berger set out to determine whether those educational retrenchment decisions that included comprehensive planning and community participation had any effect on community opposition. Data from the study showed that these two widely-held public-management principles had either no effect on opposition or even increased it. Although comprehensive, deliberate planning techniques were preferred in most situations, they did not reduce opposition to retrenchment decisions in the study. Technical rationality could not locate the "one best solution" for everyone concerned. The use of task forces and other community involvement did not help mitigate opposition, and the use of consultants was associated with greater community opposition.

A subsequent study seemed to validate the prior one. In an attempt to understand why some communities reacted more fiercely than others to school closures, Berger (1983b) chose a nonrandom sample of 65 school district retrenchment case studies from journals and other documents from the 1970s. Berger was again interested in testing the professional-consensus assumption that opposition would decrease by utilizing the scientific-management principle of planning ahead, (meaning comprehensive, deliberate, systematic and long-term planning with ample collection and analysis of data). He also put to test the assumption that opposition would decrease by including broad participation of community members in the decision-making process.

During the research (Berger, 1983b), trained case analysts looked over each of the 65

case studies to find evidence of variables of interest within each. The dependent variable was formed out of a weighted index of opposition tactics used by the community to protest school-closure decisions. In increasing level of severity, these included letters to the board, petitions to the board, heated exchanges with the board, personal attacks on the board in the media, demonstrations, board member replacement in elections, law suits, and voting down referenda and/or budgets. Independent variables included notification time frame of enrollment decline to the community, speed of the task force, planning comprehensiveness, task force representation of the broader community, consultant involvement, teacher involvement, community involvement, time of the first closure after peak enrollment, superintendent-community relations, and superintendent-board compatibility, among others.

Statistical analysis led to the following conclusions (Berger 1983b): (a) the more comprehensive the planning, the greater the opposition; (b) districts which spent more than two years between notification of a decline problem and school closings were more likely to experience greater opposition than districts which moved more quickly; (c) community involvement and large representative task forces had no impact on community opposition; and (d) the use of consultants had the possibility of increasing opposition. On the other hand, the participation of teachers in retrenchment decisions did have a mitigating effect on community opposition. Berger (1983b) emphasized,

> The data show that comprehensive deliberate planning will *not* reduce community opposition as expected, but rather, will tend to exacerbate it. Although comprehensive planning may be functional for other purposes, the widely held belief that such planning processes will reduce opposition to retrenchment decisions is not supported in this study. (p. 161)

Additionally, most comprehensive planning was overly technical in nature (Berger, 1982b). Rational planning generated percentages and ratios that tended to overwhelm and

frustrate the less technically inclined. Many people believed that statistics could be manipulated

to show whatever one wanted them to show. Thus, the collection and presentation of elaborate

information could increase rather than decrease opposition, because parents might believe that

policymakers knew what schools they wanted to close in the first place and were simply

arranging the numbers to justify their predetermined positions.

During his "computer simulation" study, Yeager (1979) noted this ineffectual nature of

numerous data on retrenchment decisions. Yeager devised a computer simulation, using one

Illinois school board's already established school-closure criteria, which allowed the board to see

the impact of any combination of school closures on those criteria. However, in the end, the

school board's final decision did not appear to be affected by the data generated by the computer

simulation. Yeager concluded, "At the decision-making level, hard data create more issues than

they resolve" (p. 311).

Another contested part of comprehensive planning was the identification of specific

schools for closure through the formation and application of multiple school-closure criteria.

Such schemes were arbitrary because of the many potentially conflicting criteria to be taken into

account (Dean, 1982). Points and weighting systems that aggregated the individual criteria

ended up camouflaging the arbitrary nature of the process.

> "How is one to weigh the relative importance of a facility's age, maintenance
> requirements, energy needs, location, internal layout, proximity to transportation routes,
> etc.? When the process is completed, proponents of school A can always question the
> relevance of specific criteria and bring in additional considerations—the impact on the
> neighborhood, the implications for desegregation, the historical significance of the
> facility, the excellence of the program—to argue for eliminating school B instead."
> (Weatherley, Narver, & Elmore cited in Dean, 1982, p. 336)

Boyd (1983) concurred with this criticism, noting that although neutral and technical

criteria were recommended in selecting schools to be closed, "there is no simple 'technological

fix' that will ensure equitable and popular decisions" (p. 258). Apparently many school district

officials also concurred. In spite of the professional advice to use multiple criteria, one survey of

districts found that, in practice, just one or two criteria tended to be utilized, the most often

mentioned being declining enrollment and age of building (R. Andrews et al., 1974).

Zerchykov (1982) summed up the overall challenge to the dominant model of "peace

through comprehensive planning and consensus" in the school-closure decision-making process.

> We have what appears to be the makings of a vicious circle. Retrenchment decisions are
> by definition controversial. They harm some concrete interests, while often benefiting
> only a general, abstract, and un-embodied interest in greater cost-efficiency. The
> professional consensus...recognizes this fact and urges decisionmakers to avoid political
> expediency and instead plan so as to achieve unity of purpose and clarity of goals.... The
> circle is vicious because the very processes by which the necessary unity of purpose and
> clarity of goals are to be created (community involvement and objective fact-finding) are
> themselves confounded by the lack of a prior unity of purpose. (p. 170)

The importance of neighborhoodness.

Another criticism of the advice offered by professional consensus was that it advanced

little concern for the concept of "neighborhoodness" within the school-closure decision-making

process, being weighted heavily toward criteria of efficiency. Better decisions could be made if

leaders paid more attention to the important school-neighborhood interface, helping to minimize

disruptions to neighborhoods, and hence opposition to school closures, even in normally

transient suburban districts (Boyd, 1982b).

As part of a larger qualitative research study on how school districts were responding to

declining enrollments, Wood and Boyd (1981) looked at three suburban districts in one

northeastern United States metro-area between 1979 and 1980. They interviewed board

members, superintendents, citizens who had spoken at board meetings, and people in the

surrounding vicinity of the schools. Wood and Boyd surmised that as suburban areas were being

built, neighborhoods were only a vague reality, but as school systems' building programs developed, this vague reality was given substance in many suburbs, with the local school playing a vital role in helping to stabilize a precarious neighborhood identity. The so-called "neighborhood schools" actually became neighborhood schools for many suburban areas given that the school was often their only visible neighborhood demarcation. "[The neighborhood school] offered the occupants of incipient neighborhoods a means of completing their social unit. A school was a concrete symbol of the identity of a group that was not even sure it was group" (p. 111). For parents, the neighborhood school meant greater safety for children, less anxiety for parents, more ownership, higher quality education, and identity with a community.

Although there did exist a complex relationship between attendance boundaries for schools and neighborhood self-perceptions, the key to the relationship was "neighborhood apperception."

> "Neighborhood apperception" [is] the condition that participation in the activities centered on a neighborhood school broadens and deepens people's sense of being part of a neighborhood and their sense of belonging. In turn, it creates even stronger loyalties to the school itself. Neighborhood schools give rise to neighborhood PTA's; they provide neighborhood playgrounds; they become, on occasion, meeting places for other local organizations; and they serve, in many instances, as the first place where parents meet other parents in the "neighborhood" who are not immediate "neighbors." (Wood & Boyd, 1981, p. 112)

Neighborhood apperception varied among the three suburban areas researched, and the very concept of neighborhood included a broad array of people-to-place relationships (Wood & Boyd, 1981). In one suburb, people had neighbors, but neighbors did not seem to add up to neighborhoods, while in another suburb, a series of definitely bounded and named neighborhoods existed due to a continuum of commercialized-to-rural settlement patterns. In the third, there prevailed a kind of psychological reality to the neighborhoods of certain areas but without attribution of any specific commonalities to neighbors.

Wood and Boyd (1981) discerned that researchers should consider further analysis of the social links between school and neighborhood, and that school closure decision-making processes should pay more attention to identifying the extent to which a school was tied to the neighborhood.

> Most administrators have a fair intuitive grasp of the degree to which different schools are "embedded" in neighborhoods. The most entrenched neighborhood schools are often the older buildings of the district, ones which some of the current board members may themselves have attended and which, on grounds of upkeep alone, might seem attractive targets for school closings. Thus, many administrators would concur with the paradoxical observation of one of the superintendents in this study that, "It's easier to close a brand new building than one that's forty years old." Old buildings simply have had more time to become enmeshed in the ramifying social links between school and neighborhood. (pp. 115-116)

However, other aspects of school-neighborhood relations were more subtle and more difficult to perceive (Wood & Boyd, 1981). Some of these more subtle links that made a school an integral part of the neighborhood included: (a) "transiency" (the frequency with which residents moved and the number of old-timers who remembered the community's past); (b) "involution" (the degree to which the attendance area of a neighborhood school coincided with the attendance areas of other institutions such as local churches or businesses); and (c) "boundaries" (neighborhood associations' boundaries and their coincidence with geographical, socioeconomic, or ethnic boundaries). The schools that were least disruptive to close were those with high transiency, low involution, and low clarity of external boundaries.

Socioeconomic status and decision making.

Further research by Boyd (1979, 1982a, 1982b) also led him to observe that the professional advice did not take into account legitimate differences in political culture that typified higher and lower socioeconomic status school districts. Decision-making models

endorsed by the professional consensus were more conducive to middle- and upper-middle-class constituencies. In addition, the advice was based on strategies that served to minimize conflict in middle- and upper-middle- class districts during periods of growth, but failed to provide them with conflict resolution in the new period of decline (Boyd & Wheaton, 1983).

Boyd (1979) embarked on some follow-up research to his earlier 1973 study of four working-class and four middle- or upper-middle-class suburbs in the Chicago area. In his 1973 study, looking at data from 1964 to 1969, a time of growing enrollment, Boyd had determined that the norm in white collar suburban districts was to avoid or minimize conflict in the community using more rational problem-solving models, while the norm in blue collar suburban districts was more supportive of overt politics and bargaining, using more political models. This distinction was the product of distinctly different political cultures in the blue and white collar districts. "The fundamental difference between blue collar and white collar districts lies in their different norms and values regarding conflict and the proper conduct of politics" (p. 346).

Boyd's prior research had conformed to earlier descriptions of "public regarding" and "private regarding" political cultures (Banfield & Wilson cited in Boyd, 1979). A public-regarding political culture was characterized as an Anglo-Saxon, protestant, middle-class ethos of "good government" in which politics was viewed as a disinterested, broad public interest to discover what was best for the whole community. A private-regarding political culture was characterized as a lower-class, immigrant ethos of "machine politics" which recognized the legitimacy of personal benefits and favors, of competition and conflict based on narrow and special interests, and of an identification that drew more from the ward or the neighborhood rather than the community as a whole.

Boyd's (1979) data from the 1960s period of growth had led him to descriptions of

decision making and political culture in suburban school districts that were similar to these public- and private-regarding depictions. He found that white collar suburban districts could be characterized as places attached to the community as a whole. Politics in its common and broadest sense was shunned, being viewed instead as a disinterested effort to discern what was in the interest of the broader community. The school board was expected to be nonpartisan, serving as a trustee for the interests of the whole district. The superintendent served as an educational statesman. White collar districts were more inclined to utilize rational, technical, and consensual decision-making models, with deference to professional expertise. Overall, white collar districts experienced less conflict during growth periods.

Blue collar suburban districts, on the other hand, were attached to particular neighborhoods. They recognized the legitimacy of competition, conflict, and the seeking of personal favors. Competing interests were accepted as part of life. Board members were viewed as partisan, expected to respond to requests for favoritism. Superintendents operated more as political strategists. Blue collar districts were more inclined to utilize political decision-making models involving compromise and bargaining, with less deference to expertise. Overall, blue collar districts experienced more conflict during growth periods.

For his follow-up study of the four blue collar and four white collar suburban districts, Boyd (1979) was interested in understanding how the change from growth to decline was impacting public school governance and whether the impact varied with respect to a district's socioeconomic status. Would white collar districts use the abundant management resources among their citizenry to mobilize conflict in the face of redistributive issues? Would the tensions surrounding redistributive issues break down the public-regarding consensus in white collar districts? He suspected that conflict levels in response to decline, especially when school

closures were involved, would be as high and perhaps higher in white collar districts than in blue

collar districts, reversing relative conflict levels under growth conditions.

> The rational-consensual ("public-regarding") policy-making orientation, which tends to be prevalent in higher status districts, may be less well suited for dealing with redistributive issues, for example, in seeking and striking compromises, than the more "political" ("private-regarding") policy-making orientation prevalent in lower status districts. (Boyd, 1979, p. 363)

Boyd revisited the same eight suburban Chicago districts, looking at new data from 1969

to 1979, including election results, census data, and operating costs. He observed meetings,

conducted interviews, and developed case histories on each district. He later expanded the study

to include a total of 15 suburban districts in two metropolitan areas. Results were revealed over

a number of years as the project developed (Boyd 1979, 1982a, 1982b; Boyd & Wheaton, 1983).

The research showed that during decline, the white collar and higher socioeconomic

status suburban districts placed a high value on the quality of the educational program (Boyd,

1979). They were convinced that retrenchment was necessary in order to maintain this

educational quality. As in growth, their abundant management resources and associated attitudes

led to rational planning in decision making as they responded to decline, including the following

elements:

> a) extensive data collection and analysis;
> b) considerable use of expertise;
> c) formation of numerous committees and task forces involving citizens and educators;
> d) numerous attempts to clarify and set educational goals, to establish policies and models for systematic and consistent responses to decline-related problems, and to develop and apply criteria for school closing decisions; and
> e) extensive public discussion of the problems of decline and of alternative solutions for these problems. (Boyd & Wheaton, 1983, p. 27)

Overt politics and bargaining were present, but they took place subtly within the context of this

rational approach, helping to maintain the legitimacy of the decision.

In responding to decline, the blue collar and lower socioeconomic status suburban

districts placed a high value on the preservation of neighborhood schools. They did not demand

a complex educational program, choosing retrenchment options that posed less threat to their

neighborhood school system (Boyd, 1979). Possessing fewer management resources, their

decision making included more political bargaining and less rational planning during decline, as

it had during growth. Decision making included:

> a) much less data collection and analysis;
> b) little use of expertise;
> c) fewer committees and less citizen involvement;
> d) fewer attempts to clarify or set goals and criteria;
> e) less public discussion, more inclination toward secrecy and suspicion;
> f) more inclination toward ad hoc and accidental policy development; and
> g) more overt politics and bargaining. (Boyd & Wheaton, 1983, p. 27)

Any discussion of grade reorganization or regrouping was suspiciously viewed as an attempt to

close highly valued neighborhood schools.

The school-closure decision-making models of professional folklore also seemed as

inapplicable to large urban districts as they were to blue collar suburban districts. Colton and

Frelich (1979) concluded that during the 1970s St. Louis retrenchment process, school closures

were not based on a formalized process of efficiency criteria, community involvement, and

public information programs. Instead, demographic characteristics, as well as high levels of

bureaucratization, were the most important determinants of the school-closure process in St.

Louis. Boyd and Wheaton's (1983) literature review of large urban districts in decline indicated

that decision making in these districts was characterized by avoidance and delay, incomplete

information, and blatant politics, followed by precipitous decisions.

There appeared to be a tension between the professional advice literature on the

management of decline and its actual practice (Boyd & Wheaton, 1983). Blue collar suburban

districts, as well as urban districts, were less inclined to follow the advice, and although white

collar suburban districts were more likely to follow the rational-planning and consensus-building

strategy, this seldom enabled them to avoid conflict, often leading to greater discord. Reviewing

Boyd's research, Zerchykov (1982) commented,

> It is precisely those types of communities whose values and decisionmaking styles are
> most congruent with (and reflective of) the rational, consensual policymaking style
> advocated by the advice literature, that are likely to experience more intense political
> conflict as a result of retrenchment decisions. The evidence…indicates that this higher
> level of conflict disrupts and delegitimizes the very process of rational, consensual
> decisionmaking presupposed by the craftlore on good management practice. (p. xiv)

School closure and stages of grief.

One of the more unusual commentaries on the school-closure decision-making process

indicated that the professional advice's preoccupation with minimizing community anger was a

futile endeavor, because parents' reactions to school closures followed more of an unavoidable

psychological path. In essence, as schools closed, community emotions could not be contained,

but would instead run their natural course. Drawing on research by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross on

death and dying, Smith (1984) asserted, "The closing of a school can be likened to the death of a

close friend or relative: It's a major change, it's accompanied by sadness and regret, and it has an

unsettling finality" (p. 31). The five progressive stages of grief in reaction to another's death as

described by Kubler-Ross (in Smith, 1984) included "denial," "rage and anger," "bargaining,"

"depression," and "acceptance." In Smith's experience with retrenchment, these five stages of

grief were as natural for the death of a school as for the death of a friend.

In the school-closure decision-making process, the first reaction of the public would be

denial. Irrefutable declining enrollment figures would nonetheless be challenged, and the

looming fiscal crisis would be ignored. The public would refuse to accept the need for school

closures and would oppose any given reason for closing a specific school. Rage and anger

would follow during the second stage of grief, often aimed directly at school board members and administrators. Parents would ask, "Why not another school?" Organized opposition would be mounted against consultants or committees (Smith, 1984).

As a semi-dose of reality began to set in, the next stage would be characterized by bargaining, often through some form of negotiation. Some of the proposals offered by the public would include putting off school closures for a year or two, asking for consideration of alternatives, or insisting on further study. As schools began to close anyway, depression would set in. Morose parents would fear that their children would not be accepted in the new school, or that their neighborhood would no longer be the same. Eventually the neighborhood would arrive at the last stage of grief—acceptance. This would be only a reluctant acceptance that the school was now closed. No happiness would accompany the reaction, but over time, people would reach a point at which they no longer felt unhappy (Smith, 1984).

Critics of the dominant professional advice did offer some of their own suggestions for the decision-making process. Some deemed that retrenchment decision making should consider school closures to be off limits for the most part (Shakeshaft & Gardner, 1983; Valencia, 1984). Communities would be much more likely to accept across-the-board cuts than discontinuation of a specific school. These critics viewed school closures to be highly counterproductive, creating more harm than good. The trauma for teachers and students, the costs in time, physical and emotional energy for parents, and the erosion of public trust in school officials were damaging to the entire community, and the costs did not outweigh the benefits.

> Without solid evidence to support school closings as educationally, politically, and financially sound responses to enrollment decline, it is unconscionable to put educators, students, and parents through such unpleasantness....
>
> Thus closing schools disrupts the stability of an educational system. It threatens administrators' job security, jeopardizes school board continuity, mobilizes community interest groups in opposition to school officials, weakens confidence in the educational

system, and satisfies no one....

Because there is little evidence that closing schools saves enough money to override all the objections to this action, it doesn't make sense to do so. Why waste time, money, and community goodwill on a task that will not reap overriding financial rewards? (Shakeshaft & Gardner, 1983, pp. 493-495)

After extensively reviewing early 1980s research on the politics of school closures, Zerchykov (1983) offered a number of suggestions to minimize conflict during the decision-making process. First, do not seek consensus. The plan-and-agree approach sets an impossible ideal. A winning coalition need not be unanimous and it may not even need to be a majority.

Second, recognize the limits of leadership. Even the superintendent with superhuman capacities for extra work, for insight, and for charismatic leadership will find such attributes largely impractical during retrenchment.

No amount of leadership (no matter how charismatic) or public relations or salesmanship will lead the victims of a proposed cutback—the teachers to be [let go] or the parents losing their neighborhood school—to agree with and participate in the planning of their victimization. (The very fact that such a simple, and banal, truth needs to be reiterated and belabored is one indicator of the shortcomings of the professional lore about good practice in managing decline and closing schools). (Zerchykov, 1983, p. 182)

Third, adopt bargaining strategies. The public should be bargained with rather than led. Package a consolidation proposal in ways designed to either build support or defuse opposition. For example, make differential decrements less clearly differential by asking for school closures in an ad hoc manner rather than simultaneously. Spreading closure proposals out over time means managers only have to fight brush fires. Use the opposite strategy for larger districts by spreading the pain and diffusing the blame. Make sure a school closure is proposed in each area of a larger district (Zerchykov, 1983).

Match a decrement with an increment as another effective bargaining strategy. Move from a sacrifice toward a trade-off, from a certain loss toward a possible benefit. Ask parents to trade off one good for another better good. Offer to improve the quality of education, not just

save money through school closures (Zerchykov, 1983). Instead of asking parents to sacrifice a present, concrete, differentially distributed good (their neighborhood school) in favor of an abstract diffuse, and future good, (like overall district efficiency), build a winning coalition around a tradeoff (such as enhanced educational programming) as opposed to a sacrifice. In Seattle (Narver, 1982) the winning coalition was organized around the benefit (or increment) of better communal use of excess facilities. "It does make sense, political sense, to *create* opportunities (that is, benefits—increments, if you will) out of the necessity to manage decline. That is, creating, rather than simply talking about such benefits is not just a good thing to do, but a political necessity" (Zerchykov, 1983, p. 186).

Other researchers maintained that, even for all its drawbacks, engaging in comprehensive, rational planning based on efficiency criteria (including school closures) was still preferred in most situations. Berger (cited in Eidell, 1983), who had shown that more comprehensive planning led to greater opposition, conducted post-facto analysis on case studies from 70 school districts involved in retrenchment and found that decisions and actions which optimized efficiency ended up producing more positive long-term organizational consequences. Similarly, Boyd (1982a, 1982b), who had shown that rational planning and consensus models did not reduce tensions in white collar districts in decline, suggested that, as long as it was not protracted, the rational, consensus-building approach was worthwhile. The approach seemed to provide more successful retrenchment decisions, or at the very least, it provided a sense of legitimacy for the policymaking process. Concurring with Berger that conflict minimization was only one objective facing decision makers, Boyd and Wheaton (1983) advocated a modified rational model, one which took into account the delicate task districts faced in balancing various objectives. They concluded that school districts would achieve their best results by:

a) discovering the "best" or at least a desirable and defensible educational solution or adjustment to declining enrollments, which at the same time, is politically viable;
b) securing community and staff understanding and consent;
c) maintaining legitimacy for the policymaking process;
d) moving rapidly enough toward closure on retrenchment decisions to avoid the apparent tendency for conflict and opposition to increase over time. (p. 26)

More Recent Approaches

The most prolific period of professional school-closure decision-making literature surrounded the stretch from roughly 1975 to 1985. Although there have been no further in-depth, generalizable studies on the scale of Boyd's or Berger's 1980s research, as this section reveals, professional advice from the 1990s and the early 2000s has continued with the publication of sporadic case studies promoting parallels to the modified rational-consensual approach for school-closure decision making. By following such an approach, sometimes the resulting decision has been to end up shelving school consolidation altogether within proposed plans for retrenchment.

Interviewing superintendents involved in eight separate voluntary rural school district consolidations in Oklahoma between 1990 and 1995, Chance and Cummins (1998) observed that winning strategies in the consolidation process included proposing expanded curriculum and activities, engaging in open communication with staff and parents, offering job security to teachers, administrators, and support staff (or providing generous severance), and maintaining all school sites. Non-winning strategies included closing schools sites and conducting open-forum community meetings.

After the failure of an excess levy request, Edmondson, Thorson, and Fluegel (2000) worked with one small, rural Minnesota district (with just one K-12 school) to address an enrollment drop from 476 in 1970 to 185 in 1999. Faced with a declining population and scant

public support, instead of closing the school and merging with neighboring districts, school officials implemented a process of school-community planning that included a broad-based, community-oriented approach that would develop consensus, establish a common vision for the school, and create an action plan. Strategies included holding town meetings, presenting demographic trends, using small-group brain storming, imagining what the school could become in the future, listening to experts, and considering options for sustaining and improving the school. At the end of the process, community members reported an increased knowledge of school issues. A new levy request passed overwhelmingly. "Sustainable school change should feature broad public participation, be highly informative, and be constructed to produce consensus within the community" (p. 53).

Another study from the turn of the century (Smette, 2001) recommended that in facing retrenchment, school officials should start with a good system of forecasting and planning, generate a clear vision of where the district was heading, and communicate with the public, all while exhibiting a positive attitude and promoting a vision of a brighter future. The botched school-closure plan in Randolph County, West Virginia, for example, was specifically tied to a lack of community input in the decision-making process (Roberts, 2001).

The director of the Kentucky School Boards Association (Hughes, 2003) offered a number of suggestions for school-closure decision making. First, conduct ample research, using credible, understandable data, including the current cost of operating each building (maintenance, staffing, transportation, supplies, utilities) and the future cost of necessary planned improvements at each building. "'We sat down with paper and pencil and gave people facts and figures. That was a key—factual information'" (p. 16), said one school district official. Second, show what the benefits to students will be of the consolidation plan, including improved

curriculum and better facilities. This includes spending time educating local news media. Do

not let the opposition frame the situation that the larger community will read, hear, and see.

Third, employ a participatory process. Plan meetings with all staff at each possibly affected

school, and meet with concerned citizens at each possibly affected school. Never say never, and

do not make judgments without the facts. Once a sound decision is made, do not get mired in

inaction by fiery public reaction, but keep listening and responding after the decision. "'We went

above and beyond the required public meetings.... The committee took time to give everyone a

forum to have their say, and that was part of why it worked'" (p. 17), said another school district

official.

Building on previous research by Yankelovich, Bueschel (2004) identified the following

steps to successful retrenchment: (a) "consciousness raising" (awareness and urgency), (b)

"working through" (looking for answers and making choices that have community support), and

(c) "integration" (initial intellectual acceptance followed by moral commitment). Throughout

the process, Bueschel encouraged "public engagement."

> The concept of public engagement is not about convincing the public to do what the
> experts believe should be done. We must begin with an assumption that the community
> knows what is best for its children and the role of the administrator is to develop
> strategies to come to consensus and build common ground to implement the community's
> will....
>   A hoped for consequence of Public Engagement is the restoration of the historic
> compact between the community and its public schools. (p. 24)

The continuation of the rational-consensual approach was still evident in Russo's (2006)

interviews with various superintendents involved in consolidation. They advised employing

careful and detailed planning, while interacting as much as possible with stakeholder

communities. Echoing advice from the 1970s, one superintendent concluded, "'Bring

consultants in. Evaluate your current facilities. Show everyone the statistics'" (para. 31).

Summary

The 1970s saw the emergence of a craftlore of professional consensus on how to temper community hostility and enact successful school consolidations. The consensus advocated an open-system approach with broad citizen participation, utilizing a decision-making process based on comprehensive, rational planning, problem-solving, and consensus-building (Zerchykov, 1982).

Advice givers recommended a series of steps to the process (Keough, 1978; Puleo, 1981; Sargent & Handy, 1974). 1. Soften up the community through personal interaction and an information campaign showing statistics on enrollment decline while promising improved educational quality through consolidation. 2. Engage in long-range planning utilizing a widely representative task force to develop a future master plan of the district including enrollment projections, needed facilities, and budget projections. 3. Develop school-closure criteria within the task force to evaluate school facilities through numeric weighting and composite score analysis in order to determine which facilities would best meet future needs. 4. Make a decision and recommendation from the task force to the board based both on the criteria and on consideration of any possible consequences.

At the end of the decade, some educational researchers challenged the professional consensus, pointing out that there were limitations to objective fact-finding, and that such an extended process often promoted coalition formation (Boyd, 1983). Studies indicated that comprehensive planning and community participation did not seem to reduce opposition to consolidation, and that there was a tendency for opposition to be greater in districts where planning was the most comprehensive (Berger, 1983b). Contrary to conventional wisdom, the more comprehensive and extended the planning process, the greater the opposition to school-

closing decisions.

    Critics also contended that the professional-consensus model underweighted the importance of neighborhoodness, and that it reflected middle- and upper-middle-class policy decisions effective during growth, but not applicable during decline in either blue or white collar districts (Boyd & Wheaton, 1983; Wood & Boyd, 1981). Some suggested that it was futile to try to quell community dissatisfaction at all, and that rage and anger were part of a natural grieving process. Others recommended resorting to across-the-board cuts, asserting that the damage to the community brought about by most school closures outweighed any purported benefits.

    In the last two decades, new ideas on school-closure decision-making processes have been scarce, with many professionals advocating a continuation of the comprehensive, rational planning, and consensus-building approach (Russo, 2006), others promoting a more modified rational-consensual approach, taking into account political feasibility, legitimacy, and pace in decision making.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE PART 4
HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

*Ultimate solution must
be sought in consolidation.
Harold Foght, 1917*

The previous two parts of the review presented research conducted largely by professional, educational decision makers in the late 20th century. They focused on arguments supporting and opposing school consolidation, on community resistance to school closure, and on ways to mitigate resistance through effective school-closure decision-making processes. The professional literature's intent was to influence the action of other professional, educational decision makers by helping them answer such questions as, "Should we use consolidation as a means of relieving fiscal pressures, and how best do we go about consolidating and selecting the particular school buildings to close?"

The ERIC database showed a third concentration of study, mostly from the late 1980s through the 1990s, which explored school consolidation from historical and theoretical perspectives. The intent of such research, conducted largely by university academicians, was not to offer specific recommendations to school district officials, but rather to give them a deeper well of understanding from which to consider the previous two questions of whether or not to consolidate and how to best go about consolidating. Scholarly work that helped develop historical, social, and political components vital to this deeper understanding of school closure is the focus of the fourth part of this literature review which has been divided into two sections: (a) historical analysis, and (b) theoretical critique of consolidation.

Historical analysis of consolidation is reviewed in the first section, starting from the roots of the movement over 100 years ago. In light of congruent historical forces from the early 20th

century, modern researchers suggested ulterior motives behind the consolidation drive at its infancy, motives radically different from the advertised pedagogical pretenses. This literature helped secure a greater understanding of the later 20th century consolidation movement by tracing its foundations, giving it historical context, and imparting a degree of appreciation for its decision makers, many of whom had received their professional formation during the first half of the 20th century.

The second section is devoted to literature analyzing consolidation from a broader theoretical basis. Here, researchers developed a more complete understanding of school-closure decision making and its repercussions by placing these into larger social and political theoretical constructs. This section includes an overview of these social and political analytical tools and then presents a number of in-depth school-closure case studies that demonstrate how researchers have used these tools in their critique of consolidation. This literature served to identify those theoretical positions that were best suited for my own analysis of the Robbinsdale case study.

Historical Analysis of Consolidation

In his historical review of early to mid-20th century American educational policy, Guthrie (1980) concluded, "The school consolidation movement perhaps reflects one of the most awesome and least publicized governmental changes to occur in this nation during the 20th century" (p. 120). From 1930 through 1972, while national student enrollment doubled from 25 million to a peak of 50 million, about nine out of ten school board members saw their positions disappear as the number of school districts was reduced from 128,000 to less than 17,000, and as mean school district enrollment size grew fifteen-fold.

During the same time period, although national enrollment doubled, mean school

building enrollment skyrocketed, increasing five-fold as the number of schools dropped from 262,000 to 90,800. In 1930, over half of all schools employed just one teacher. By 1972, that number had dropped to less than two percent, with the average secondary school increasing its enrollment to about 1,000 pupils (Guthrie, 1980). In the 1970s, during the first eight years of national enrollment decline, an additional one third of remaining schools was closed, leaving 61,000 schools nationwide by 1980 (DeYoung & Howley, 1990). Even as enrollment began to decline, however, average school size continued to grow. Prior to 1940, 14 percent of high schools enrolled between 500 and 2,500 students. By 1990, more than half of all high schools' enrollment fell within that range (Hampel, 2002).

The consolidation wave during the mid-20th century was strongest in rural areas since tiny urban schools had all but disappeared by the early 1900s (Hampel, 2002). Research by Sher and Tompkins (1977), however, showed that rural residents were particularly protective of their smaller schools. In 1921, 69 percent of rural patrons in the state of New York opposed consolidation. Subsequent studies showed that rural people in Ohio, Wisconsin, and Idaho also opposed unification. Given the unpopularity of school closures during a time of massive consolidation, modern researchers were interested in discerning the impetus behind the movement. Why did small rural schools largely vanish during the 20th century, and why were metropolitan areas faced with ever larger mega-complex school sites? "What persuaded the American public and its officials to undertake such a dramatic alteration in the size and form of one of its major institutions" (Guthrie, 1980, p. 121)?

Pedagogical and Financial Pretenses in Early Rural Consolidation

Historical research showed that the same arguments used to promote both rural and urban

consolidation in the later 20th century, as reviewed in part two of the literature review, were those behind the movement in rural areas during the earlier part of the 20th century (Guthrie, 1980). The marketing of rural school consolidation during this earlier period utilized a two-pronged approach. Collapsing smaller districts and smaller schools into larger units, it was argued, would increase economic efficiency on the one hand, and increase instructional effectiveness on the other.

On the question of efficiency, proponents contended that larger educational organizations could be operated more cheaply than smaller ones by eliminating administrators, librarians, custodians, and even teachers. Foght (1917), an early 20th century professor of rural education and sociology from the Midwest, wrote that it was inefficient to have "many teachers endeavoring to do for many *small* classes what a few teachers could do for a few *large* classes. Again, it can be shown conclusively that the many small schools are actually more expensive to maintain than the graded consolidated school" (p. 305).

Concerning educational effectiveness, proponents argued that larger schools could better afford more up-to-date instructional tools, and that the increased number of students per grade level would justify more specialized and higher quality personnel.

> The nine one-room schools will be discontinued, and instead a modern school will rise, near the center of the township, which will afford every opportunity for practical preparation for happy life on the farm. The school will be hygienic, and have modern equipment and better teachers. The course of study will be graded, recitation periods longer, interest well sustained, years in school longer. Pupils living at a distance will be conveyed to school in suitable vehicles, avoiding exposure to inclement weather. (Foght, 1917, pp. 304-305)

At the high school level, consolidation would help fulfill the desire to group students by ability and interest (Hampel, 2002). By the 1930s, half of all high schools offered a variety of tracks for students, including academic, commercial, general, and vocational tracks. Test scores,

class grades, and teacher recommendations were used to assign students to suitable tracks.

Larger consolidated schools would have sufficient enrollment to offer the specialized rooms

needed to offer such tracks, as well as multipurpose rooms such as libraries, lunchrooms,

auditoriums, and pools. Additionally, architectural scale imparted a certain psychological effect.

> The large school building won respect not just for the array of rooms inside. Its external appearance made manifest certain beliefs about education, especially those having to do with students' character and behavior. In the early years of the 19th century, schools' resemblance to churches proclaimed the moral aspects of public schooling. As buildings got larger and larger in the late 19th century, many educators rhapsodized about the powerful lessons of order, health, and economy taught to students by the scale and solemnity of the fortress-like high schools in most cities and many towns. The austerity of many buildings matched the no-nonsense formality of the teaching and learning in most classrooms. In contrast, the shabbier rural schools, such as those that had been converted from barns, grocery stores, poolrooms, cheese factories, and sheep pens, might be reassuringly familiar sights, but could those makeshift structures impress students as special and important places, inspiring them to live up to the dignity of a civic monument? (Hampel, 2002, p. 360)

One of the early important historical figures in the rural consolidation movement was

Ellwood Cubberly, head of Stanford University's school of education. In 1914 Cubberly wrote,

"'The rural school is today in a state of arrested development, burdened by education traditions,

lacking in effective supervision, controlled largely by rural people, who too often do not realize

either their own needs or the possibilities of rural education'" (Cubberly cited in Theobald &

Nachtigal, 1995, p. 2). As a reformer of the Progressive Era, Cubberly saw three advantages in

larger schools: (a) reduction in the number of administrators to teachers; (b) division of students

by grade level, subject, and ability for more specialized instruction; and (c) better facilities at

lower cost (Berry, 2004).

Later on, during the mid-20th century, James Bryant Conant became one of the more

influential proponents of consolidation (Hampel, 2002). A retired Harvard chemistry professor

and administrator, Conant, in his best-selling 1959 book, *The American High School Today*,

wrote that the number of small high schools should be drastically reduced through reorganization. Conant thought that a high school should have a minimum of 400 students, or 100 in each grade level, so that courses in advanced math, science, and foreign language could be offered to the top 15 percent of students. Such course offerings were needed, he argued, in order to compete with the Soviet Union. He was more interested in the needs of the academically talented, and he thought small high schools could not sort and divide students adequately.

Following Conant's recommendations, the American Association of School Administrators stated, "'Small districts need to be reorganized into effective and efficient administrative units. They are outdated and outmoded. They have outlived their usefulness. They can no longer do the job that needs to be done'" (Stemnock cited in Beckner & O'Neal, 1980, p. 3). Adams and Foster (2002) maintained that these arguments continued to hold sway into the 21st century since they matched state policy contexts that demanded (and still do) fiscal restraint and educational improvement. As such, consolidation possessed political capital, transforming rural-consolidation policy talk into effective political rhetoric.

Although many rural residents had fundamental objections to consolidation, they seemed to be seduced and beguiled by such arguments (Sher & Tompkins, 1977). They appeared willing to concede that consolidated schools would save money through operating efficiencies and that more highly educated and specialized teachers would inevitably be better than their less-credentialed colleagues often found in smaller schools.

> The arguments for consolidation have tremendous face validity. To argue that economies of scale may not exist, or are very small if they do, or are outweighed by diseconomies, is counterintuitive. To suggest that newer and more modern school buildings with more educated teachers do not necessarily mean that children learn more turns the educational world on end....
>
> So the arguments stood. Asserted over and over again and left unchallenged, they

came to be believed. (Sher & Tompkins, 1977, p. 74)

Sher and Tompkins (1977) provided ample empirical evidence that, all in all, rural consolidation had not been able to live up to the educational and economic claims made on its behalf. However, since large new rural schools were tangible symbols of the modernization sweeping all aspects of life in the 1900s, rural Americans ended up succumbing to the consolidation wave, hoping that the new resources would lead to increased learning and chances of success for their children. "The values of smallness...seemed overshadowed by the promise of new buildings, more courses, and sophisticated equipment. All in all, the benefits of consolidation seemed overwhelming and the costs minimal by comparison" (p. 45).

Modern researchers were able to identify a number of additional motives surrounding rural consolidation in the first half of the 20th century. Some seemed self-evident, such as increased road paving in rural areas, allowing students to travel longer distances in shorter times, and decreasing enrollment due to migration from rural farms to urban areas from the 1930s on, including the farm crisis of the 1980s (Bard et al., 2006). Other forces, however, were more clandestine, operating behind the scenes. Among these ulterior forces were the industrialization of the educational system, starting in urban schools and followed by the eventual urbanization of rural schools, as well as the expansion of state control in pursuit of national goals and economic interests.

Industrialization of Urban Education

Enveloping many of the motives behind the consolidation movement, including the quests for efficiencies and pedagogical reform, were larger industrializing forces that began to affect many aspects of American life in the late 1800s. As the nation began building larger cities

surrounded by factories, a cultural assumption began to develop that if our cities and factories were growing larger, so must our schools (Bard et al., 2006; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). In urban areas, as business interests moved into the educational sphere, it was determined that school systems could contribute to this modern era by using organizational forms adopted from industry, forms that emphasized larger size and specialization. The industrialization of education was characterized by an overall propensity to view education through an economic and business lens coupled with a strong belief in scientific management.

Economic theory and business interests.

The linking of economic goals to education began in the 19th century, producing major effects on school organization by the early 20th century (DeYoung, 1989b). In his historical overview of the impact of economic theories on schooling, DeYoung showed how the economic thinking that eventually came to dominate American education had its roots in classical economic perspectives of the late 18th century. Searching for economic laws that would advance material wealth and social development in Europe, classical economic thinkers, such as Adam Smith, came to believe that the progress of Western civilization depended on the rational development of market economies, a free-market system where goods and services could be efficiently produced. Some feared, however, that this unrestrained, open, free-market, capitalist system would eventually begin to negatively affect public institutions.

> [Under capitalism] all government funded institutions (like the school) would inevitably have to conform to demands of the private sector in order to operate….Capitalists through their official government channels would utilize the state to put into practice economic and social policies seen as beneficial to their own class interests, that is, policies designed to further legitimate and extend the possibilities for capitalist economic development. There would be no questioning of the free enterprise system or of the importance of property ownership. Ideas skeptical toward capitalism would not be entertained in government-financed institutions, for such ideas might question the

emerging power base of capitalism itself. (Marx cited in DeYoung, 1989b, p. 24)

Skepticism could be found, however, among contemporaries of late 18th-century classical economic thinkers, including the ideas of Robert Owen, founder of New Lanark in Scotland (DeYoung, 1989b). Owen saw classical economics as detrimental to the sustenance of community, the loss of which was not worth the promise of economic opportunity. He believed human identity to be dependent on participation in family, community, and occupational groups. Later skeptics included Karl Marx, who similarly believed it was only in community with others that the individual could be whole, and thus, an economic system that forced individuals to compete with each other for survival was incompatible with human nature. He found capitalism to be inhuman, anti-individual, and antisocial, as well as exploitive.

"As career (geographic) mobility patterns now verify, and as human capital theory now explicitly calls for, stable and meaningful community life in the industrial world is a vanishing phenomenon" (DeYoung, 1989b, p. 169). DeYoung considered the devaluing of community life inherent to this economic viewpoint to be an important component in the eventual consolidation of rural schools.

Urban school systems, however, were the first to be impacted by such economic thought via the direct injection of business interests into school boards. At the beginning of the 20th century, in an effort to overturn the influence that ward bosses maintained over the nation's urban schools, these business interests sought to reduce the size of school boards and make elections nonpartisan and at-large (Spring, 2001). These changes affected the social composition of boards because candidates would now need enough money and organizational backing to campaign throughout their entire city rather than just a small geographical area. "The combination of these reforms almost guaranteed that school boards would represent the views

and values of the financial, business and professional communities" (p. 290).

In 1913, a small-school-board bill was enacted in Ohio to reduce the size of urban school boards from between 30 and 40 members to seven (Spring, 2001). Elections would be citywide as opposed to elections by district, and elections would be nonpartisan. Consequently, of the 49 Cincinnati school board members elected between 1914 and 1964, 18 were from the business and financial community, and 10 were lawyers. The social composition of the board did not represent the social composition of the community. A 1916 study of urban districts showed that business people composed more than 50 percent of the total number of board members, and another 1927 study found urban school boards to be dominated by proprietors, professionals, and business executives. Following the change in school boards, business interests then began to seep into schools' administrative ranks.

> It is logical that the new form of school board dominated by civic elites appointed administrators who reflected their business values and interests....Between 1890 and the Depression years of the 1930s, business dominated in the control of the schools and business values dominated the management of the schools.... The business attitudes and cost-consciousness of the school administrators pleased the business people who dominated the boards of education. These professional and business people were happy to relinquish functions to an administration that promised to provide more education at less expense. (Spring, 2001, pp. 295-296)

Later on, during the middle 20th century, additional ideas from private enterprise were transported into public education, although their implementation was often problematic given that the differences between the private and public spheres were often ignored (Deal & Derr, 1980). During the 1960s, particularly in the field of organizational development, many private-industry professionals moved into education, attracted by funding for educational innovation and experimentation, but carrying with them their value biases and assumptions from industry to education. "[Organizational development] OD had its nexus in industry and that experience was often transposed onto schools by non-educator OD practitioners" who were prone to "taking the

'latest thing' from industry and adopting it, without much adaptation, in schools" (Deal & Derr, 1980, p. 96).

Scientific management.

Scientific management began in the early 20th century under the leadership of Frederick Taylor. Taylor believed that industry needed a more systematic organization and control of work. "An organization was envisioned in which decisions would be made at the top, based on scientific studies, and would flow to the bottom" (Spring, 2001, p. 293). Interested in how to apply social science to the production process, Taylor searched for ways to make the workplace more efficient, enhancing the status of science in the business world. "Efficiency and precision in production were central to both the interests of management science and the profit motives of employers" (DeYoung, 1989b, p. 54). Such thinking would soon find its way into the educational field.

> Business leaders and an emerging number of school efficiency experts felt that the problem with schools was that they were inefficient. Efficient business organizations had clearly demarcated chains of command, exact and specific job requirements, and a highly specialized division of labor. Such "scientific" attributes of business (as opposed to the moral values of an earlier era) were argued to be the basis of the principles on which future social progress in the West would continue. And if the school was to either lead or play a part in the continual advance of culture, its organizational practices would have to become more scientific (i.e. efficient).... For example, many proponents of scientific management...continually referred to teachers as workers, hoping to equate their work with those now staffing the assembly lines in America. Relatedly, students were seen as "raw material" to be processed by the school, and learning outcomes were typically referred to as products. (DeYoung, 1989b, pp. 73-74)

School administrators were eager to respond to calls for making their operations more scientifically sound. They began abandoning the scholarly role of educational philosopher and curriculum leader for that of a more business-oriented role, and school administration became professionalized around concepts of scientific management borrowed from the business

community (Callahan cited in Spring, 2001). Scientific management theory was turned into practice in urban schools through efficient management techniques, teacher specialization, standardization of curricula and texts, fine-tuning of instructional periods, and grouping students mentally and by age (DeYoung & Howley, 1990). In rural areas, this principle contributed to the disappearance of many one or two-room schools because "observing and evaluating efficient teaching practice in districts with many small rural schools posed an intolerable threat to efficient management" (p. 69).

Fitting in mutual compatibility with scientific management was the concept of meritocracy, a concept of society based on the idea that an individual's social and occupational position should be determined by individual merit (Spring, 2001). "As a method of internal organization, meritocracy meant the creation of an administrative structure in which the positions held by professionals depended on their training and abilities as opposed to their political influence and power" (p. 287). In the late 19th century, a new elite group of public administrators emerged, led by professional managers and efficiency experts, as political reform groups sought to replace the politician in governmental administration with a public servant or bureaucrat.

Boyd (1979) referred to this change as the Municipal Reform movement, which influenced thinking on public administration in general, and particularly in school systems. "In brief, the reformers believed that cities and schools could, and should, be run as efficient businesses" (p. 339). The Municipal Reform movement argued that no tension needed to exist between public consensus and compromise, on the one hand, and efficiency, on the other. Such conflict was irrational and, in principle, avoidable. "There was 'no Republican or Democratic way to build streets or schools, only a *right* way.' And this *right* way could be best divined by

professionally trained administrators operating in a non-partisan framework" (p. 339).

According to Boyd (1979), the urban school system rising out of the Municipal Reform and scientific management movements at the turn of the century was one in which educational government was separate from municipal government. The corporate board rather than the political forum was viewed as the correct model for school boards to emulate. Politics had no proper place in educational decision making, the sole legitimate interest being the public interest, therefore illegitimating the desires of various classes and ethnic groups. Educational questions were technical matters beyond the capacity of ordinary citizens, requiring the hiring of professionally trained, technical educational experts who would administer the school system and pursue policy making guided by rationality and efficiency. The board would only define in broad terms the educational policy. "Superintendents were viewed as better qualified than their school board members to make what were held to be the essential *technical* judgments required to develop a general and efficient educational program" (p. 340).

Spring (2001) noted a resulting increase in the power of educational administrators at this time period. The combination of small school boards, professional administration, meritocracy, and nonpartisan governance justified putting more control in the hands of administrators rather than in boards of education. After a cross-country trip to inspect other school systems in 1921, one urban superintendent commented on the ideal relationship between boards and superintendents, stating that the best school systems were those in which there was "'the clearest recognition of what constitutes executive and administrative responsibility, with the Superintendent and his staff...unhampered in the execution of educational plans and policies which have been approved [by the school board]'" (p. 296).

The proper role of administrators was to administer policy without interference from the

board of education. School boards relinquished many of their traditional functions to the new professional administrators who saw a resulting increase in their duties and power as they adopted techniques of scientific business management to administer school systems.

> As school boards declined in power and ability to function in the schools, their traditional activities were passed onto the school administration.... School administrators championed ideas such as keeping the schools out of politics and maintaining clear lines between the functions of the school board and those of the administration. Administrators willingly adopted the principles of scientific management because it gave them status comparable to that of members of the business community. (Spring, 2001, p. 288)

Graduate schools of educational administration.

With the increasing power of school administrators, who were now called on to play an ever expanding role in school policy decisions, graduate schools of education became important links in the educational power structure that came to dominate public schools in the early part of the 20th century (Spring, 2001). In their molding of educational leaders, these schools became channels for the dissemination of scientific-management and business-oriented viewpoints. School administrators hoped to share the mantle of respect so widely enjoyed by the efficiency experts then popular in the private sector, and generations of administrators were inculcated with the ideology that if bigger was better in the private sector, it must be the same for schools. "The concept of larger is cheaper and better became the professions' conventional wisdom" (Guthrie, 1980, p. 122).

> The rise of the profession of school administration during the heyday of scientific management contributed further to the movement for centralization. Administrative training in prominent schools of education (Stanford, Columbia, and Chicago) was dominated in the 1920s and 1930s by advocates of consolidation, efficiency, and economy. Their textbooks and their students shaped state university and college administrative training in the 1940s and 1950s. These professionals, many of whom came from one-room elementary schools and small rural high schools, returned home to argue that they had learned better ways. (Sher & Tompkins, 1977, p. 73)

Programs were increasingly referred to as educational administrative "science," and it was argued that the school superintendency of the future would depend less on instructional or moral leadership attributes and more on the scientific management skills of school administration (DeYoung, 1989b).

Between 1900 and 1924, school administration programs rapidly professionalized around hierarchical management, scientific control of organizational elements, and cost-effectiveness (Spring, 2001). In 1911, an efficiency expert spoke to teachers in New York City on the topic, "Efficiency in the High Schools through the Application of the Principles of Scientific Management." Educational administrators often made comparisons between business leaders and superintendents. In 1916, an education professor at the University of Chicago compared a manufacturing company of 1,200 people to a similarly-sized school system. Comparing citizens to stockholders and superintendents to corporate managers, the professor concluded, "'When it is asserted that educational management must in its general outlines be different from good business management, it can be shown from such a parallel study that there is absolutely no validity to the contention'" (Spring, 2001, p. 295). The head of Stanford's school of education estimated that an hour a week should be sufficient for a school board to transact all of its business. "'There is no more need for speeches or oratory in the conduct of a school system than there would be in the conduct of a national bank'" (Boyd, 1979, p. 339).

Additional evidence of the industrialization of educational graduate programs could be found in curricular trends within these institutions (Spring, 2001). A survey of doctoral dissertations in educational administration between 1910 and 1933 found that the most popular topics were fiscal and business administration. In another survey of professors of administration and superintendents of city schools in the early 1930s, respondents considered school finance to

be the most important topic in school administrators' educational formation. Between 1910 and 1924 the percentage of total graduate degrees awarded in administration and supervision more than doubled to 42 percent of all graduate degrees at Columbia University's Teachers College. A study of textbooks on educational administration in the early 1930s found that over 80 percent of the 8,000 pages reviewed were devoted to the executive, organizational, and legal aspects of administration. Spring (2001) commented, "These texts lacked critical analysis of educational problems, educational philosophy, or educational issues in a social context. The focus of training for school administrators was not scholarship and learning, but principles of management" (p. 294).

Urbanization of Rural Schools

The industrializing forces at work in urban areas eventually made their way into rural school systems. According to DeYoung (1989a, 2002), the story of American public education is the story of how city needs and interests turned into state interests, which then came to displace rural concerns. Changes came first to the city schools and then were dispersed across rural areas. This urbanization of rural schools was characterized by a desire to emulate the following aspects of urban school systems: (a) increased professionalization, (b) increased bureaucratization, and (c) changing curricular patterns. These, in turn, drove a demand for larger city-style schools through rural school consolidation.

The professionalization of education, noted first in urban school systems, was characterized by higher paid teachers and administrators who, compared to their rural counterparts, had more ample opportunities to earn advanced degrees and to specialize in one subject. Tenure and more professional support were more common (Hampel, 2002). Urban

districts were less provincial and embraced more progressive values, hiring credentialed experts to handle textbooks and curriculum, while rural administrators were at the mercy of the school trustees and voters who meddled in such issues. There was less oversight of school staff's personal lives in the cities. "Teachers in many small towns were expected to act like saints, forsaking any leisure-time activities that might be controversial. The ideal teacher would be a model of virtue and self-restraint, a spotless example of irreproachable habits" (p. 360). DeYoung (1989a) argued that rural school consolidation facilitated the extension of urban style professionalization into rural areas, reducing the influence of local political groups in educational matters. "Professional educators in rural areas have throughout this century been concerned with keeping non-educators at a safe distance from the schoolhouse door" (p. 40).

Bureaucratic structures were also adopted first in urban schools before moving on to rural systems. Spring (2001) advanced a number of reasons for the increasing bureaucratization of urban school systems. In addition to their increasing size and the industrializing forces within these systems, urban districts began adopting bureaucratic models due to a desire to protect middle-class values and a desire to teach bureaucratic values. The feminization of teaching, coupled with the belief that women were naturally subordinate to men, also played a role. Summarizing Tyack's research on the history of American urban education, Spring (2001) described how the search for the "one best system" had rendered the following typical bureaucratic urban district at the beginning of the 20th century.

> 1. A hierarchy with a superintendent at the top and orders flowing from the top to the bottom of the organization
> 2. Clearly defined differences in roles of superintendents, principals, assistant principals, and teachers
> 3. Graded schools in which students progressively moved from one grade to another
> 4. A graded course of study for the entire school system to assure uniformity in teaching in all grades in the system
> 5. An emphasis on rational planning, order, regularity, and punctuality (p. 149)

Graded schools with uniform courses of study, the position of principal, and the positions of district, county, and state superintendent were all part of the early development of a hierarchical, bureaucratic organization in American education. Rural school consolidation allowed rural areas to more readily adopt the bureaucratic structure found in urban areas (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999).

Also implicated in the demise of small rural schools was a changing curricular focus in urban systems. DeYoung (2002) detailed the early 1900s divergence of opinion over instructional focus at the high school level. On the one hand, there were those who favored a curriculum centered on academics, aimed at information accumulators, producing intellectuals and cultured people. On the other hand, there were those who supported a curriculum focused on more practical courses, concerned with real life and real places, aimed at doers, makers, and creators, enhancing the livelihood of workers.

The academic-curricular perspective originated in the previous century, when learning was a class matter. John Dewey had described pre 20th-century secondary education as "'a high-priesthood of learning which guarded the treasure of truth and which doled it out to the masses under severe restrictions'" (Dewey cited in DeYoung, 2002, p. 4). It entailed a kind of medieval conception of learning, appealing mostly to "'the intellectual aspect of our natures, our desire to learn, to accumulate information, and to get control of the symbols of learning; not to our impulses and tendencies to make, to do, to create, to produce'" (Dewey cited in DeYoung, 2002, p. 4).

The opposing practical-coursework position was given increased stature in 1917, when federal vocational education funding was made available to both city and country high schools (DeYoung, 2002). These funds allowed for the creation of "terminal" high schools where, rather

than solely preparing students for university studies, actual careers were legitimated. There was

a resulting increase in rural high school enrollment.

> "[These new high schools] were not identified with the older, elite traditions of higher education, but created their own traditions of education for life, for citizenship, for useful tasks, the traditions, that is, of the mass democratic terminal secondary system that came to full flower between 1910 and 1940." (Trow cited in DeYoung, 2002, p. 6)

These terminal high schools functioned well for rural areas because staying in or close to

one's rural community did not demand preparation for higher education. After World War II,

however, in a push that served urban interests over rural interests, terminal schools were turned

into "comprehensive" schools (DeYoung, 2002). These schools trained for both vocational

pursuits and university studies. Comprehensive high schools were required to focus on both

livelihood and academics.

The change from terminal to comprehensive schools was easier for urban high schools to

implement due to their larger size, but as rural high schools were pushed to change from a more

technical to a more comprehensive framework, many smaller rural high schools were forced to

consolidated (DeYoung, 2002). "City education issues first drove urban curricular and

instructional reforms that later became enshrined in state education policy and then were

disseminated throughout the countryside" (p. 3).

The argument that rural education was inferior and should better emulate urban education

in all its facets could be discerned in the writings of educational academicians of the early 20th

century. One professor of rural education (Foght, 1917) stated that "just as thorough-going

schools may be made to flourish in the beneficent rural environment as in the city" (p. 303).

Foght viewed this perceived superior education offered to city dwellers as an issue of equal

rights between urban and rural districts. "*Ultimate solution must be sought in consolidation....* It

is a plan to reconstruct the rural schools on a new foundation which will reestablish the ancient

principle of 'equal rights to all'" (p. 302).

Educational Centralization and State Control

  If a fascination for urban education and a drive for its adoption in rural areas was one ulterior force behind rural consolidation, the push for more state control through educational centralization was another. As early as the 1860s, the state of Massachusetts adopted a law authorizing consolidation, shortly thereafter enacting another law providing for student transportation at public expense (Foght, 1917).

  In Minnesota, the legislature passed an act in 1905 providing an optional plan for counties to consolidate rural schools (*School District Reorganization*, 1977). In 1947, an act was passed allowing all counties to establish a county survey committee to study the school districts in the county and make recommendations on reorganization. The law also established a state advisory commission on school reorganization to study the reports of the county survey committees and to report to the legislature. At the time, there were about 7,000 Minnesota school districts. Over the next 30 years in Minnesota, over 6,200 districts would merge, leaving a total of 438 by 1977.

  State officials often provided fiscal incentives for rural consolidation, as the state further extended its control over accreditation, curriculum, and teacher certification (Berry, 2004). Many states made school construction funds contingent on local consolidation plans. "The money tail wagged the policy dog" (Sher & Tompkins, 1977, p. 74). Purdy (1997) and Roberts (2001) documented how, as late as the 1990s, policies associated with such entities as West Virginia's School Building Authority were designed to starve school districts into consolidation.

  According to DeYoung and Howley (1990), the exercise of state control through

educational centralization provided a better explanation overall for rural school consolidation when compared to the advertised curricular, pedagogical, or administrative benefits. "We argue that understanding the logic behind such 'improvement' as school consolidation in rural America demands understanding...how [state] goals override other cultural and intellectual interests which might serve citizens equally well, if not better" (p. 65).

The state's primary goal was centered on economic development. In rural areas, consolidated schools served as useful tools in promoting national and international economic growth. Drawing on Durkheim, DeYoung and Howley (1990) explained,

> Modern institutions become progressively more "complex" and, internally, entail the re-direction of *provincial* activity to goals consistent with building a *national* social and economic order in the modern world. Society, under this rationale, has an interest in reorganizing rural schools into bigger units concerned with producing students with the skills and values required for the pursuit of national goals and occupational possibilities. Indeed, according to this view, such purposes are the only reasons why state and national governments would be in the business of supporting schools. (p. 73)

The consolidated rural school offered a more desirable conduit for state investment in the range of skills that would enhance national economic development (DeYoung & Howley, 1990). The national economic growth promoted by the state, however, would come largely at the expense of traditional social institutions and values, like the importance of place, community, and kinship. "Market-driven societies can exist...only if individuals (not families, communities, or other traditional groupings) comprise the primary social unit" (Boli & Ramirez cited in DeYoung & Howley, 1990, p. 74). In consolidating rural schools, the state required individuals to abandon their identification with community, kin, or tribes and become national citizens. They received free schooling if they accepted this, and they were awarded credentials that allowed them entrance into the national workplace.

> Schools become sites for the exercise of the legitimated authority of the state, allegedly working in the best interests of all citizens. Allegiance to local communities, education in

the service of interest other than the national imperative of economic expansionism—including intellectual development, cultivation of an ethical life, and all other functions that lack national utility—appear as merely sentimental anachronisms. Local communities, in this view, are not entitled to make decisions about the schools their children attend. Schooling is the *clear prerogative of the state*. (Boli & Ramirez cited in DeYoung & Howley, 1990, p. 76)

Adding to this argument, DeYoung and Howley (1990) offered a distinction between "schools" and "schooling." Schools are important places in which people construct a social reality—places in which meaning is made. Schooling, on the other hand, is the systematic instruction of predetermined bodies of knowledge using pedagogy—a systematic technology for delivering such instruction. "The reform of the *particular places* known as schools into sites for systematic *instruction* remains to this day the major theme of rural school history" (p. 68).

With the launch of Sputnik and the advent of the Cold War, international competitiveness became an additional national interest (DeYoung & Howley, 1990). Since smaller, local rural high schools served more local needs, they were viewed as squandering talent. Rural high schools were consolidated in the name of providing a technically better sort of schooling in this national interest, and they became sorting machines, sending the most talented youth to urban areas to contribute to the nation's well-being.

Originally rural schools were tightly linked to their communities, serving as sites for community activities. Schooling reflected local values and ways of life. As late as the 1940s, many midwestern schools added a month of German or Norwegian school during the summer (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Over time, through consolidation, reformers removed students from local communities, taking the communities out of the schools and championing the professional view that community involvement and connection with the schools was less relevant than better instruction (DeYoung, 1989a).

At the heart of the problem is the conflict over the purpose of schooling, with state and

national reform leaders typically calling for schools to prepare students to contribute to national interests, while rural education scholars (and probably many rural parents) believe rural schools should also serve local community interests. (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999, p. 72)

Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) concluded that the deterritorialization and consolidation of rural education under the campaign to make it more centralized, standardized, bureaucratized, and professionalized had robbed it of its distinctiveness and had failed to deliver on the promise of improved quality of education.

The study of history and philosophy helps us see that converting industrial tenets—such as specialization, standardization, centralization, technological efficiency, reliance on experts, and the reduction of the production process to its lowest skill elements—into analogous schooling practices was not some kind of natural evolution, though its strongest proponents liked to believe this. It was merely a decision made by people with power and an agenda for its use. (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995, p. 4)

Summary

The school consolidation movement constituted one of the most imposing governmental changes to occur in the United States during the 20th century (Guthrie, 1980). From 1930 through 1972, while the school-age population doubled, the number of school districts dropped by over 80 percent, and the total number of schools in operation dropped by over 60 percent. From 1972 to 1980, although national enrollment dropped by only 10 percent, an additional one-third of remaining schools was closed. Throughout this period, school building enrollment size continued to grow. By 1990, half of all high schools enrolled between 500 and 2,500 students (Hampel, 2002). Through historical investigation and analysis, researchers were able to identify a number of motives behind the urban and rural consolidation movements in the first half of the 20th century. These included the advertised pretenses as well as ulterior forces.

On the surface, the marketing of rural consolidation utilized a two-pronged financial and

pedagogical approach. Collapsing smaller districts and smaller schools into larger units, it was argued, would increase economic efficiency on the one hand, and increase instructional effectiveness on the other. Such arguments were disseminated by prominent educational professionals and academicians including Ellwood Cubberly and James Bryant Conant (Berry, 2004; Hampel, 2002). Both in the short and long term, consolidation could often not live up to the profuse educational and economic claims made on its behalf, and many rural citizens were hesitant to embrace consolidation. However, since large, new rural schools were tangible symbols of the modernization sweeping all aspects of life in the 1900s, rural America ended up succumbing to the consolidation wave, hoping that the new resources would lead to increased learning and chances of success for its children (Sher & Tompkins, 1977).

Other forces behind the consolidation movement were more clandestine, operating behind the scenes. Among these was the industrialization of the educational system, starting in urban schools in the late 1800s and rooted in classical economic thinking of the previous century (DeYoung, 1989b). Aided by the injection of business interests into urban school boards, along with the concept of meritocracy and the Municipal Reform movement, these industrializing tendencies resulted in larger, specialized, professionalized schools operating under bureaucratic structures which gave increasing power to administrators (Boyd, 1979; Spring, 2001). These administrators were formed in educational graduate schools steeped in theories of scientific management which taught that schools should be run as efficient business organizations.

Changes in urban schools were eventually duplicated in rural areas as city needs and interests turned into state and national interests which then came to displace rural concerns. The urbanization of rural schools, characterized by increasing professionalization and bureaucratization, required larger buildings and school systems, while changing curricular focus,

especially the move from technical to comprehensive high schools, brought about further rural consolidation (DeYoung, 2002). The state exercised expanding control over the reorganization of rural schools since bigger units were viewed as offering a more desirable conduit for state investment in the range of skills that would enhance national economic development. The launch of Sputnik and the advent of the Cold War added to the rural consolidation drive in the name of providing a technically better sort of schooling in a new era of international competitiveness (DeYoung & Howley, 1990).

Theoretical Critique of Consolidation

What is the real nature of decision making? What are the societal ramifications of decisions to consolidate schools? This second section, as well as the ensuing part five of the literature review, is devoted to literature analyzing consolidation from a broader theoretical basis. Using broader theoretical application, researchers offered critique and analysis of school-closure decision making, community reaction, and consolidation's effect on community.

Guiding their analysis of school-consolidation decision making, researchers such as DeYoung and Howley (1990), Carspecken (1991), Ward and Rink (1992), and Post and Stambach (1999) entertained a number of questions. What social, political, economic, cultural, or ideological forces influence consolidation decisions? Is the consolidation decision making process more technical or political in nature and should it be based more on criteria of efficiency or criteria of compromise? Are there any personal prejudices and self-interests masked by claims of scientific objectivity in consolidation decision making, and how does decision making by expertise or scientific objectivity affect the meaning of democracy? What are the interests, perceptions, and values of parents who reject consolidation? What power relationships exist

between various segments of a community and its schools, and how are these manifested in the closure process? What role do traditions, beliefs, or values, in the form of local culture, play in the process, and how do varying cultural or social-class conceptions about the purposes of education influence the decision-making process?

Analyzing the effects of consolidation on society, researchers such as Peshkin (1982), DeYoung (1995), Reynolds (1999), and Alsbury and Shaw (2005) focused on a further set of questions. Why is consolidation so resisted in many instances, and what is the nature of a community in conflict over consolidation decisions? What is the meaning of a school to a community, and what role does a school play in the definition of community and community boundaries? What is the experience of school consolidation at the personal and community levels? What varying interpretations can be discerned about what is at stake when a school is proposed for closure, and what are the effects of consolidation on different segments of society? What are the effects of consolidation on social justice? Is there evidence of class or race differentiation? How does consolidation affect existing local social relations such as the relationship between school and community, or between school and society, and what are its lasting institutional effects? In light of these questions, how appropriate is it to close schools as a means of resolving financial predicaments?

This section, along with part five of the review, considers these questions through an overview of some prominent social and political analytical tools, including empirical, phenomenological, and critical analyses. Incorporated into the discussion are reviews of a number of in-depth school-closure case studies that demonstrate how researchers have used these varying analytical camps in their critique of school consolidation.

Social and Political Theoretical Analysis

As the 1970s decade of school enrollment decline moved into full acceleration, Bernstein (1976) completed an appraisal of the then current state of social and political theory. According to Bernstein, by the 1960s, American social scientists had proclaimed the end of ideology in their disciplines, believing they had reached "a firm empirical foundation where we could expect the steady progressive growth of scientific knowledge of society" (p. xi). Mainstream empirical social science theorists viewed their fields as an extension of the natural sciences.

This empirical theoretical perspective to social science knowledge claimed to be objective, neutral, logical, rigorous, value-free, descriptive, and based on observation of fact. The theorist was a mostly disinterested observer. With roots in the early Enlightenment and the positivism of Comte, empiricism emulated techniques used in science to understand nature, applying dependent and independent variables, hypothetical and deductive reasoning (Bernstein, 1976).

But the 1960s also brought about a radical critique of social science empirical thinking. Critics claimed that its foundations were rotten, that empiricism held hidden values, and that it still reflected an ideology, a disguised form of ideology that supported the status quo, and that it was unable to provide any critical perspective. They contended that there was an increasing gap between empirical knowledge and its utilization for creating a good and just society, and that empirical thinking, on the contrary, "gave a false legitimacy to the social technical control and manipulation that was infecting all aspects of human life" (Bernstein, 1976, p. xi). A tension had developed between those, on the one hand, that pictured a close link between the natural or physical sciences and the social sciences, and those who found increasing limitations in such a linkage. Were the social sciences really scientific? How much could or should the social

sciences borrow from the natural and physical sciences?

Three theoretical orientations, each rooted in earlier time periods, began to challenge the dominant empirical view of social sciences. Two of these theoretical challengers, linguistic analysis and phenomenology, were of a more interpretative bent, and the third, critical theory, was more critical in nature, especially the thinking coming out of the Frankfurt School.

Linguistic or language analysis theory deemed social reality and the language that described it to be indistinct. Language was constitutive of reality. Based on the thinking of Wittgenstein and Berlin, among others, this theoretical camp believed that, although the theorist was still a disinterested observer, understanding society was logically different from understanding nature (Bernstein, 1976). In society, one could only understand a situation as conceived by those involved. Furthermore, human actions could not be described without moral categories. In this theoretical viewpoint, empirical social science theory served to scientifically engineer and manipulate society. Even in the natural sciences, it was argued, one did not find a steady and cumulative building of science. Rather, as Thomas Kuhn showed, the scientific community would impose a "paradigm," which would later be revolutionized through the discoveries of various anomalies.

In phenomenology, as in language analysis, the empirical search for regularities or causal relations between independent and dependent variables was insufficient to provide a meaningful interpretation of social reality. Founded in the thinking of Schutz, Husserl, and Sellars, the phenomenological theorist was still a disinterested observer, but analysis was based on perception, interpretation, and experience. A shift of perspective brought focus on understanding human action with reference to the meaning that such action had for the agents.

> A phenomenology of this life-world is...concerned...with how we come to interpret others and their actions; with the complex ways in which we understand those with whom we

interact; and with the ways in which we interpret our own actions and those of others within a social context. (Bernstein, 1976, p. 141)

Since the human actor was constantly interpreting his or her own acts and those of others, phenomenological analysis generated categories for understanding what the actors from their own points of view meant in their actions, making this essentially a theory of meaning and action. What was lacking in phenomenology, however, with its drive toward pure description, was anything that could serve as a basis for critical evaluative judgments. This is where a critical theory of society stepped in.

The first three theoretical frameworks looked at the role of the theorist as a "disinterested observer, who explains, understands, interprets, or simply describes what is" (Bernstein, 1976, p. xix). Their intent was to interpret the world, not change it, and to describe and explain, not make prescriptive claims about what ought to be. There was no ground for evaluating the varying forms of political life, for saying that one form better approximates what political life is or ought to be. The critical theorist, in the other hand, was not a disinterested observer, seeing the distinction between fact and value as problematic. Moving beyond a "descriptive discourse" of description and explanation of what is, critical analysis was more interested in a "prescriptive discourse" of clarification and justification of what ought to be.

Based on the thinking of Horkheimer, Adorno, Weber, Althusser, and more recently, Habermas, Bourdieu, and arguably Foucault, critical theory was neo-Marxist, critical, and emancipatory, oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole.

> "[Critical theory] is suspicious of the very categories of better, useful, appropriate, productive, and valuable, as these are understood in the present order, and refuses to take them as nonscientific presuppositions about which one can do nothing." (Horkheimer cited in Bernstein, 1976, p. 181)

Critical theory was engaged in a critique of domination and power, with an eye toward

emancipation and the potential for human freedom and happiness. Any relevant analysis of contemporary society should include the critical intent of Marxism—"'the experience of an emancipation by means of critical insight into relationships of power'" (Habermas cited in Bernstein, 1976, p. 189).

School consolidation research in the late 20th century utilized analysis from a number of these theoretical orientations described by Bernstein (1976). Literature already reviewed in parts two and three of the review fit a more empirical analytical mold. Some of the richer and more in-depth research, however, such as Peshkin's (1982) study of inter-town consolidation feuding in rural Illinois and DeYoung's (1995) historical account of small-town West Virginia consolidation, followed a more phenomenological path. Critical analytical research included Carspecken's (1991) account of an attempted working-class school closure in Liverpool, England, as well as Reynolds' (1999) historical study of 1920s country-school consolidation in Delaware County, Iowa. The final portions of the literature review are devoted to explaining how empirical, phenomenological, and critical analyses have been incorporated into school consolidation research.

Empirical Analysis in School Consolidation Studies

Is school consolidation effective at reducing costs? Does it improve academic achievement? These questions, examined in part two of the literature review, were often analyzed using empirical methods. Sher and Tompkins (1977) combed the literature and used empirical research and analysis of their own to dispel "the myths" of rural school and district consolidation, questioning the then current paradigm transported from the industrial world which held that bigger was also better in the educational field, yielding increased operational efficiency.

According to Sher and Tompkins, these early to mid-20th century assumptions and assertions underlying the consolidation movement had rarely been examined, yet "people came to believe that the values of consolidation were supported by scientific truth" (p. 77).

> Modernization in government was characterized by a move toward scientific management. Efficiency and economy became the prevailing creeds. School size and class size were increased. Much emphasis was placed on per pupil costs. It became important for principals and superintendents to report trivial savings. (p. 72)

As it turned out, there was no strong base of empirical data to support the widely held assumption that consolidation necessarily resulted in efficiency. Sher and Tompkins (1977) showed that smaller high schools in Vermont actually had lower average costs per pupil than larger schools. Diseconomies of size often offset the supposed economies of consolidation. Consolidated high schools had to lay off professional staff and raise pupil-teacher ratios in order to approximate the level of operating expenses found in smaller schools. Savings in administrative costs were false efficiencies, because less money was being spent to obtain fewer services.

Other empirical studies also questioned this assumption of increased operational efficiency, including research by Guthrie (1980), who pointed out that as schools had become larger nationwide, expenditures per pupil had increased fourfold over the 40 years of the mid-20th century. R. Andrews' et al. (1974) survey of metropolitan districts showed that, in many instances, consolidation had saved no money or had actually increased costs. Empirical analysis of operational efficiency in West Virginia (Purdy, 1997) confirmed that in the early 1990s the state had produced no demonstrable savings after closing more than 25 percent of its schools and spending over half a billion dollars to build larger schools.

In regards to the argument of enhanced educational quality assumed by consolidation advocates, Sher and Tompkins (1977) found evidence showing that achievement levels of

students in small schools were generally equal to, or higher than, those of students from large

schools, and there was little or no correlation between school size and success in college.

Berry's (2004) empirical analysis of school size and students' future earnings revealed that

students educated in states with smaller schools had better wages as adults. Bickel et al. (2000)

concluded that larger schools were associated with lower achievement among low

socioeconomic status students.

While consolidation was not totally devoid of worth, according to Sher and Tompkins

(1977), "given the enthusiasm with which consolidation was advocated, one would expect the

empirical evidence supporting this policy to be overwhelming. It is not" (p. 45). Over 25 years

later, Adams and Foster (2002) similarly found empirical research and analysis lacking in settling

the question of optimal size. "On the whole, the empirical literature on school district size

harbors evidence of positive, negative, and negligible effects of consolidation on students'

performance and educational economies" (p. 837).

Empirical research and analysis also made up the bulk of studies attempting to determine

the decision-making process best suited for minimizing adverse community reaction in

consolidation. Literature concentrating on this aspect of school closure was examined in part

three of this review and was, in large part, comprised of school district leaders' reflections on

school-closure decisions made under their tenure. This "advice literature," which was

considered empirical since knowledge was based on personal observations, formed a kind of

craftlore of professional consensus on consolidation decision making (Zerchykov, 1982, 1983),

one which conformed to the then current "plan-and-agree" paradigm of educational

administration and civic culture in general.

These educational leaders, along with a number of academicians, called for broad citizen

involvement in consolidation policy making using a process based on rational planning, problem-solving, and consensus-building which would lead to agreement and high-quality decisions in a relatively peaceful environment. The professional-consensus call for more rationality and more participation appeared credible since these were congruent with the norms of the times and were based on experience and anecdote from actual cases. Yet here was another paradigm that would be thrown into question as a result of further and more generalizable empirical analysis.

Looking at 53 districts in decline, Berger (1982b) used a survey method with closed-ended questionnaire checklist followed by statistical analysis to show that, on average, comprehensive planning and community participation did not help mitigate opposition. In a follow-up study, Berger (1983b) looked at 65 studies of school districts in decline studies, creating his own dependent and independent variables followed by statistical analysis to show that the more comprehensive the planning, the greater the opposition to school closure. Additionally, the level of community involvement had no impact on community opposition. Using empirical techniques, Boyd (1982a, 1982b) likewise concluded that rational planning and consensus models did not reduce tensions in white collar districts in decline.

Empirical theory was, in summary, the analytic tool chosen by most researchers to better understand the effect of consolidation on operational efficiency and academic achievement and quality, as well as to try to discern an optimal decision-making procedure. In the end, however, empiricism proved somewhat ineffective at providing the concrete resolutions researchers sought.

A different sort of analysis was required for other areas of research focus, such as investigations into the role of traditions, values, and local culture in consolidation decisions, the

meaning of a school to a community, the role a school played in the definition of community, the varying interpretations about what was at stake when a school was proposed for closure, and the nature of communities in conflict over consolidation decisions. For further understanding of such topics, researchers largely turned to a phenomenological theoretical perspective.

Phenomenological Analysis in School Consolidation Studies

> Human action cannot be properly identified, described, or understood unless we take account of the intentional descriptions, the meanings that such actions have for the agents involved, the ways in which they interpret their own actions and the actions of others. These intentional descriptions, meanings, and interpretations...are constitutive of the activities and practices of our social and political lives. If we are to understand what human beings are, then we must uncover those models, interpretative schemes, and tacit understandings that penetrate human thought and action. (Bernstein, 1976, pp. 229-230)

In his review of phenomenology, Bernstein (1976) explained that in natural scientists' research, the world of nature being explored did not "mean" anything to the molecules, atoms, and electrons. "But the observational field of the social scientist—social reality—has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, acting, and thinking within it" (p. 139). Phenomenological analysis sought to understand human action with reference to the meaning that an action had for its agents, to discover and uncover the ways in which these agents understood themselves and interpreted what they were doing. It was argued that

> to understand human action we must not take the position of an outside observer who "sees" only the physical manifestations of these acts; rather we must develop categories for understanding what the actor—from his own point of view—"means" in his action. (pp. 138-139)

Especially useful for interpreting qualitative data, phenomenology was grounded in commonsense constructs.

In *An Imperfect Union*, Peshkin (1982) told the story of a rural Illinois school district formed from the consolidation of five politically different towns. Years later, when a decision

was made to close two of its five towns' elementary schools, one town, pseudonym Killmer (population 900), strenuously resisted, taking a secession case all the way to the state's Supreme Court. Peshkin used phenomenological methods to explain why the decision was resisted, interpreting the characteristics of consolidated school districts, the nature of community boundaries, the meaning of a school to a community, and the behavior of communities in conflict over school-closure decisions. Much of the data came from interviews in which he let "four responsible residents speak in their own voices" in order to understand the "varying interpretations of what is at stake when a school closes and how appropriate it is to close schools as a means of resolving financial problems" (p. 89).

Peshkin's (1982) analysis led him to conclude that personal and community identity were important components to understanding resistance to school closures. The school helped give meaning to such questions as, "Who am I?" and "What is this community?" On the personal level, residents had spent most of their formative years and one fifth of their living years in continual contact with their local school. "To lose a community school is not merely to be bereft of a building or a program, but to be deprived of an object that helps make sense of one's life" (pp. 169-170).

On the community level, Peshkin (1982) concluded that residents in small rural towns identified closely with their particular community, whose history and boundaries distinguished it from its neighbors. People were socialized to feel that they were members of that community. For these community members, the school, in addition to performing an educative function, became a structure of meaning, entering the lives of residents and of the community on an important symbolic level. On the symbolic level, the school represented community autonomy, community vitality, community integration, and community tradition. For all these reasons, the

school was part of community identity. Consolidation's promise of better education could not compare to the loss of control, autonomy, and pride experienced by a community.

Schools that had developed this structure of symbolic meaning, the ones that were hardest to close, were not the schools of everywhere. They existed more in small, homogeneous places where it was easier to form a high degree of community "integrity" (completeness, wholeness, unity), such as in rural towns or, at times, in stable urban neighborhoods.

> Completeness, wholeness, unity—these are the characteristics of integrity that make the term so appropriate in describing a village.... The community with integrity is sensitive to threats because it is concerned with survival; conscious of its boundaries, it is alive to guarding what is inside them and to monitoring what impinges upon them from the outside; it has a we-they feeling; and it is alert to the consequences of incongruity between itself and other communities, groups, and events. Given integrity, a community's boundaries are sensitive demarcations. Many different acts of passing over them may be seen as trespass, an alien breaching of the barriers. (Peshkin, 1982, p. 157)

The possible loss of the local school through consolidation exemplified an alien threat. But this integrity was a virtue found on a continuum, with some of the five communities in Peshkin's (1982) study possessing a high degree, such as Killmer, and others a lesser degree. This differentiation fanned a kind of civil war in the larger district between those in favor of and those opposed to closing and consolidating Killmer's school. Anti-consolidation forces feared the loss of community vitality, while the pro-consolidation forces stressed cost effectiveness or enhanced instruction and course offerings. Peshkin concluded, "The advocates of fiscal responsibility, of academic opportunity, and of the community school...defined them in ways that the victory of one demanded the defeat of the others" (p. 186).

Ward and Rink (1992) studied a rural Illinois district that had resisted consolidating with other neighboring districts over a 20-year period, while adjoining communities were much more open to the opportunity. The purpose of the research was to provide a deeper understanding of the reasons why stakeholders in some local school districts continued to resist school district

reorganization and consolidation efforts. The study would also enhance understanding of the local school district decision-making process.

Utilizing a case study approach with multiple methods of data collection, Ward and Rink (1992) held interviews with representative stakeholders in the opposing community, they analyzed public documents, newspaper accounts, minutes of meetings and other communications, and they observed meetings. Using interactive analysis, a full case narrative was developed and analyzed. They found opposition to consolidation was based on self-interests and ideologies of localism and traditionalism. Stakeholders feared financial loss from unemployment or from higher taxes, loss of position or prestige, and loss of power and accessibility to board members. An ideology of localism, or associating with "one's own kind," was also noted. Residents preferred not to associate with residents of the other districts, thinking consolidation would be a major moral and cultural disaster. They referred to residents in one of the neighboring lower socioeconomic districts as "river rats," or lower people. They did not want their own taxes being used to educate "their" children. There was general satisfaction with current system and any information to the contrary was suspect.

"Policy makers and policy analysts who expect information to have immediate and independent power in the local policy making process...have a distorted view of the local policy making process" (Ward & Rink, 1992, p. 18), they concluded. Instead, they found that policies more compatible with predominant values and ideologies were more likely to be accepted. Knowledge of local culture and knowledge of the local history, as well as the history of a policy issue, were critical in policy proposals. Change would be easier by finding common bonds rather than by opposing or denigrating local cultural norms.

In his research of one rural, small-town West Virginia school closure, *Farewell Little*

Kanawha, DeYoung (1995) stated, "The story of Little Kanawha is more than the story of one school, or of one region in the U.S. It is one story that probably represents thousands of American rural schools" (p. 292). Rural Braxton County had boasted 150 mostly country schools feeding into three high schools during the 1930s. By the 1990s the county was left with only five schools, including one newly built consolidated middle school, feeding into one consolidated high school. DeYoung focused on the history and closure of Burnsville High and Burnsville Middle School, located on the banks of the Little Kanawha River, from which the school derived its nickname, "Little K."

The purpose of the study was to offer an in-depth look at the circumstances surrounding and involving a particular school consolidation and its involved communities, while describing the social life of the school and its community during the last year of the school's existence. Although research was more concerned with the experience of school consolidation at the personal and community levels, DeYoung (1995) also wanted to place the study within an historical context by establishing the social and economic forces under which the school flourished, as well as the social, political, and economic circumstances which led to its demise. He also intended to detail late 20th-century school and community dynamics about which little had been written. Contrasting his work from Peshkin's (1982) account of midwestern school and community interaction during consolidation, DeYoung noted that midwestern rurality was different from Appalachia's, which had been in steep economic decline over a number of years. Thus, his study was more about lived cultural experiences in decaying and dying communities.

Farewell Little Kanawha was included as part of a series called "Studies in Education and Culture," in which most research used a phenomenological conceptual framework, although some of the works used a more generic qualitative approach, mixing methods and

methodologies. As he documented the circumstances surrounding the closure of this small, rural West Virginia school, DeYoung (1995) used all three qualitative methods (interviews, document analysis, and field observation) in a cross disciplinary approach utilizing the interplay of economics, sociology, anthropology, biography, and historical narrative in what he called "genre blurring."

DeYoung (1995) specified that over the course of 20th-century rural American history, at times, consolidation was an attractive proposition, bringing on little community opposition. In other instances, though, school closures became highly charged and complicated affairs. "From the perspective of communities losing their schools, such events are usually not understood primarily as matters of pedagogy or efficiency. Rather, they represent social, economic, and political concerns" (p. xvii). DeYoung determined that the arguments for and against consolidation revolved around the following essential consideration: "Is [a school] primarily a place belonging to a local community, or a temporary site for the transmission of knowledge and skills" (p. 206)? Here, he discerned a difference between "school" and "schooling."

Advocates of larger schools via consolidation appealed more to "schooling," defined as "an attempt at systematic instruction of predetermined bodies of knowledge" (DeYoung, 1995, p. 34). Opponents of consolidation thought more in terms of "school," defined as "important places in which people construct social realities" (p. 34), including local traditions and community identity. DeYoung argued that consolidation and the eventual closure of "Little K" resulted from political, economic, social, and cultural forces that failed to recognize the important relationship between the school and the community. Educational reform through consolidation, transforming the particular places known as schools into sites for systematic and statewide monitored instruction, continued as one of the major themes in rural school history.

In their review of DeYoung's account of the demise of Little Kanawha, fellow educational researchers Howley and Theobald (1996) reflected,

> Local circumstance—call it "sense-of-place"—inspires people to make meaning and to give meaning to life.... The locality to which we refer need not be rural, of course. But rural localities, as DeYoung demonstrates, embody the ideas of "place" much better than the placeless suburbs, and maybe somewhat better than the cosmopolitan metropolis….
>
> Persisting in the place where you live, with the people you love, and discovering and cultivating the meaning in those relationships arguably constitute the meaning of life; but in the world created by the engines of conspicuous consumption, knowing what life is all about has become as inapplicable as literature (Berry, 1990).... Education, unlike schooling, must deal cogently at its center with questions about the good life. When education fails, as Hannah Arendt (1968/1954) pointed out, the world of humans and their artifact inevitably fails. (pp. 45-47)

Post and Stambach (1999) researched a 1996 anti-consolidation effort in a rural Pennsylvania district that had been formed from a consolidated group of four districts during the 1960s. At that time, each district had retained its own high school, and one high school in particular had fought further consolidation efforts over the years. In 1996, the school board voted to close the high school and merge it with another. Parents organized demonstrations and filed lawsuits to block the closure. After the lawsuits were dismissed, a number of parents decided to home-school their high school children.

The goal of the study was "to uncover the interests, perceptions, and values of parents who rejected the concept and practice of consolidating their children in larger schools" (Post & Stambach, 1999, p. 109). The study was based on historical research of the district and interviews with parents, alumnae, administrators, and board members. Additionally, a survey was mailed to 550 parents. Using phenomenologically-based analysis, Post and Stambach (1999) discerned that parents wanted a no-frills education with smaller classes, where teachers personally knew students and parents. The home-school relationship was important to them, viewing school as the heart of the community and recognizing the importance of high schools for

community identity. Even the most up-to-date, sophisticated school could not replace the value associated with a rural community school.

Pro-consolidation forces were characterized by ideologies of efficiency, technology, and the desire for larger community, while those in opposition valued the freedom of families to define their own communities. Post and Stambach (1999) concluded,

> Our case study highlights a deeper and enduring social tension that is reflected in the conflict: the strain between the centralizing movements of governing bodies and the decentralizing interests of local communities which seek to retain and to define their own identity. (p. 106)

Alsbury and Shaw (2005) studied the effects of school district consolidation on the staff, students, and community from superintendents' perspectives. Although interested in gaining broad understanding and meaning of the events, circumstances, and issues surrounding district consolidation, the researchers varied from previous studies by exploring the impact of consolidation on social justice. "'What do issues of social justice in education have to do with school district consolidation'" (p. 106)? They surmised that consolidation may give students in small communities a more diverse student body, increasing social justice, but the closure of a community school may also bring about the demise of the community and its unique values, thus diminishing diverse cultures and lessening the goals of social justice. The primary question for the study became, "'Is social justice in the school or the community more important'" (p. 121)?

Alsbury and Shaw (2005) chose nine districts from around the nation that had recently been consolidated with another district. Only half of the districts had closed a school in the process. Some of the consolidations had been forced by the state, while others had been completed on a voluntary basis. Only one urban district was included in the sample. Using a phenomenological approach, one-hour phone interviews with the districts' superintendents were taped, transcribed, and coded. Interviews questions were open-ended and included follow-up

questions, in order to capture the nuances from the superintendents' own individual perceptions.

Superintendents reported that consolidation had brought about expanded socioeconomic and racial diversity, enhanced student awareness and understanding of other viewpoints, improved services for special needs and gifted students, and greater support and counseling services for at-risk students (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005). On the other hand, superintendents reported an exodus of residents and businesses from communities in which a school had been closed, a lingering sense of animosity from those communities, and a fear from parents that they, their children, and their community values and identity would become marginalized or invisible. "'When a school closes, a community loses a part of its soul'" (p. 115), stated one superintendent. The threat of school closures was one of the greatest concerns of the rural community, followed by the reality of lost community identity.

Alsbury and Shaw (2005) concluded that school consolidation may often enhance opportunities for in-school social justice but diminish community social justice through devolution of small communities. As to whether one was more important than the other, they reflected,

> If the purpose of public education today is for preservation of the local community and rural districts in the name of tradition and heritage, will our students in the process be left unprepared to live in a global world of diversity, competition, and change? Or if the purpose today is the same as that echoed a century ago, namely that "students should be prepared to live in a world that is changing and diversified" (Henderson, 1975, p. 21), will community culture and heritage be left only as remnants in history books? (p. 121)

In summary, a phenomenological approach was the method chosen by most researchers to better understand the role of traditions, values, and culture in consolidation decisions, the meaning of school to a community, and the issue of community identity. A different sort of analysis, however, was required for other areas of research focus, such as determining the political, economic, or ideological forces influencing consolidation decisions, the power

relationships within the community and within the closure process, and the effects of consolidation on different segments of society. For further understanding of such topics, researchers largely turned to a critical analytical perspective.

Summary

As national school enrollment peaked and the 1970s decade of school enrollment decline moved into full acceleration, Bernstein (1976) completed an appraisal of the then current state of social and political theory. By the 1960s, American social scientists had proclaimed the end of ideology in their disciplines, believing they had reached a firm empirical foundation. This empirical theoretical perspective to social science knowledge claimed to be objective, neutral, logical, rigorous, value-free, descriptive, and based on observation of fact. With roots in the early Enlightenment and the positivism of Comte, the empirical theorist was a disinterested observer, viewing the social sciences as an extension of the natural sciences.

But the 1960s also brought about a radical critique of social science empirical thinking. Critics claimed that its foundations were rotten, that empiricism held hidden values, and that it still reflected an ideology, a disguised form of ideology that supported the status quo. They contended that there was an increasing gap between empirical knowledge and its utilization for creating a good and just society. A tension had developed between those, on the one hand, that pictured a close link between the natural or physical sciences and the social sciences, and those that found increasing limitations in such a linkage (Bernstein, 1976).

Varying theoretical orientations, each rooted in earlier time periods, began to challenge the dominant empirical view of social sciences. One of the more important theoretical challengers, phenomenology, was of a more interpretative bent, while another, critical theory,

was more critical in nature, especially the thinking coming out of the Frankfurt School. School consolidation research in the late 20th century incorporated all three major analytical perspectives: empirical, phenomenological, and critical analysis.

Was school consolidation effective at reducing costs? Did it improve academic achievement? These questions, examined in part two of the literature review, were most often analyzed using empirical methods. Empirical research and analysis helped to dispel "the myths" of rural school and district consolidation, showing that bigger was not always better (Purdy, 1997; Sher & Tompkins, 1977). Using statistical analysis, Bickel et al. (2000) found that larger schools were associated with lower achievement among low socioeconomic status students. Adams and Foster (2002) concluded that the empirical literature on school district size showed evidence of positive, negative, and negligible effects of consolidation on educational economies and student performance.

Examined in part three of the review, empirical research and analysis also made up the bulk of studies attempting to determine the decision-making process best suited for minimizing adverse community reaction in consolidation. Using empirical techniques, Boyd (1982a, 1982b) concluded that the rational planning and consensus models of professional craftlore did not reduce tensions in white collar districts in decline. Berger (1982b, 1983b) also challenged the plan-and-agree paradigm, studying over 50 districts in decline and using statistical analysis to show that, on average, comprehensive planning and community participation did not help mitigate opposition.

A different sort of analysis was required for other areas of research focus, such as investigations into the role of traditions, values, and local culture in consolidation decisions, the meaning of a school to a community, and the issue of community identity. For further

understanding of these richer and more in-depth topics, researchers largely turned to a phenomenological theoretical perspective. Especially useful for interpreting qualitative data, phenomenology was founded in the thinking of Schutz, Husserl, and Sellars. A shift of perspective brought focus on understanding human action with reference to the meaning that such action had for the agents. Phenomenological analysis was based on perception, interpretation, and experience, generating categories for understanding what the actors from their own points of view meant in their actions (Bernstein, 1976).

Two of the more expansive studies exemplifying phenomenological analytical methods were Peshkin's (1982) story of inter-town consolidation feuding in 1970s rural Illinois, in which he examined the meaning of a school to a community, and DeYoung's (1995) in-depth look at the circumstances surrounding the 1990s closure of one small-town West Virginia school, describing the social life of the school and its community during the last year of its existence. Other phenomenologically based consolidation research included rural Illinois interdistrict consolidation resistance (Ward & Rink, 1992), rural Pennsylvania high school consolidation efforts (Post & Stambach, 1999), and superintendents' perspectives on "in-school" versus "community" social justice following consolidation decisions (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005). For further areas of research focus, such as determining the political, economic, or ideological forces influencing consolidation decisions, researchers largely turned to a critical analytical perspective.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE PART 5
CRITICAL THEORY
AND SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

Power is a machine
in which everyone is caught.
Michel Foucault

Continued discussion of scholarly work that helped develop social and political theoretical critique vital to a deeper understanding of school consolidation is the focus of this fifth part of the literature review. Whereas researchers used empirical theoretical analysis to determine operational efficiency, academic achievement and quality, and optimal decision-making procedures within consolidation, and whereas a phenomenological approach was the method chosen to describe the role of traditions, values, and culture in consolidation decisions, a different sort of analysis was required for other areas of research—interests such as the political, economic, or ideological forces influencing consolidation decisions, the power relationships within the community and within the closure process, and the effects of consolidation on different segments of society. For further understanding of these topics, researchers largely turned to a critical analytical perspective.

Moving beyond a "descriptive discourse" of description and explanation of what is, critical analysis was more interested in a "prescriptive discourse" of clarification and justification of what ought to be. Critical theory was neo-Marxist, critical, and emancipatory, oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole. This section reviews critical theory and school consolidation by first looking at a critique of scientific management within consolidation decision making, followed by examination of those critical theoretical principles applicable to analysis of late 20th-century school-closure decision making, community reaction, and consolidation's effect on community.

The section concludes with a number of in-depth school-closure case studies, including DeYoung and Howley's (1990) investigation into the real motives behind West Virginia's 1990s consolidation scheme, Carspecken's (1991) account of an attempted working-class school closure in Liverpool, England, and Reynolds' (1999) historical study of 1920s country-school consolidation in Delaware County, Iowa. This literature served to further identify those theoretical positions that were best suited for my own analysis of the Robbinsdale case study.

Critique of Scientific Management

The scientific-management, business-oriented approach to educational decision making and educational leadership, both broadly and specifically within school retrenchment, has faced intense criticism within consolidation literature. Appearing about a decade into the late 20th-century era of decline, this literature turned a skeptical eye to a non-partisan, technical-rational, expert-centered view of decision making, one which emphasized efficiency and industrial notions within educational change. Essentially, the industrialized schooling framework, one of the primary catalysts behind more than a half-century of consolidation, was in dispute.

Critics such as Deal and Derr (1980) argued that viewing educational organizations and decision making in a business-industrial way was constricting and overly simplistic. The unique nature of schools had to be taken into account, specifically the diffuse, unclear goals which characterized education.

> In business and industry, the primary goal of profit making is simple and is shared by all individuals who participate in the organization. In schools, goals are more diffuse, numerous, and conflicting.... The multiplicity of goals makes it difficult for schools to pursue a common direction. Many of the goals of schools are latent and when made explicit cause conflict and political struggle of educational priorities. Although these issues over goals arise also in business organizations, they are more pronounced in schools. (pp. 98-99)

Other critics argued that consolidation decisions should be viewed more through a political-compromise lens than through the non-partisan, technical-efficiency lens of scientific management. Iannaccone (1979) contended that understanding school-district decision making during declining enrollment required looking at both the technical-efficiency concepts found in rational organizational models for decision making as well as the political concepts found in political conflict management. However, in his view, school-closure decisions were still primarily political conflict management issues.

> The declining enrollment problem is a political conflict management one, a policy process problem, not a traditional organizational specialist area even though it requires specialized technical inputs. The sequence of first technical and then political inputs will not work if the actors involved become wedded to the implied technical solutions even though they subsequently go through the charade of receiving political inputs. This may be a particularly difficult lesson to learn for technically well-trained educational professionals. (p. 420)

Likewise, for Dean (1981), it was a mistake to approach school closures as simply an administrative task. Although economic and educational factors surrounded such decision making, social and political considerations were even more important, and even the technical decisions involved were not apolitical. Here again, unclear ends made the issue essentially a political one.

> The management of decline then is not "simply" a "technical" problem (i.e. where managers are able to control the relationship between ends and means). It is much more of a "political" problem. This fact by no means serves to denigrate the expertise that managers do have; rather it indicates that the social ends to be achieved have not been clearly identified or agreed upon. And as Rogers argues, the assumption that presumably "technical" educational decisions are apolitical is anyway unfounded since all administrative decisions are based on assumptions of value, involve priorities, and involve conceptions of alternative costs. (p. 2)

For Dean, school leaders should counter-balance their tendencies to rationalize the process by making every effort to humanize school closures as well.

Reviewing the literature, Zerchykov (1982) discerned that school-closure decision

making involved a continuing tension between technical and political considerations. School

leadership required trade-offs between technical, cost-efficiency criteria and political criteria.

Even the "facts" themselves could become a part of political debate.

> Are schools best seen as rational-purposive organizations in which decisionmaking
> responds to creative leadership and follows objective-technical processes? Or, are
> schools best seen as "polities,"—coalitions of internal and external interest groups—
> whose decisionmaking procedures more closely approximate processes of interest group
> bargaining rather than objective fact-finding?...School decisionmaking processes are no
> doubt constituted by both objective fact-finding and interest group bargaining. (p. 164)

Evidence from districts in 10 large cities in enrollment decline during the 1970s (Cibulka,

1983) seemed to indicate that school consolidation decisions in large urban districts were

characterized by more of a bargaining model in which constituencies were not all that interested

in overall economy and efficiency. A scientific-management, technical approach to the decision-

making process also seemed to skirt important issues of fairness and social justice where school

closures where concerned. Researching urban enrollment decline in St. Louis' school district

during the 1970s, Colton and Frelich (1979) found that many of the closed buildings were

located in neighborhoods comprised primarily of poor, black families.

Looking at school closures in New York City from the late 1970s, Dean (1982) discerned

the following determinant factors among the schools that had been closed that distinguished

them from those which remained open. Using qualitative and quantitative techniques, including

multiple regression analysis, Dean found that student populations in closed buildings tended to

be less white, more dependent on free lunch, and lower-scoring on reading tests. A subsequent

study (Dean, 1983) showed that New York City school closures had occurred in neighborhoods

that were much worse off socio-demographically than neighborhoods in which schools had not

been closed. Schools were closed in neighborhoods that had the greatest overall population, the

least white population, and the lowest income. On the contrary, schools that had not been closed

were located in areas with the least overall population, the greatest white population, and the highest income.

Valencia (1984) referred to such research as focusing on "critical issues of educational equity" (p. 7), having himself served as an expert witness in one Arizona school-closure court case. In 1982, parents sued the Phoenix school district over its school-closure plan. They charged that their school, Phoenix Union, a 94 percent minority inner-city high school, was being unfairly closed along with two other minority high schools, while none of the remaining six white high schools was being closed. As a result, a 30-square-mile section of the inner city had no high school to serve a predominantly minority population. A federal court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, concluding that the closing of the school was discriminatory and had a negative impact upon rights to equal educational opportunity. In declining enrollment, the burden and sacrifice should be shared.

Even in less urban areas such as Santa Barbara, California, Valencia (1984) found that such critical issues of equity arose. Responding to questions as to why no white schools were to be closed during a 1979 school-closure plan, and defending one of the white schools in particular, district officials explicitly stated,

> "The school's residential area is the highest socioeconomic area in the city. Maintaining this area as a predominantly public school attendance area is important to the District. Unless the District can attract and hold these upper middle class areas, the entire Elementary School District is in danger of becoming more progressively ethnically and socioeconomically segregated." (pp. 13-14)

Valencia's (1984) review of school-closure literature found that, up to that point, most literature had been prescriptive in nature, dealing with advice and technical aspects, offering little concern for the policy implications of school closures on students or the community. The few studies that had addressed such issues painted a disturbing picture.

> School closures raise critical issues of educational equity. Based on a small number of case studies, there is ample evidence that economically advantaged white students and their parents have been the clear winners while minority and working-class students and their parents have been the clear losers as a result of closure decisions. (p. 7)

Valencia concluded that the evidence showed that school-closure policies were neither color blind nor free of class inequities and that such decisions exacerbated the difficult conditions already faced by such communities.

Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) noted that the rationale behind a business-oriented, technical-efficiency approach to educational decision making was founded in a philosophy which held that the greatest level of public good was created by an "invisible hand" when individuals pursued their own self-interest. However, when it came to rural school consolidation, they asserted, "It appears that rather than an invisible hand building the common good, what has emerged is an invisible foot that is slowly kicking the common good to pieces" (p. 4). Research along the lines of Valencia (1984) and Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) demonstrated an interest in a critical theoretical approach to analyzing and thinking about school consolidation.

Critical Theory

In contrast to other social and political theories oriented toward understanding or explaining society through a purely observational mode, critical theory's intent was to change society as a whole. Through examination and critique of society, it sought to expose systems of domination and to then expand autonomy and emancipation by promoting a more humane, democratic, and socialist society.

Rooted in early 20th-century Frankfurt School thinkers, such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, critical theory was outspokenly critical of capitalism, viewing history largely through the lens of class struggle, and yet it turned a skeptical eye toward grand narratives such

as 20th-century orthodox Marxism, especially that associated with 20th-century orthodox communist parties. Given this background, some branches of critical thinking have been categorized as "neo-Marxist" in nature. Jürgen Habermas, Pierre Bourdieu, Louis Althusser, and arguably Michel Foucault, are thinkers associated with critical theory in the later part of the 20th century (Bernstein, 1976; Brookfield, 2005; Sim & Van Loon, 2001).

The literature reviewed for a better understanding of this critical theoretical perspective included a 30-year span of wide-ranging works including: original work by Habermas (1975) on crisis tendencies in late 20th-century western society; Bernstein's (1976) placement of critical thinking within the field of various social and political theories of the time; original work by Foucault (1977, 1980) on the power-knowledge interlink; critical perspectives on educational leadership offered by writers from Deakin University (Smyth, 1989b); Apple's (1990, 1995) analysis of power and ideology within education; an exploration into ideology, legitimation, and power by Eagleton (1991); an introduction to basic concepts within critical theory by Sim and Van Loon (2001); and Brookfield's (2005) expansive historical review of critical theory, its guiding principles, and its usefulness in adult education.

A number of tenets illuminated by this review of critical social theory literature showed promising applicability to a better understanding of late 20th-century school-consolidation decision making and its effect on society. 1. Technical and bureaucratic rationality founded in positivistic and scientistic thought were overtaking moral and ethical commitment (Apple, 1990, 1995; Brookfield, 2005). 2. Ideological and hegemonic forces, embedded in legitimatory systems, had led people to become complicit in perpetuating a societal and institutional organization that often did not function in their best interest, benefiting the few against the well-being of the many (Brookfield, 2005; Eagleton, 1991). 3. Power and knowledge had become

increasingly intertwined, with power structures supported by dominant discourses or regimes of truth. Furthermore, as authoritarian power had become partially replaced by self-imposed disciplinary power, power had become omni-present (Brookfield, 2005; Foucault 1977, 1980). 4. The development of authentic, participative, and democratic communication had become threatened by the values of capitalist society and a loss of social solidarity (Brookfield, 2005). 5. Advanced capitalism tended to promote a cascading series of crises: economic, rationality, legitimation, and motivation (Habermas, 1975).

A deeper review of each of these five concepts follows. As will be shown at the end of this section, a number of these ideas have been used by researchers in their analyses of school consolidation. These concepts also helped guide later analysis of the Robbinsdale case study.

Technical and Bureaucratic Rationality

Critical theorists, such as Habermas, noted that one of the outgrowths of an empirical, positivistic outlook on political and social life was the development of "scientism," science's belief in itself, a situation in which we no longer understood science as one form of possible knowledge, but rather identified knowledge with science (Bernstein, 1976). This "'fetish of science'" had manifested itself in a kind of "technocracy," "'a perspective in which the development of the social system seems to be determined by the logic of the scientific-technical progress'" (Habermas cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 245). The result was a prevailing tendency to transform all issues concerning social and political life into technical questions subject to technical control and manipulation, while paying minimal attention to moral and ethical considerations.

> Technocracy acts as a force for domination by promoting the belief that life is principally a matter of technical adjustment. All problems—emotional, spiritual, and social—are

fixable by the application of technology.... Hence, technocratic consciousness turns all questions concerning how to live into instrumental, rather than ethical or moral, questions. People set goals and make decisions as purely technical matters. As a result, "the reified models of the sciences migrate into the sociocultural lifeworld and gain objective power over the latter's self-understanding." (Habermas cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 245)

In a critical theory of society, on the other hand, the reified consensus model of science was called into question and was considered as more of a "continuing dialectic of controversy and conflict" and "truth-until-further-notice" (Apple, 1990, p. 100). Furthermore, the technical was viewed as just one domain of knowledge, and there was a call to reclaim areas of political and social life that had been ceded to technical experts and to those who controlled and possessed specialized knowledge.

Additionally, critical theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno found an unsettling move toward the instrumentalization of thinking. With the development of bureaucratic rationality, or "the belief that life can be ordered and organized into mutually exclusive, yet interlocking, categories," a complimentary instrumental kind of reasoning was employed, one "'essentially concerned with means and ends, with the adequacy of procedures for purposes more or less taken for granted and supposedly self-explanatory'" (Horkheimer cited in Brookfield, 2005, pp. 70-71).

[In bureaucratic rationality] reason is applied to solve problems of how to attain certain short-term social and economic objectives. In the scramble to achieve short-term ends, the application of reason to abstract universals such as justice, equality, and tolerance becomes increasingly impossible. (Horkheimer cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 71)

Critical thinking, on the other hand, considered it important to discuss goals, purposes, and ends, to ponder universal questions such as how we should live and treat each other. There was danger in making thinking mostly a tool to attain certain ends, in making reason subservient to utilitarian, practical, short-term, and taken-for-granted ends.

Applying these critical concepts directly to the field of education, authors from

Australia's Deakin University (Angus, 1989; Bates, 1989; Blackmore, 1989; Codd, 1989; Foster,

1989; Rizvi, 1989; Smyth, 1989a; Watkins, 1989) offered a "Deakin perspective" in their critique

of prevalent theory and practice within educational leadership during the 1970s and 1980s. In

their view, educational administrative "science" had bought into other social sciences' emulation

of physical science, focusing on prediction, control, objectivity, and universality, as opposed to

non-observable, particularistic, or experiential knowledge.

Educational leaders were being formed as administrators, or managers, whose main

concern was to formulate rationally designed means for the realization of given ends. Given the

primary task of applying instrumental solutions to practical problems, administration had become

an individualistic enterprise within a hierarchical arrangement premised upon technical expertise.

In such a technical-rational administrative policy outlook, administrators were supposedly

detached from politics or ideology. Complex educational problems were reduced to solvable

administrative issues. Fact was separated from value, observation from interpretation. Power

differentials were downplayed, and conflict was regarded as dysfunctional or something to be

controlled.

> In this framework organizations such as schools were considered to be value-free
> contexts, in which organizational objectives could be stated and adhered to; in which
> individuals were treated as autonomous beings whose interests and objectives could be
> moulded through the gentle direction of their leaders to those of the organization or
> school; in which consensus was the norm and conflict regarded as aberrant behavior by
> those in authority; in which power was not confused with notions of authority and
> control. Organizational control was legitimately invested in formal institutional roles.
> Power was ignored as having connotations of being manipulative, political, and devious.
> Administration in schools thus came to be conceived as a neutral practice carried out by
> experts in a scientific and rational manner. Decision-making was seen as a rational and a
> linear procedure, not a matter of values or subjective opinion. Means were separated
> from ends, fact from value. (Blackmore, 1989, p. 112)

Furthermore, in the Deakin perspective, educational administration was being invaded by

a kind of "corporate managerialism" (Codd, 1989), imposing good business sense on schools, and through which leadership was increasingly defined in terms of efficiency. Under corporatist models of school leadership, the running of schools was to be left in the trusted hands of "a disinterested civil servant class who operate according to value-free managerialist principles of accountability, efficiency and effectiveness" (Smyth, 1989a, p. 184). In fact, organizational authority seemed to derive its legitimacy from these overriding concerns of efficiency and effectiveness. "Leadership [was] to be neutral with respect to particular organizational goals, concerned solely with the most efficient means for the realization of the given organizational ends (Rizvi, 1989, p. 205). The Deakin thinkers contended that within educational leadership there were a number of problems associated with both the technical-rational, bureaucratic outlook within administrative science as well as the efficient-effective approach within corporate managerialism.

The technical-rational policy-making framework, through which educational leaders were taught to apply instrumental solutions to practical problems, largely ignored the broader social, cultural, and political circumstances which influenced the nature of choices available to educational decision makers. As such, it also ignored the moral and ethical dimensions of decision making and failed to address the ideological context in which it occurred (Angus, 1989).

> "No social policy's worth can be solely instrumental because any such policy will require that people interact with one another in certain definite ways, and for this reason it must have moral value *in itself*.... All political proposals, no matter how instrumental, will alter and shape the personal relations of at least some of the members of a society, and will affect the relative welfare of various classes of people; as such they embody moral notions as to what is permissible, just, or right in human affairs. They are a species of moral statement." (Fay cited in Codd, 1989, p. 164)

The separation of means and ends within instrumentalist decision making, where emphasis was placed on the formulation of rationally designed means for the realization of given

ends, was also criticized. An absolute means-ends distinction was neither empirically feasible

nor morally defensible within the educational enterprise (Rizvi, 1989).

> Professional educators, whether they be policy-makers, administrators or teachers, are inevitably involved in the business of judging and deciding what ought to be done. Whether they are determining ends or means, they cannot escape the commitment to values; neither can they ignore the careful appraisal of facts—psychological, sociological or historical—pertinent to each decision. (Codd, 1989, p. 160)

This value-ridden nature of educational decision making also made the technical-rational,

instrumentalist fact-value separation untenable. The claim of educational administration to be

value-free, dealing only with facts, had diminished the importance of the study of values in

human behavior. "'This has allowed administrative science to deal with values surreptitiously,

behind a mask of objectivity and impartiality, while denying it is doing so'" (Greenfield cited in

Bates, 1989, p. 136).

Likewise, the cleavage between observation and interpretation was viewed as a false

dichotomy. Educational decision making was rife with social dilemmas. How a social situation

came to be defined depended largely on the cultural or ideological viewpoint through which it

was understood. "Educational administrators, like any other practitioners, must interpret their

social world, and to this extent at least they cannot avoid holding theories about the nature of that

world" (Codd, 1989, p. 167).

Blackmore (1989) concurred that rather than being a neutral, fact-based, rational process,

educational decision making was value ridden, theory laden, and ideologically prescribed.

Furthermore, she contended that the hierarchical arrangement within bureaucratic rationality,

with its view of leadership as an individualistic endeavor premised upon centralized technical

expertise, was harmful to the communitarian and collective activities and values with which

education should be concerned. Leadership should empower others to have power.

The Deakin critique of technical and bureaucratic rationality within administrative science echoed Schon's (1983) earlier observation that within the varied topography of professional decision making, although there did exist the high, hard ground where research-based technique could be useful, there was also the corresponding swampy lowland of confusing messes incapable of technical solution. It was within the swamp that the issues and problems of greatest human concern were to be found.

The Deakin school was additionally highly skeptical of the infusion of corporate managerialism into educational administration, Smyth (1989a) emphatically stating, "Hierarchically organized and sanction-ridden business management notions of leadership that have to do with efficiency, effectiveness, standardization and quality control have no place in schools" (p. 199). Efficient-effective policy making sought solutions based on the most efficient means to achieve a desired effect or end. As with the previously criticized precept of taken-for-granted effects, goals, or ends within technical rationality, the notion of "efficiency" used as an unquestioned mean to achieve these ends was also taken to task. "We need to ask the question, efficiency in terms of what—monetary costs? human labour? suffering? the consumption of natural fuels? time? or what" (Rizvi, 1989, p. 213)?

Rizvi (1989) argued that there were no purely technical and neutral criteria of efficiency. Efficiency was a value-laden concept, and substantial value judgments had to be made in determining the most efficient means to achieve a given goal.

> In education any attempt to calculate efficiency must involve reference to notions of significance, appropriateness, worth and the like, and it is not at all clear how choices of this kind can be made in a value-free manner.
>   The idea of administrative efficiency is a goal, the preference for which over other goals, such as mass participation, has to be argued for in specifically moral and political terms. Efficiency is, moreover, not an ideal which is self-evidently worth pursuing—especially when it conflicts with other human interests. Indeed, as Callahan (1962) has demonstrated, in American educational thought the pursuit of efficiency for its own sake

has served to subvert other more important educational goals. It has played a specifically ideological role. (p. 214)

The Deakin perspective called for a revised or "transformed" view of educational leadership. Because many educational policy-making dilemmas could only be understood in relation to their broader political, social, or cultural contexts, Angus (1989) called for educational leadership that valued educational complexity, making explicit connections between the educational sphere and other spheres. Smyth (1989a) called for problem-posing rather than problem-solving.

> We are confronting a crisis of confidence in which claims to knowledge based on technical rationality are out of step with the changing situations of practice; the rules of the game have changed radically. Accepted and taken-for-granted ways of applying specialized knowledge to resolve particular recurring problems no longer seem to work. The foundations of professional practice, in teaching as well as in a range of other professional areas, seem to have shifted dramatically from "problem-solving" to "problem-setting" (or problem-posing); that is, from a rational process of choosing from among possibilities that best suit agreed upon ends to a situation that opens up for contestation and debate the nature of those decision, the ends to which they are to be directed and the means by which they are achievable. (Schon cited in Smyth, 1989a, p. 195)

Codd (1989) argued that educational leadership was a form of moral action meaningful only within a broader cultural context. Rejecting the solely technological and instrumental viewpoint, he advocated a combination of executive and critical-reflective thinking within the social and political context of education.

> Because schools are not factories, and because the administration of education is not reducible to management strategies, it [is] argued that professional administrators should be distinguished by their overall commitment to a set of educational values and principles for practice, rather than their competence in particular management skills. (p. 176)

Countering the emphasis on individualism, hierarchical relationships, and centralized expertise within bureaucratic rationality, Blackmore (1989) and Rizvi (1989) called for a greater circle of empowerment and increased participation in educational decision making. Rather than

using advisory councils as rubber stamps for "managed participation," educational leaders could

employ a democratic decision-making structure that would allow for learning and feedback

loops, where errors could be more "effectively" corrected, perhaps even ensuring greater long-

term "efficiency" in decision making.

> Many recent organizational thinkers such as Fischer and Siriaani (1984) and Crouch and
> Heller (1983), have gathered a great deal of empirical evidence to suggest that
> participation is a necessary condition for bringing about greater "efficiency", if the term
> is to mean satisfying long-term interests rather than short-term technical goals which
> have been broken down into smaller "manageable" objectives. Fischer and Siriaani's
> argument is based on the belief that participation encourages and arouses commitment to
> the common goals which the participants have had a say in formulating. Participation
> induces, they claim, enterprise, initiative, imagination and the confidence to experiment
> in a variety of directions, and must rebound to the greater utility of the whole
> organization. They argue, moreover, that the people who actually belong to local
> communities know their interests best. Efficient decision-making requires that people be
> encouraged to come forward, actively say what they need and help administrators
> identify the social and moral context in which policies have to be developed. (Rizvi,
> 1989, pp. 216-217)

Ideology, Hegemony, and Legitimation

Technical and bureaucratic rationality were situated within the broader critical conception

of ideology. For critical theorists, technical and bureaucratic rationality were one of the central

props, one of the "evil twins," along with capitalism, of the ideological framework governing

western society (Brookfield, 2005).

> Ideology is the central concept in critical theory. It describes the system of beliefs,
> values, and practices that reflects and reproduces existing social structures, systems, and
> relations. Ideology maintains the power of a dominant group or class by portraying as
> universally true beliefs that serve the interests mainly of this dominant group.
> (Brookfield, 2005, p. 68)

These broadly-accepted and ideologically-based explanations, beliefs, values, and

practices were embedded in language, social habits, and cultural forms, giving people a

framework for thinking about and making sense of their lives and their world. They were hard to

detect, often appearing as self-evident truth and commonsense wisdom accepted by a majority of a particular class, race, or culture. "In their apparent obviousness lie their subtle seductiveness and their hidden power.... Because ideology is so soaked into our existence, it seems objective and neutral, rather than partisan" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 68).

In a critical viewpoint, the function of ideology was to maintain an unjust social and political order. It accomplished this purpose by convincing society that existing social and political arrangements were naturally determined, serving the best interests of all. The concept of ideological dominance within critical theory had its roots in Marx and Engels, who wrote that as the ruling class desires "'to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society...it has to give its ideas the form of universality and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones'" (Marx & Engels cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 41).

> "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force...the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production".... They "rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age." (Marx & Engels from *The German Ideology*, cited in Brookfield p. 41)

Eagleton (1991) emphasized that these ruling-class ideas and intellectual forces which helped to reproduce a dominant social power were often not consciously developed or well-articulated. Such a rationalist view missed "the affective, unconscious, mythical or symbolic dimensions of ideology; the way it constitutes the subject's lived, apparently spontaneous relations to a power-structure and comes to provide the invisible colour of daily life itself" (p. 221). Instead, successful ideologies underwent an unconscious masking and mystification process, in which they became naturalized and universalized, creating a tight fit between the ideology and social reality, in order to close the gap to any critique. Alternative ideas were placed out of bounds of the thinkable.

Yet ideological control could never completely blanket all opposition. Critical theory's intent was to assist in challenging and resisting ideological conditioning through "ideology critique," one of the central projects of the Frankfurt School. Through ideology critique, or learning how to distance oneself from and then oppositionally reengage with the dominant culture, "what strikes us as the normal order of things is suddenly revealed...as a constructed reality that protects the interests of the powerful" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 42). This possibility of resistance was also at the center of the concept of hegemony, an important element of ideology critique.

The concept of hegemony was developed by the Italian economist Antonio Gramsci in the early 1900s. Hegemony was less abstract than either ideology or the traditional Marxist notion of false consciousness. It was at the root of our brains, "an organized assemblage of meanings and practices" (Apple, 1990, p. 5) which were lived. According to Gramsci it acted to saturate our consciousness and the consciousness of society.

> [The traditional Marxist] mechanistic explanation could not account for the failure of the working class to develop revolutionary consciousness, even with changes to the economic base. Gramsci concluded that there must be forces deep within the popular psyche itself which induced the oppressed to accept or "consent" to their own exploitation and daily misery. He advanced the concept of ideological hegemony to explain how the ruling class maintains its dominance by achieving a popular consensus mediated through the various institutions of civil society, including the schools, the mass media, the law, religion and popular culture. This form of ideological domination evades resistance by permeating consciousness itself, becoming embedded in popular beliefs, values, folklore and common sense. (Codd, 1989, pp. 171-172)

Hegemony accounted more for the process, the ways, and the specific consensual means through which the subjugated were convinced to accept dominant ideology. "Very roughly, then, we might define hegemony as a whole range of practical strategies by which a dominant power elicits consent to its rule from those it subjugates" (Eagleton, 1991, pp. 115-116). Hegemony widened the understanding of ideology to be viewed as embedded in a system of practices that

people lived out on a daily basis. "Ideology becomes hegemony when the dominant ideas are learned and lived in everyday decisions and judgments and when these ideas...pervade the whole of existence.... It emphasizes how the logic of capitalism...seeps and soaks itself into all aspects of everyday life" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 94).

Hegemony infiltrated the whole arena of civil society. Hegemonic apparatuses could include the family, workplace, schools, churches, libraries, architecture, city design, names of streets, public and private media outlets, health care, or recreation. Through hegemonic means, the dominant power became woven into culture itself, into the very texture of human experience. Thus, for Gramsci, in order to contest hegemony, it was not enough to confront the state.

> What must be contested is the whole area of "culture", defined in its broadest, most everyday sense. The power of the ruling class is spiritual as well as material; and any "counterhegemony" must carry its political campaign into this hitherto neglected realm of values and customs, speech habits and ritual practices. (Eagleton, 1991, p. 114)

Brookfield (2005) emphasized that hegemony worked by consent, in that people were not forced against their will to adopt dominant ideology. They learned to do this willingly and pridefully through the deceptive cruelty of hegemony, believing that dominant ideology represented their own best interests. By actively colluding in their own oppression, in a sense, they became their own jailers.

> The subordinate group enthusiastically embraces beliefs and practices that are slowly killing them.... Those who are exploited enter ideological prisons built by the exercise of their own free will. They choose their own cells, lock their cell doors behind them, and then throw the keys out of the cell window as far beyond retrieval as they can. (p. 98)

Hegemony was, however, in a constant state of flux, being partly a process of negotiation between oppressor and oppressed. Hegemony could never smother all resistance. Rather than avidly embracing a system of beliefs and practices that were mostly supportive of the interests of the powerful, the subordinate class was capable of contesting hegemony by learning critical

consciousness (Brookfield, 2005).

In critical theory, the concept of legitimation was closely tied to that of ideology and hegemony, Eagleton (1991) pointing to one of the varying definitions of ideology as "the *promotion* and *legitimation*" (p. 29) of the interests of a significant social group in the face of opposing interests. "Legitimation refers to the process by which a ruling power comes to secure from its subjects an at least tacit consent to its authority" (p. 54). Legitimation meant establishing one's interests as broadly acceptable. A mode of domination was generally considered to be "legitimated" when those subjected to it came to judge their own behavior by the criteria of their rulers.

In looking at ideological formation through the lens of legitimation, Eagleton (1991) discerned that the dominant power could legitimate itself through a number of different strategies including: (a) promoting beliefs and values compatible to it; (b) naturalizing and universalizing these beliefs so as to make them appear self-evident; (c) denigrating ideas which might contest it; (d) excluding opposing forms of thought, even if only by some unspoken but systematic logic; and (e) obscuring social reality in ways beneficial to itself. This process of obscuring, distortion, obfuscation, or "mystification," as it was commonly known, took the form of masking or suppressing social contradictions to produce an imaginary resolution.

Legitimating language established a group's claim that it knew what it was doing (Huebner cited in Apple, 1990). Examples of capitalist ideology which had crept into the language of educational leadership included "buying into," "downsizing," "rightsizing," and referring to students and parents as "customers" (Brookfield, 2005).

Science had likewise performed a legitimating or justificatory function in the educational realm of advanced industrial societies. Apple (1990) noted that in educational decision making,

scientific and technical talk had been given more legitimacy or "high status" than ethical talk,

with scientific evaluation considered as useful in producing knowledge while ethical evaluation

was looked on as leading to purely subjective outcomes. At the end of the 20th century, the

ideological principles provided by science comprised the filter through which knowledge in

educational leadership was organized.

> If a field can convince funding agencies, government, or the populace in general that
> scientific procedures are being employed, whether or not they are in fact helpful, then the
> probability of increased monetary and political support is heightened. Given the high
> status of technical knowledge and the high esteem in which science is held in industrial
> nations, this is important. (p. 115)

> Apple (1990, 1995) was critical of "systems management" in education, with its

emphasis on cost-cutting, efficiency, and productivity, arguing that it was essentially a system of

control stemming from an ideology which served to legitimate the existing distribution of power

and privilege in society. Although the technical expertise and industrial logic within systems

management provided meaning to certain sectors of society, it essentially served the interests of

those who already possessed economic and cultural capital.

> Is systems management "merely" a mode by which an institutional and managerial elite
> avoids conflict over *basic* values and educational visions? By making choices about
> limited options within the framework of existing modes of interaction, are questions
> about the basis of the structure itself precluded? How, for instance, would systems
> management procedures deal with the clash of two competing ideologies about schooling
> where goals cannot be easily defined? (Apple, 1990, pp. 117-118)

Power, Knowledge, and Dominant Discourse

> The role of theory today seems to me to be just this: not to formulate the global
> systematic theory which holds everything in place, but to analyse the specificity of
> mechanisms of power, to locate the connections and extensions, to build little by little a
> strategic knowledge (savoir). (Foucault, 1980, p. 145)

> Michel Foucault, prominent French historian and socio-political theorist of the 1970s and

early 1980s, resisted intellectual categorization by contesting both the cultural-political

establishment of the times as well as its opposition (Burns, 1990). Foucault attempted to create a

new space in leftist French thought by searching for a non-economic analysis of power, one in

which power was not always in a subordinate position relative to the economy. He has been

considered by many as more closely associated with postmodernism, a critique that "called into

question the modernist underpinnings of critical theory, particularly those aspects that emphasize

the unproblematic possibility of individual and collective liberation, emancipation, and

transformation" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 37) and that viewed power as more diffuse and

contradictory than critical theory had traditionally allowed.

However, Brookfield (2005) convincingly argued that Foucault met two of the conditions

integral to critical theory by his focus on how existing power relations reproduced themselves

and by his self-critical attitude toward his own theoretical conceptions of power.

> Foucault's analysis of power is squarely in the critical tradition despite the belief of some
> that Foucault is really a postmodernist who challenges the Enlightenment foundations of
> criticality. Reading Foucault helps us understand how apparently liberatory practices can
> actually work subtly to perpetuate existing power relations.... If the Gramscian
> approach...helps us name the enemy, a Foucaultian approach makes us aware that the
> enemy is sometimes ourselves. (pp. 146-147)

Foucault's major works included historical analyses, or "archeological digs," on madness,

sexuality, and punishment. Looking at the way discourses emerged to construct dominant

understandings of these, his writings showed an unwavering concern for an understanding of

power. Notions of power were also central to the previously discussed critical concept of

ideology. Eagleton (1991) noted that the most widely accepted definitions of ideology included

references to issues of power. "Very often [ideology] refers to the ways in which signs,

meanings and values help to reproduce a dominant social power" (p. 221). Critical theory

emphasized how state power was organized to assuage the populace into submitting to the

dominant order through the repressive power of ideological state apparatuses and other

hegemonic structures. It also saw the development of critical consciousness and

counterhegemony as offering a sort of liberatory power. But Foucault did not see power in these

"repressive versus liberatory" bipolar terms.

> In [Foucault's] view repression and liberation coexist to different degrees wherever
> power is present.... Furthermore, the simple classification of power as either good or evil
> is, for Foucault, hopelessly wrong. Power is far more complex, capable of being
> experienced as repressive and liberatory in the same situation....Foucault shakes up the
> confident belief that power can be bent to our will so that it can be experienced by
> recipients the way we intend. (Brookfield, 2005, p. 120)

In helping to "unmask power" (Brookfield, 2005), Foucault extended the critical

understanding of power to include the following: (a) power is omni-present, exercised in all

social situations; (b) authoritarian power has been partially displaced by self-imposed

disciplinary power and mechanisms of surveillance; and (c) power structures are intertwined

with what counts as knowledge, supported by dominant discourses and the establishment of

regimes of truth.

Foucault looked beyond legal edifices and state apparatuses in his analysis of power,

preferring to study the techniques and tactics of domination, particularly the "material operators"

of power and other forms of subjection within that domination. Brookfield (2005) described this

approach as one which "starts at the bottom, with the everyday thoughts and actions of 'ordinary'

people" (p. 126).

Studying these material operators, Foucault (1980) found power to be all-pervasive and

omni-present. "It seems to me that power *is* 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it,

that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in" (p. 141). In this

view, power was not possessed, transferred, or bestowed, "but rather exercised," only existing

"in action" (p. 89). In this exercise of power, it insidiously "reaches into the very grain of

individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their

discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (p. 39). As power was essentially exercised

by people at all levels, it became anonymously machine-like.

> One doesn't have here a power which is wholly in the hands of one person who can exercise it alone and totally over the others. It's a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised.... Power is no longer substantially identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it becomes a machinery that no one owns. (Foucault, 1980, p. 156)

> Power also seemed to exist in circular flow around society, organized in a kind of net-like

fashion in which people operated more as the vehicles of power rather than its resisting victims.

> Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

Brookfield (2005) noted that in this view of power as all-pervasive and omni-present, exercised

by people at all levels within a machine or net-like organization, the establishment of societal

mechanisms of control by a dominant group became haphazard and accidental rather than

deliberately organized.

Foucault used historical research to develop this view of power as machine-like and

omni-present, never in anybody's hands. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault showed that

during the 1700s, in conjunction with the growth of capitalism, sovereign or royal power was

replaced with "disciplinary" power, or "power that is exercised by people on themselves in the

specific day-to-day practices of their lives" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 120). Essentially people began

to "surveiller" or monitor themselves through self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-

censorship in their own lives and work sites. This was evident in the functioning of prisons,

schools, and factories of the time.

> [Foucault] observes that modern society is so complex that a permanent army of police and informers would be necessary to make sure people accepted prevailing power relations. Since this is logistically impossible, he argues that over surveillance has been replaced by self-surveillance—that we monitor and censor our own thoughts and behaviors. (Brookfield, 2005, p. 121)

Foucault (1977) noted that during the 1700s, even among some thinkers of that time period, a repressive, authoritarian kind of control was viewed as less advantageous and less effective than self-imposed control. A mid-1700s writer on criminal justice wrote,

> "A stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas; it is at the stable point of reason that he secures the end of the chain; this link is all the stronger in that we do not know of what it is made and we believe it to be our own work; despair and time eat away the bonds of iron and steel, but they are powerless against the habitual union of ideas, they can only tighten it still more; and on the soft fibres of the brain is founded the unshakable base of the soundest of Empires." (Servan cited in Foucault, 1977, pp. 102-103)

Rather than utilizing the concept of ideology to analyze the formation of these chains of self-imposed ideas, Foucault developed the term "discourse." A discourse was an agreed upon and common language, or set of concepts, social practices, and conventions, operating somewhat like a paradigm or worldview. Medicine, law, and other academic disciplines could be considered as discourses. A discourse included rules for judging what would be considered as acceptable or unacceptable contributions to that discourse community, helping to sort out what knowledge was to be regarded as most important or true. Although there could exist competing discourses, a dominant discourse was the one that held the most sway, reflecting and supporting the existing power structures (Brookfield, 2005; Eagleton, 1991; Sim & Van Loon, 2001).

Within these discourses one could detect a power-knowledge interlink. Foucault (1977) stated that power and knowledge directly implied one another, that all power relations were based on some underlying knowledge claim, and that, correspondingly, all claims to knowledge

included some form of power relation.

> The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power.... Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power.... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power. (Foucault, 1980, p. 52)

In Brookfield's (2005) interpretation, "Whoever is in a position of power is able to create knowledge supporting that power relationship. Whatever a society accepts as knowledge or truth inevitably ends up strengthening the power of some and limiting the power of others" (p. 136).

When discourses overlapped, they then formed larger "regimes of truth" linked with the systems of power which produced and sustained them. These regimes of truth were the dominant ideas and frameworks of analysis that shaped how the world was viewed, and they helped decide which discourses would be allowed.

> Each society has its régime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980, p. 131)

Foucault's work revealed that cultures and their institutions were established more on legitimized power than on notions of truth or justice (Sim & Van Loon, 2001). In Western cultures, Foucault noted that the judicial system in particular, rather than being a neutral institution based on truth and justice, was really an instrument of class power. The court's historical function had been largely to control popular justice. "Each time that the bourgeoisie has wished to subject a popular uprising to the constraint of a state apparatus a court has been set up" (Foucault, 1980, p. 7). Steeped in the ideology of the ruling class, and used to augment contradictions among the different classes, the judicial system was essentially a vehicle of bourgeois legitimation. In Foucault's opinion, the forms of justice operated by the ruling class

merited rigorous criticism.

All hope was not lost, however, for the marginalized and the inhabitants of the subordinate classes in a Foucaultian viewpoint. Because Foucault understood power in a relational sense, as "power relations," power always implied the possibility of resistance through "'a strategy of struggle'" offering "'a means of escape'" (Foucault cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 140). Any analysis of power should be realized in solidarity with those who contested it and should provide aid to social, cultural, or political interventions.

Unmasking power was a difficult endeavor in any field, given its implantation into accepted ways of thinking and speaking. Educational administrative science tended to ignore issues of power, or within the hierarchical leadership perspective, considered it to be static and uni-directional. Educational leadership should include discussions of power based on issues of class, agency, and gender (Bates, 1989; Watkins, 1989). Hidden issues of power were also present within notions of specialism and expertise. Educational specialists and experts, who claimed superior knowledge and information, were really claiming a sort of "expert power" (Smyth, 1989a; Watkins, 1989). Brookfield (2005) noted that disciplinary power was often present in democratic and participatory educational practices.

Foucault's work on power and knowledge offered illumination in many fields, including education. Brookfield (2005) summarized,

> Foucault's writings on the connection between truth, discourse, and power move us right away from thinking of knowledge as something that is pursued and produced for its own sake by energetic individuals enthusiastically dedicated to the wider edification of humankind. Instead, knowledge becomes seen as a social product. We start to wonder how it happens that particular writings, ideas, and people emerge as important in a particular field. (p. 138)

Participative, Democratic Communication

  Jürgen Habermas was one of the central thinkers in the Frankfurt School of critical theory from the 1960s through the 1980s. In Habermas' analysis of society, he found a threat from two imposing societal "steering mechanisms." Steering mechanisms were forces that determined how the political and economic systems were run. Two steering mechanisms, that of money, or "the pursuit of profit through the exchange economy," and that of power, or "the maintenance by dominant groups of a system of ideological and technocratic domination" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 237), were posing a danger to the public sphere, to civil society, and to the lifeworld.

  The public sphere, or the civic space or commons where adults came together to debate and decide their response to shared issues and problems, had declined as society had become larger and more complex. This commons had become dominated by money and power, leaving adults publicly voiceless (Brookfield, 2005). With the public realm essentially depoliticized, governments could put forth their own vision of the world, neutralizing intellectual challenges to the dominant order. Society was thus left with institutions "that are democratic in form, while the citizenry, in the midst of an objectively [an sich] political society, enjoy the status of passive citizens with only the right to withhold acclamation" (Habermas, 1975, p. 37). Meanwhile, destructive privatism, in the form of meritocratic and technocratic systems, had flourished.

  Civil society, or all those organizations and associations not directly controlled by the state or corporations, had also become threatened by the steering mechanisms of money and power that dominated the state political system and the capitalist economic system. Again, with civil society threatened, the forces that ran the political and economic systems were left to operate unchallenged (Brookfield, 2005).

  The lifeworld was comprised of the assumptions and preconscious understandings that

framed how people viewed the world and understood life. It was "'a storehouse of unquestioned

cultural givens from which those participating in communication draw agreed-upon patterns of

interpretation for use in their interpretive efforts,'" so much a part of us that "'we are simply

incapable of making ourselves conscious of this or that part of it at will'" (Habermas cited in

Brookfield, 2005, p. 239). Brookfield (2005) explained,

> I think of the life world as the background rules, assumptions, and commonsense
> understandings that structure how we perceive the world and how we communicate that
> perception to those around us. This kind of primordial, prereflective knowledge hovers
> on the periphery of consciousness, a shadowy frame to all we think and do. (pp. 238-239)

Providing input to civil society and the public sphere, the lifeworld had likewise become

controlled and deformed by the steering mechanisms of money and power, invaded by

capitalistic and bureaucratic ways of thinking. Once the lifeworld had become dominated by

money and power, all the discussions in the public sphere and in the organizations of civil

society were compromised without public awareness. "The decline of the public sphere, the

threat to civil society, and the invasion of the lifeworld are manifestations of a broader loss of

social solidarity—in [Habermas'] view the truly endangered resource on the planet" (Brookfield,

2005, pp. 243-244).

In order to combat these threats, Habermas was less concerned with the traditional

Marxist emphasis on reorganizing patterns of production. Instead, he advocated a rethinking of

patterns of communication. He believed that critical theory should be more than a critique of

political economy. "It must broaden its concern to investigate matters of morality and

communication and how a democratic society might organize itself to promote the fullest and

freest communication possible amongst its members" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 224).

Habermas' work on communicative competence and action through democratic

communication was based on the ideals of democratic participation, or participatory democracy,

a situation in which societal decisions could be made and consensus reached based on broad

based, reasoned, and un-coerced participation that was free from domination. Learning

democracy through communicative action could limit the destructive effects of the attacks by

money and power on the public sphere, civil society, and the lifeworld.

> Despite the postmodern critique of his theory of communicative action, Habermas
> steadfastly refuses to ditch modernity's dream of using human reason to create a more
> humane world. Part of that dream is clearly bound up with the possibility of adults
> learning to speak to each other in honest and informed ways so that they can hold
> democratic conversations about important issues in a revived public sphere. (Brookfield,
> 2005, p. 256)

Communicative action entailed two or more people trying to come to an understanding,

an agreement, or a consensus, on common action. Habermas conceived a number of necessary

background conditions to ensure participation in full, free, and equal discourse, thus ensuring the

operation of democracy. Foremost among these were the ideal rules of discourse, which

included "'(a) all relevant voices are heard, (b) the best of all available arguments, given the

present state of our knowledge, are accepted, and (c) only the non-coercive coercion of the better

argument determines the affirmations and negations of the participants'" (Habermas cited in

Brookfield, 2005, p. 265). These rules also formed the basis of democratic process.

> In other words, good discussion, and therefore good democratic process depends on
> everyone contributing, on everyone having the fullest possible knowledge of different
> perspectives, and on everyone being ready to give up their position if a better argument is
> presented to them. (Brookfield, 2005, pp. 265-266)

Another background condition for meaningful conversation included mutual agreement

on speakers' claims of comprehensibility, truth, rightness, and authenticity, called "validity

claims."

> A smoothly functioning language game rests on a background consensus formed from the
> mutual recognition of at least four different types of validity claims...that are involved in
> the exchange of speech acts: claims that the utterance is understandable, that its
> propositional content is true, and that the speaker is sincere in uttering it, and that it is

right or appropriate for the speaker to be performing the speech act. (McCarthy in Habermas, 1975, pp. xiii-xiv)

Validity claims could be established through a series of questions (Brookfield, 2005). Was the speaker clear and understandable? Was the speaker accurately representing some state of affairs and providing the fullest information possible? Did the speaker stick to the prevailing rules of talk in the community in a way that was familiar and likely to be understood in the way intended? Was the speaker sincerely interested in reaching understanding with trustworthy intentions?

Since Habermas was concerned that decisions be arrived at in a truly democratic manner, he also argued for the establishment of an "ideal speech situation." An ideal speech situation was an optimal set of conditions which would facilitate the fulfillment of true, respectful, and open democratic discussion. It honored otherness and a diversity of identities, values, and desires. It dealt with power differentials based on race, class, and gender (Brookfield, 2005).

Ideal speech is that form of discourse in which there is no other compulsion but the compulsion of argumentation itself; where there is a genuine symmetry among the participants involved, allowing a universal interchangeability of dialogue roles; where no form of domination exists. The power of ideal speech is the power of argumentation itself. (Bernstein, 1976, p. 212)

Habermas believed that legitimation should be based on democracy, that the democratic process would ensure the legitimacy of social, political, and economic institutions and prevent them from becoming instruments of ideological manipulation. The rules governing communicative action should be the same as those informing a truly democratic process. The same criteria of validity that could be applied to judge the effectiveness of communicative efforts should be applied to assess whether or not a decision, including a democratic majority decision, was legitimate. "What is crucial in determining the legitimacy of a majority decision is the way this is reached" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 267).

A democratic decision, such as the way in which wealth should be distributed among the population, (or, for that matter, whether a school should be closed and consolidated), only had legitimacy if it were reached in an attempt to follow the rules of discourse. The democratic process was the guarantor of legislative legitimacy. In Habermas' words, "'the *democratic process* bears the entire burden of legitimation'" (Habermas cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 268) where legislative decisions were concerned.

Habermas' theories on participative and democratic communication were influential in the Deakin perspective of educational leadership. In Foster's (1989) view, leadership should be critical, with the ideals of freedom and democracy in central standing. It should also be ethical, oriented toward democratic values within a community. Rizvi (1989) was critical of hierarchical notions of leadership, advocating "organizational democracy," or democratic decision making with broad-based participation. "Insofar as educational decision-making is concerned, there would seem to be an important participative role for the wider school community, which includes students, parents and teachers" (p. 216). Smyth's (1989a) "educative" perspective on leadership criticized corporatist models and urged reflection based upon rationally informed discourse.

> If leadership has little to do with hierarchical impositions, then it has a lot to do with enabling the "best" ideas to emerge wherever they come from, through a process of informed and rational debate. The kind of participative structures that are involved allow all "voices" to be adequately heard regardless of class, race, gender or position in the formal hierarchy of school. (p. 191)

Crisis Tendencies in Advanced Capitalism

In *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas (1975) developed a theory of advanced capitalism and the resulting crisis tendencies characteristic of late-stage capitalist society. Habermas used the terms "organized," "late," "state-regulated," as well as "advanced" capitalism to describe this

period of the later 20th century that followed the early or liberal capitalism of the 1700s and 1800s.

Advanced capitalism could be distinguished by an increasing concentration of economic activity through national and multi-national corporations and oligopolistic market structures. Although the private sector operated under market-oriented competition, there was a growing public sector that oversaw an administrative system of global planning and fiscal or financial regulation, including price guarantees. The state took an active role in improving the conditions for the realization of capital through trade treaties and the improvement of material or immaterial infrastructure, including training or reeducation programs and unemployment compensation (Habermas, 1975). Advanced capitalism kept class conflict latent as the social identity of classes had begun to break down and class consciousness had become fragmented. Nevertheless, wage disputes erupted from time to time in the public sector, and conflict ensued from cuts in the government financing of education, housing, and health care.

Noting that even in this state-regulated capitalism, social development still entailed "contradictions," or crises, Habermas (1975) believed that applying a Marxian theory of crisis to the altered reality of advanced capitalism could be problematic. "Neither analyses of the economic 'basis' nor analyses of the socio-cultural 'superstructure' are adequate in themselves to comprehend the dynamics of advanced-capitalist society" (McCarthy in Habermas, 1975, p. xxiii). Habermas' hope was to develop new crisis theorems in their place as he surveyed late 20th-century Western society. His contention was that advanced capitalism had tended to promote a cascading series of crises, emanating from an economic crisis, then spilling over into various political crises, including rationality and legitimation crises, and finally ending in a socio-cultural motivation crisis.

In early or liberal capitalism, the state would not have attempted to resolve an economic crisis with a strong hands-on approach. However, in advanced capitalism, especially during the 1970s period of high inflation and stagnant growth under which Habermas was writing, the economic crisis would necessarily move into the political sphere, where some action would be expected.

The political sphere in advanced capitalism was faced with contradictory pressures, however, on the one hand, to increase collective-capitalist planning capacity, and on the other, to block this expansion which could threaten the continued existence of capitalism. "Thus the state apparatus vacillates between expected intervention and forced renunciation of intervention" (Habermas, 1975, pp. 62-63). In other words, if the state, through political stalemate, were unable to raise the requisite taxes or effectively use them to avoid disturbances to growth, it would essentially find itself in the grips of a rationality crisis. "A rationality deficit in public administration means that the state apparatus cannot, under given boundary conditions, adequately steer the economic system" (Habermas, 1975, p. 47).

The result of a rationality crisis would be a legitimation crisis. "If government crisis management fails,....the penalty for this failure is withdrawal of legitimation" (Habermas, 1975, p. 69), and the public would no longer have confidence in the political-administrative sphere. Habermas contended that even if the state were able to act and succeed in providing economic growth, the growth would most likely be achieved in accordance with the priorities of the dominant class, by raising taxes or spending resources in an unfair manner. Even here, a legitimation crisis would still be the end result. "The patterns of priorities...result from a class structure that is, as usual, kept latent. In the final analysis, *this class structure* is the source of the legitimation deficit" (Habermas, 1975, p. 73). Habermas believed that a legitimation crisis could

only be avoided in the long-run if the latent class structures of advanced capitalist society were

transformed.

As the public became increasingly disenchanted with the political and economic system,

a socio-cultural motivation crisis would follow. A motivation crisis was

> a discrepancy between the need for motives declared by the state, the educational system
> and the occupational system on the one hand, and the motivation supplied by the socio-
> cultural system on the other....when the socio-cultural system changes in such a way that
> its output becomes dysfunctional for the state and for the system of social labor.
> (Habermas, 1975, p. 75)

Habermas believed that the socio-cultural system would not be able, in the long run, to maintain

the privatistic syndrome, the core components of bourgeois ideology such as possessive

individualism and achievement orientation, that were necessary for the political-economic

system's continued existence.

Smyth (1989b), who applied Habermas' crisis tendencies to education and educational

leadership, discerned a crisis of rationality in educational leaders' attempt to use scientific

approaches to solving the perceived social and economic problems of the 1970s and 1980s.

These approaches tried to substitute technical-rational administrative solutions to complex social

questions of equity and to issues of access and distribution of society's resources.

A crisis of legitimacy followed as these approaches were translated, justified, and

wrapped up in the language of cost efficiency and cost effectiveness.

> In taking on economistic language and methods to analyze and resolve our social
> problems, we are required not only to write off the accumulated wisdom and cultural
> traditions that have enabled us to resolve our social problems in the past, but more
> importantly we destroy the cultural habitus that has held educational communities
> together. (Smyth, 1989b, p. 3)

Rationality and legitimacy crises then turned into a crisis of motivation.

> As feelings of increasing alienation and powerlessness develop: we feel that control lies
> "out there with them" and "not with us in here, in this institution". Not only does this

produce a loss of meaning, identity and purpose, but more importantly it is accompanied by the imposition of forms of language and discourse that further reinforce and bolster the orientation toward measurement, technocracy and managerialism. (Smyth, 1989b, p. 3)

Critical Analysis in School Consolidation Studies

DeYoung and Howley, 1990

Reviewing the literature on school consolidation, DeYoung and Howley (1990), in *The Political Economy of Rural School Consolidation*, concluded that research on school size had not documented the larger school benefits claimed by proponents. Motivated by the implementation of a new consolidation program in West Virginia in the late 1980s, they surmised that something other than the advertised curricular, pedagogical, or administrative benefits had been at work within rural school consolidation in the United States. A few years later, Howley (1996b) conducted quantitative research with statistical analysis to show that lower socioeconomic student populations in West Virginia's small schools had been well served in the 1980s, that small schools had enhanced the achievement of poor students, and that the state-imposed consolidation program slated for the 1990s would have a detrimental effect on such students.

A number of questions guided both studies. In light of such evidence, why consolidate? What were the real motives behind consolidation in the United States, in general, and in West Virginia's 1990s scheme in particular? Using critical theoretical analysis, their conclusion was that social, political, and ideological motives better explained the specialization, differentiation, and division of labor found in rural school consolidation. The advertised benefits of school consolidation, whether curricular, pedagogical, or administrative, actually served to conceal social, political, and economic agendas. In West Virginia's case, a state legitimation crisis was behind the 1990s consolidation push (DeYoung & Howley, 1990; Howley, 1996b).

According to Howley (1996b), West Virginia possessed ample resources for school funding, but up to 70 percent of all lands were held for natural resource speculation by absentee corporate owners. These lands were assessed at only one fifth the value of all owner-occupied residential property. During the 1980s, the state government budget was viewed by corporate interests as having been mismanaged. A major state investment fund had been scandalously depleted by close to 300 million dollars, the state was failing to pay its bills in a timely fashion, and tax refunds were delayed. The state was facing a legitimation crisis when a new governor took office in 1988.

At close to half of West Virginia's state budget, education was the place to demonstrate the rigor needed to restore the legitimacy of the state, particularly the confidence of key corporate interests. Consolidation was chosen as the legitimatory action (DeYoung & Howley, 1990; Howley, 1996b). Improved efficiency would save the state money and facilitate education reform. The state would provide capital funds to districts if they met certain economy of scale standards. Small schools were closed widely as a result.

Analyzing rural consolidation from a critical perspective, DeYoung and Howley (1990) believed that the political economy and dominant views of economic development and social progress, which largely reflected and benefited those in economic and political control of society, had been the major influences behind school organization and the purposes of instruction, obfuscating many alternative social interests.

> School reform and school improvement are hardly stories about how to best structure learning opportunities for children. Rather, they are stories about the changing political economy of the United States. We argue that understanding the logic behind such "improvement" as school consolidation in rural America demands understanding how the state legitimates its goals and, more particularly, how those goals override other cultural and intellectual interests which might serve citizens equally well, if not better. (p. 65)

Looking specifically at West Virginia in the late 1980s, DeYoung and Howley (1990)

drew on critical theory to explain that predictable periods of crisis compel the state to take

extreme action in order to shore up the private sector. The dilemma of the modern state was its

need to conceal the inherent inequities and contradictions from those who the political economy

had disenfranchised. During good times, the state could assuage the cultural contradictions of

capitalism with expenditures on public entitlements. During recessionary times, it had to

mediate between public demand and the imperative to accumulate capital, bringing on a

"legitimation crisis." In these periods of crisis,

> state and federal governments continue to press for changes in all public institutions, including schools. Such changes, according to the state, will better meet the (hypothetical) "needs" of the private sector. At the same time...it also champions cost savings....
>
> The relevance of this view for consolidation lies in the efforts of the state to (a) extend its control over a realm [of small rural schools]…; (b) appear to curtail expenses that the state, in crisis, can no longer afford; and (c) tighten the perception of instrumental connection between schooling and economic prosperity. (p. 78)

In his critique of the West Virginia case, Howley (1996b) similarly maintained that the

reasons behind consolidation had little to do with education. Using the thoughts of critical

theorists Eagleton and Habermas, Howley found that a crisis of legitimation had led the state to

take action to consolidate schools in order to improve educational efficiency, resulting in a

disproportionate net loss of schools in both rural areas and less affluent communities.

> The motive for closures was not civic-minded school improvement, but a crisis of legitimation that indicated the need for the State to take forceful action to restore public confidence, especially the confidence of the corporations exerting traditionally strong influence in the state. (p. 8)

Carspecken, 1991

In *Community Schooling and the Nature of Power: The Battle for Croxteth*

Comprehensive, Carspecken (1991) detailed the battle for saving an urban secondary school from

closure in Liverpool, England in 1982. Occurring almost simultaneously with Robbinsdale's school-closing drama, yet a world away, Croxteth's parents occupied the school building shortly before its planned closure, and found volunteer teachers to run the school for a year, after which authorities finally agreed to continue operating the school. Carspecken's goals were to give a chronological narrative of the story and to provide a theoretical analysis of power as mediated through community-school relations, pedagogic practice, national policies on education, and cultural structures.

A number of questions guided the study. What were the cultural frameworks through which working-class residents perceived the purposes of schooling and constructed their interactions with teachers and students? What power relationships existed between working-class communities and their schools? How did power enter into school-community relations? Carspecken (1991) used historical and ethnographic methods, including observations, documents, and interviews, as he balanced between narrative and social theorizing, looking at the event within a framework of sociological interpretation. The areas of theoretical concern he intended to address included sociology of education, social movements, and social theory.

The story of the proposed closure of Croxteth Comprehensive School had begun in the recessionary years of the 1970s (Carspecken, 1991). With national budget cuts and declining enrollment, education seemed a logical place to reduce cities' budgets. In 1978, a local newspaper had estimated that the equivalent of over two million dollars was being lost each year due to the inefficient use of Liverpool's school buildings, stemming from 7,500 surplus student spaces.

The community of Croxteth, an outer-ring area of Liverpool, was a mostly white, working-class neighborhood with 12,652 people, high unemployment, and graffiti-plagued

buildings. The city owned 86 percent of the housing. Croxteth Comprehensive was the only non-religious secondary school in the area, also serving as a locale for youth clubs and occasional services for the elderly. With its large playing field for sports activities and community fairs, residents viewed the school as the only real facility in the neighborhood. Discipline, school uniforms, and proper regard for school authority were important matters for parents (Carspecken, 1991).

In 1981, the city council of Liverpool decided to close Croxteth Comprehensive School by the summer of 1982, as a cost-savings measure due to citywide declining enrollment, and then to merge it with another school two miles away. The belief in Croxteth at time was that a deal had been made between the Liberals and Conservatives in the city council's Liberal-Conservative coalition to close a working class "comprehensive school," merge it with a "selective school" (since conservatives preferred selective schools), and then sell Croxteth and its 32 acres to developers.

Carspecken (1991) surmised that, in addition to financial pressures and declining enrollment, Croxteth was chosen for closure for specific political reasons. The Croxteth community supported the Labour Party, not the Liberal-Conservative coalition. Additionally, he noted that the chair of the city's Education Committee represented the area in which the school to remain open was located, a Liberal-controlled area.

Community protests were initiated by Croxteth's residents using legal and institutional tactics. Teachers and parents formed coalitions, pointing out why Croxteth was superior to the other school and asking that the other school be closed instead. Lobbying, letter writing, offering alternative plans, and visiting the Ministry of Education in London followed, but these were all to no avail.

In the winter, new leaders joined the protest, and the parent-teacher campaign was replaced by a more community-oriented movement, called the Croxteth Community Action Committee (CCAC), which also began to address other needs of the neighborhood. The school closure became a symbol of other neighborhood grievances, and the coalition no longer insisted that the other school be closed, focusing instead on the community alone. Later, after an experienced union organizer assumed leadership of the group, residents used more militant tactics. Engaging in civil disobedience, they occupied government chambers and a newspaper building, blocked some roadways which ran near the school, and stormed two radio stations to talk live over the airwaves.

Residents' actions drew sympathy from local and national media. One newspaper ran a featured article on the issue stating, "'The school...is seen by the people as one of the threads holding the community together'" (Carspecken, 1991, p. 47), asserting that it was crucial to local identity and helped meet social needs. Shortly thereafter, in a large majority vote, the Liverpool city council reversed its decision and decided to create a new school in the buildings of the old. The national British government, however, vetoed the city council's plan and ordered the closure to go through anyway, causing more protests. The CCAC blocked traffic again, sent two busloads of residents to London to demonstrate outside the Ministry of Education, occupied Education Office buildings in Liverpool, and formed a daily picket in front of the school building. The Minister of Education, who was touring buildings in Liverpool, declined to visit Croxteth, but finally agreed to a non-supportive five-minute audience with parents. Again, parents' requests were rebuffed.

A few days before the scheduled closure date for the building, on July 13, 1982, residents began an illegal occupation of the school, barricading windows and doors, and creating an

overnight picket. A popular television actress supported the occupation, the British Broadcasting Corporation ran a program on the event, and parents decided to run a short summer program in the school themselves. The city council decided not to send in the police for fear of a sympathetic public. Carspecken (1991) noted that the CCAC leaders had expanded power by using media coverage to gain city and national sympathy for the cause, by making connections with local and national trade unions, and by garnering united support from the neighborhood.

The school opened for the next school year on September 23, 1982, with volunteer teachers and 280 pupils on the first day of class, which represented about 62 percent of the previous year's pupils. The media covered the opening, giving the image of the common person, "the community," fighting back against governmental neglect. One third of teacher volunteers were experienced teachers, while the others all possessed college degrees.

The community residents ran the school themselves with a fairly comprehensive educational program for the 1982-1983 school year aided by the volunteer teachers and activists sympathetic to their goals. The school year had ups and downs, some teachers only lasting for a short period, while a core group taught for the entirety of the school year. With a lack of sufficient teachers and limited educational materials, some students left for other schools. Discipline was difficult at first, but improved over the year, and the curricular program continued on a fairly traditional track, geared toward getting a few students ready for spring examinations (Carspecken, 1991).

As the year progressed, the basic goal of CCAC shifted, from simply trying to win back the school, to identifying with Labour Party policies for community education. The city's Labour Party took on the school as a cause, and leaders of CCAC joined forces with them, helping the party win an overall majority in the May city elections. The leaders of the party had

promised that the first thing on their action list would be to reinstate Croxteth Comprehensive. The school had become a symbol of the local Labour Party victory. The victory was announced in the school assembly the next morning and filmed for a national television audience. The newly elected Labour Party on the city council reopened the school, restoring state support by including the reopening in a package of reforms which the British government desired. The school continued operation under regular governmental control, redesignated as a "community comprehensive school."

Carspecken (1991) integrated social theoretical perspectives into the historical account, using the social theories of Giddens, Habermas, and the Birmingham school of cultural studies. He found that power entered into school-community relations in a number of ways: (a) in the access that different communities had to decision-making procedures affecting school practices, (b) in the familiarity of different communities with informal rules determining the effective use of formal channels, and (c) in the cultural views through which various communities assessed their needs and possible courses of action. Middle- and upper-class families were more familiar with the culture of teachers and politicians (who were often their class peers), and thus, these families were frequently able to influence teachers over their treatment of children and to pressure politicians on such matters as school closures and budget allocations.

Working-class culture had its own way of viewing the purposes and practices of schooling. However, the occupation of the school had altered these views somewhat, with some parents beginning to question the purposes of education in a type of critical awareness. Should education just be for passing examinations and achieving employment, or should it have other purposes? Carspecken (1991) discerned "a discourse of criticism" (p. 177) amongst the activists over the school year, showing growing discontent with traditional schooling and an interest in

exploring alternatives. "The local activists were questioning their original, taken-for-granted assumptions about the purposes of schooling: employability and discipline. They were also, as a result of their involvement, perceiving linkages between schooling and political activity" (p. 178). These alterations of viewpoint through critical awareness were not, however, able to lead to much concrete change in educational practice due to constraints such as the national system of examinations and the lack of clearly formulated policies on alternative educational practice.

Reynolds, 1999

In *There Goes the Neighborhood: Rural School Consolidation at the Grass Roots in Early Twentieth-Century Iowa*, Reynolds (1999) featured the early 1900s push to consolidate small, one-room rural country schools through an historical account of how consolidation was sold to one rural community and by documenting the divisive debates that ensued. The intent was to analyze the politics, geography, and social history of rural education reform.

> [The country school] was…an institution under attack. The purpose of this book is to document the nature of that attack and the cultural and economic circumstances that spawned it, to analyze the political struggles it engendered, and to interpret them within the context of the political economy and geography of the period. (p. 16)

Reynolds (1999) divided research into two sections, first, looking at theoretical and historical contexts of rural education reform in the Midwest at the time, and secondly, presenting a case study of how school consolidation and local resistance took place in the township of Buck Creek, Delaware County, Iowa. The case study showed how community politics shaped efforts at school consolidation, making this essentially a study about the politics of organizational change and governance.

Using historical methodology, Reynolds (1999) drew on agricultural history, sociology, demography, and economics, painting a picture of the politics and economics of these rural

school wars. A geographer by training, Reynolds interpreted these struggles in light of theories of political economy as well as geography. A number of questions guided the research. How did rural school consolidation become the principal policy prescription for the reform of rural life in the Midwest? How and why did its supposed beneficiaries oppose it so vociferously? What were the intended and unintended impacts of rural school consolidation on local social relations and what were its lasting institutional effects?

The rural school district structure at the beginning of the 20th century was based on the rural township, with districts called "school township districts." As the United States acquired land in the Midwest in the 1800s, property had been carved up into "government plots" of one mile wide by one mile long. Within each government plot were 16 40-acre plots, an acre being one-quarter mile in width and length. A township was six miles wide and six miles long, composed of 36 government plots, or 36 square miles (Reynolds, 1999).

The township district was divided into nine subdistrict school sections, each subsection being two miles in width and length, equal to four square miles, or four government plots. Each of the nine subdistricts had a one-room country school for grades one to eight, with about 20 to 25 students, or about three students per grade level. In this configuration, all farms were within school walking distance, only rarely located more than one mile from the country school. This subdistrict, with its own designated country school, often defined the rural neighborhood. Each of the nine subdistricts had a director who normally sat on the nine-member township district school board.

If there existed a small town of 100 or more residents within the larger 36-square-mile township, the small town would operate its own "independent district," separate from the larger township district. Likewise, any of the nine subdistricts could secede from the larger township

district and form a small "rural independent district" by a majority vote of the subdistrict's

residents (Reynolds, 1999).

The early 1900s rural consolidation drive consisted largely of proposals to close the

small, one-room rural country schools and replace them with a larger graded school in some

central area of the township or in one of the nearby small towns. Proposals often included

merging township districts into larger districts. Proponents argued that rural education needed to

be better and more equitable, and that this could only be done efficiently through consolidation.

Consolidation would improve rural (both country and small-town) education and offer

educational opportunities equal to those available in urban areas (Reynolds, 1999). In the

Midwest, this push came from the elite sector of society, joined by reformers of the Country Life

Movement and some fairly prosperous farmers. In a review of Reynolds' research, Theobald

(1999) pointed out that the Country Life Commission was a movement born of Social Darwinism

(or in his view, racism) created at a time when southern and eastern Europeans were flocking to

cities. "Country Lifers were trying, first and foremost, to keep rural kids in the countryside" (p.

119).

Reynolds (1999) found that poorer farmers of the time period were happy with education

in one-room schools. They opposed creating larger, better-equipped, and better-staffed schools

since they were farther away from home and often led to higher taxes. They felt consolidation

was being forced on them, and they feared loss of control by not being able to hire the local

teacher. For opponents, smaller schools meant better education. By keeping education local and

in the neighborhood, community schools could better impart important local values. "'I believe

that the taxpayers, especially of the rural districts, should not be called upon to expend millions

of dollars for palatial school buildings'" (p. 228), stated one candidate running for public office

in Iowa. In areas that eventually ended up supporting consolidation, it usually took several elections before approval. When a proposal failed, proponents would note areas of opposition and exclude those areas from the next proposed consolidated district. Consolidation defeat was possible if proponents could be easily tagged as representing "town interests" or if proponents' attempts at gerrymandering ended up being completely impractical.

In the 10 years from 1913 to 1922 school consolidation resulted in the closing of over 2,500 country schools, but not without resistance. Between 1906 and 1925, the Iowa Supreme Court heard 70 cases opposing school consolidation. Reynolds (1999) focused on the Iowa township of Buck Creek, one of the few rural, country-side consolidations that did not include a town. This early 1920s proposal to consolidate the one-room schools of the township plus parts of the adjoining township, almost 40 square miles, so reverberated throughout the area that 75 years later it was still discussed among the older residents.

Elites in most of the smaller towns in Delaware County favored rural school consolidation because it would give them a larger, more modern school without significant tax increases in their existing town's independent school district. Proponents stated that consolidation reflected "'the ambition of the fathers and mothers of the community to give their children an education demanded by the times'" (Reynolds, 1999, p. 193). However, as the consolidation proposal in Buck Creek did not include a small town, proponents used some reinforcement from the Ku Klux Klan (including cross burnings) to make the vote for consolidation a vote for Protestantism. Farmers were asked to rent land to families that would be inclined to vote for consolidation.

Opponents within the Buck Creek district noted that the district did not include any small town to share the burden of a new building, and that land values would drop with the heavy taxes

required to build and maintain the consolidated school. Transportation could also be a problem with many roads almost impassable in winter. Catholics saw consolidation as a thinly disguised move to establish Protestant hegemony over the public schools. They also opposed taxes for public high school education since many sent their children to parochial high schools (Reynolds, 1999).

Farmers from smaller and poorer farms in Buck Creek resisted consolidation since they depended more on the labor of all nuclear family members. They thought children would be less available for work under the consolidation proposal. Males were fearful that women might follow their nurturing instincts and vote for bonds to build the new consolidated buildings, however costly. Since women could vote in bond elections, males feared they might support anything that would enhance educational advantages for their children. Advocating a basic, no frills education, opponents stated, "'We heartily endorse a rightly disciplined education.... Select a school with a reputation; not one that is filling the air with athletic skyrockets; but one that prudently keeps the education of the mind and character uppermost'" (Reynolds, 1999, p. 193).

The vote for consolidation in Buck Creek ended up passing, but the issue was then taken to court and overturned. After a second affirmative vote, the issue was again taken to court, finally reaching the Iowa Supreme Court which ruled the schools could be consolidated. The consolidated two-story brick structure was built next to the area's Methodist church in 1924. In 1959 the high school portion was closed, but the building continued operating as an elementary school, which subsequently closed in 1976.

Using geography and political economy in analysis, but also drawing on sociology and economics, Reynolds (1999) determined that rural school consolidation was the result of a "complex interplay between class and place formation, regional class structure, and individual

agency" (p. 5). Efforts to consolidate rural schools sometimes brought to the surface religious

tensions that had remained dormant, with additional generational and gender dimensions also

evident. In Buck Creek, opponents tended to be older, Catholic, and male. However, resistance

in the larger rural setting could primarily be characterized as place-based and class-based, played

out in a decentralized, local manner.

Reynolds (1999) discerned the existence of two place-based rural groupings, which

seemed to translate into two rural class divisions. These two groupings, the small-town

neighborhoods and the open-country neighborhoods were often at odds with each other over

rural school consolidation. Whereas the boundaries of a small-town neighborhood seemed self-

evident, rural open-country neighborhoods were often defined by the boundaries of the small,

one-room country school.

The country schoolhouse was most often the only real communal property the farmers

possessed, serving as a place for formal education and a site where rural members came together

to decide neighborhood matters. Removing the school from the open-country neighborhood

severed the tie between the school, the family, and the neighborhood. By sending their children

into town, farmers were entrusting them to an arbitrary unit of civil society. One opponent

stated,

> "If they are to benefit the people in the country, [consolidated schools] must be located in
> the country. By voting to consolidate our school into a town we are helping to build up
> the town schools at the expense of the country schools.... The rural schools are just what
> we make them.... They say that the school should be the social center of the
> community.... Where would our social center be if the schools were all located in
> towns?... Why is it that the country school can and does furnish the town school with
> nearly all their best scholars?... The one-room country school explains it. Do you want
> your boy or girl to associate with a street loafer or a street walker?" (Reynolds, 1999, pp.
> 79-80)

Farmers resisted consolidation because it would undermine the existing social relations and the

longer-run sustainability of family farming.

In addressing the class-based nature of the controversy in rural consolidation, Reynolds (1999) acknowledged the dangers of extending neo-Marxist class analysis to midwestern agriculture. However, he maintained, "A place-based class movement is one in which class consciousness and a sense of place (and community) are inextricably entwined and mutually reinforcing" (p. 8). One farmer characterized legislation that required the consolidated schools to be built in towns as "class legislation." He remarked that if country schools were closed and replaced by consolidated schools in towns, farmers' daughters would not be hired for teaching jobs, as was the practice in country schools. Town and city girls would end up doing the teaching and farm girls would end up working in their kitchens. "The issue had been politicized in both class- and place-based terms" (p. 80).

> If anything, class-based antagonisms between farmers and the residents of small towns were the more severe [compared to larger towns]. Farm people did not want to be forced into new communities dominated by those who had abandoned residence in the country—typically wealthy "retired" farmers who retained ownership of farms in the surrounding neighborhoods—and engaged in other business and banking ventures that often exploited those who remained family farmers in the locality. (Reynolds, 1999, pp. 78-79)

Town elites, as well as some wealthier farmers, who were more likely to subscribe to middle-class values, were seeking the aggrandizement of power, not school improvement, in their support for consolidation.

> The country school could be depended upon to reproduce the social relations necessary for the perpetuation of a rural ideology and class structure in which the family farm and the rural neighborhood were the preeminent social units. There was no assurance that his would also be the case in the consolidated school, where children from the farms would mingle and compete with children of town merchants, clerks, and workers and where farm parents had to share power with those who subscribed to different values. (Reynolds, 1999, p. 57)

Reynolds (1999) noted that in the later 20th century, these formerly consolidated small-

town schools were undergoing reconsolidation with other small-town schools. These larger rural

consolidated schools were then being moved back into the open country to avoid the appearance

of favoring one small town over another. Although this more current resistance was still based

on community defense sentiments, it was now shorn of any class basis.

Summary

For further areas of research focus, such as determining the political, economic, or

ideological forces influencing consolidation decisions, the power relationships within the

community and within the closure process, and the effects of consolidation on different segments

of society, researchers largely turned to a critical analytical perspective. In contrast to other

social and political theories oriented toward understanding or explaining society through a purely

observational mode, critical theory's intent was to change society as a whole by engaging in a

critique of domination and power, and, with an eye on the potential for human freedom and

happiness, by promoting a more democratic, and socialist society. Based on the thinking of

Horkheimer, Adorno, Weber, Althusser, and more recently, Habermas, Bourdieu, and arguably

Foucault, critical theory was neo-Marxist, critical, and emancipatory in nature (Bernstein, 1976;

Brookfield, 2005; Sim & Van Loon, 2001).

Critical social theory literature included a number of tenets applicable to a critique and

analysis of late 20th-century school-closure decision making, community reaction, and

consolidation's effect on community. 1. Technical and bureaucratic rationality founded in

positivistic and scientistic thought were overtaking moral and ethical commitment (Apple, 1990,

1995; Brookfield, 2005). 2. Ideological and hegemonic forces, embedded in legitimatory

systems, had led people to become complicit in perpetuating a societal and institutional

organization that often did not function in their best interest, benefiting the few against the well-being of the many (Brookfield, 2005; Eagleton, 1991). 3. Power and knowledge had become increasingly intertwined, with power structures supported by dominant discourses or regimes of truth. Furthermore, as authoritarian power had become partially replaced by self-imposed disciplinary power, power had become omni-present (Brookfield, 2005; Foucault 1977, 1980). 4. The development of authentic, participative, and democratic communication had become threatened by the values of capitalist society and a loss of social solidarity (Brookfield, 2005). 5. Advanced capitalism tended to promote a cascading series of crises: economic, rationality, legitimation, and motivation (Habermas, 1975).

As early as the 1980s, critical issues of educational equity were noted in urban school closures following the decade of decline. Economically advantaged white students and their parents had been the winners, while minority and working-class students and their parents had been the clear losers in school consolidation. Evidence showed that school-closure policies were neither color blind nor free of class inequities (Dean, 1982, 1983; Valencia, 1984). Three of the more expansive studies utilizing a critical theoretical approach included DeYoung and Howley's (1990) assertion that a state legitimation crisis was behind West Virginia's 1990s consolidation push, Carspecken's (1991) evaluation of power as mediated through community-school relations, pedagogic practice, and national education policies during a 1980s working-class occupation of a school proposed for closure in Liverpool, England, and Reynolds' (1999) place-based and class-based analysis of one-room country-school consolidation in 1920s rural Iowa.

Also widely addressed and subjected to intense critique within a critical theoretical framework were the scientific-management, business-oriented approaches to educational decision making and to educational leadership, both generally and specifically within school

consolidation. Through research which turned a skeptical eye to a non-partisan, technical-rational, expert-centered view of decision making that emphasized efficiency and industrial notions within educational change, the industrialized schooling framework, one of the primary catalysts behind more than a half-century of consolidation, was put into dispute (Apple, 1990, 1995; Smyth, 1989b).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE PART 6
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
ROBBINSDALE CASE STUDY

History represents a means of
coming to terms with the past.
David Kyvig and Myron Marty

This expansive review of late 20th-century school consolidation literature was designed with a number of broad goals in mind. By including a focus on research from the 1975 to 1990 time period, the period corresponding to consolidation within the Robbinsdale Area Schools, the review has attempted to: (a) uncover strategies being recommended at the time to address enrollment decline and resulting fiscal crisis; (b) examine concurrent research on the effectiveness (and the unintended effects) of using consolidation as a means of addressing fiscal crisis; (c) survey community reaction to school closures around the nation at the time; (d) discern the prevalent school-closure decision-making processes being advocated; (e) understand the historical roots of the late 20th-century consolidation movement; and (f) identify the analytical tools that have helped frame school consolidation and decision making in larger theoretical constructs, studying how these have been used in various school-closure case studies' analyses.

The purpose of such an in-depth review of literature was to better inform the Robbinsdale case study by viewing it as part of a national predicament, by opening a window onto the ideas and advice that Robbinsdale leaders were likely exposed to at the time, and by considering the Robbinsdale school closures and other late 20th-century consolidation as part of an older historical movement originating from an era in which many of the educational leaders of the 1970s and 1980s grew up and completed their professional formation. Looking at literature from the time period of the case study, rather than focusing solely on the most recent consolidation literature, also helped to avoid the dangers of "presentism" in historical research, through which

interpretation of the past becomes unduly based on present-day ideas and perspectives.   Finally, the review of various theoretical frameworks and their application in previous research offered a basis for interpretation and analysis of the Robbinsdale case study.

As the review has shown, the literature on school consolidation developed around three research interests. One field of study focused on the merits or demerits of consolidation from a mixture of financial and educational quality viewpoints, essentially concentrating on whether consolidation could be used as an effective means for relieving fiscal pressures or improving educational quality. Such research included a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, mostly empirical in nature.

Another area of investigation centered on the specific decision-making processes used in various school districts' consolidation efforts, as well as the public's reaction to resulting school closures. Here, attempts were made to discern an ideal model for selecting the particular buildings to close while mitigating adverse community action. Much of this literature was comprised of opinion and advice based on empirical evidence from particular descriptive case histories, but a smaller number of studies were more generalizable, using statistical analysis across a number of school districts.

A third concentration of study explored school consolidation from historical and theoretical perspectives. Rather than offer specific suggestions or concrete recommendations to educational decision makers, this literature's intent was to place consolidation in larger theoretical constructs, developing historical, social, and political components vital to a deeper understanding of school-closure decision making, community reaction, and consolidation's effect on community.

In exploring the role of traditions, values, culture, and the meaning of school to a

community, including the issue of community identity within consolidation decisions,

researchers largely used a phenomenological theoretical perspective. To determine the political,

economic, or ideological forces influencing consolidation decisions, the power relationships

within the closure process, and the effects of consolidation on different segments of society,

researchers largely turned to a critical analytical perspective. Using an historical critical

framework, researchers also presented ulterior motives to the very beginnings of the

consolidation movement.

The Robbinsdale case study does not pretend to address issues of operational efficiency

or educational quality. Likewise, although it may be considered as a testimonial on how not to

close a school, offering some broad concluding recommendations, it does not attempt to add to

the research on discerning an ideal process for consolidation decisions. The Robbinsdale study is

more aligned with the third concentration of research focus in the current corpus of literature—

exploring consolidation from historical and theoretical perspectives.

The Robbinsdale research project differs from other school-closing studies in its

combination of a number of facets. Although the reviewed literature included numerous case

studies, only a handful of these could be considered as in-depth studies in which the

consolidation process was detailed over a number of years. Fewer still would be considered as

historical research in which data was gathered many years after the actual event. There seemed

to be a notable lack of in-depth historical research on suburban school districts in particular,

although many suburban schools were consolidated during the decade of decline.

While each district in the consolidation literature was unique in some fashion, the

Robbinsdale Area Schools was quite unusual considering that within its overall suburban nature

it contained small-town as well as urban aspects, including a definite east-west socioeconomic

split. The story itself was unparalleled, a story in which, when downsizing from three high schools to two, the superintendent declined to recommend one school for closure with the board then deadlocking on the issue over four months, formally closing all three schools, and finally hiring an arbitration panel to decide which two should reopen. No other research was detected detailing such an explosive high school consolidation process within a single suburban district, with half the district's residents at war with the other half.

The Robbinsdale study also presents a somewhat unusual blend of analytical topics: (a) examination of the political process, (b) evaluation of the strong and continuing community backlash, and (c) reassessment of leadership. For the Robbinsdale Area Schools, such analysis should reflect a sort of "means of coming to terms with the past" (Kyvig & Marty in Butchart, 1986, p. i). For the larger community of educational leaders, the historical and theoretical analytical frameworks within this case study should help inform professional practice.

> "The purpose of theorizing is…to enable us to grasp, understand, and explain—to produce a more adequate knowledge of—the historical world and its processes; and thereby to inform our practice so that we may transform it." (Hall cited by Apple in Carspecken, 1991, p. ix)

Although the Robbinsdale research uses critical theory as an overall interpretive framework, in accord with Foucault's (1980) view on the limits of a global systemic theory which pretends to hold everything in place, to some extent the study also includes a mixture of the various theoretical perspectives reviewed earlier. As Apple (1990) stated, "[In critical scholarship] the 'truth' of something can only be seen through the use of the totality of perspectives one can bring to bear upon it" (p. 131). Bernstein (1976) likewise contended, "Empirical research, interpretation, and critical evaluation dialectically involve each other" (p. xiv).

In examining the political aspects of the Robbinsdale school-closure process, the study

explores the nature of power, focusing on power bases, power base shifts, class interests, and the control of discourse. It attempts to uncover the players, the forces, and the dominant hegemonic ideas involved. The framework used here is squarely within the critical tradition, somewhat in the vein of DeYoung and Howley's (1990) legitimation analysis or Reynolds' (1999) place-based and class-based analysis.

On the other hand, in understanding the Robbinsdale community's strong resistance and the long-lasting community turmoil in which the school closure continued to fester as living history for over 20 years, a phenomenological perspective provides added value, honoring the voices of the study's numerous interview participants. In reassessing leadership, the research draws on a notably detailed decision-making account, including internal administrative and board member correspondence, giving an unprecedented sense of the inner workings of administrative policy during a school-closure process. Here, analysis relies on the views of interview participants as well as on the previous professional empirical research, shedding light on the nature of educational leadership during periods of institutional contraction.

Thus, analysis is constitutive of a number of voices, including previous empirical, phenomenological, and critical consolidation research, as well as the views of interview participants, but all considered through the overarching framework of critical theory. In summary, the Robbinsdale research project is essentially a case study based on an historical reconstruction of events in a school-closure process, using analysis from a theoretical basis to help interpret and inform the historical events. It constitutes an interpretation of the historical through a theoretical lens, combining analysis with storytelling. The story is presented as a social and critical history of struggle within a community, with particular focus on class interests, power, and the control of discourse. The application of critical social and political theory to this

consolidation dilemma will add to the corpus of literature on lessons to be learned from school

closures. More broadly, this study will increase understanding of the local school district

decision-making process.

METHODOLOGY

History means interpretation.
Edward Carr, historian

Data Collection

Using historical research methodology suggestions put forward by Butchart (1986) concerning research into the "nearby history" of local schools, the reconstruction of events surrounding the closure of Robbinsdale High School commenced with a search for local primary archival data, "historians' building material." I began by paying a visit to Dr. Robert Cameron, the Director of Administrative Services for District 281, the Robbinsdale Area Schools. Dr. Cameron was the only cabinet-level administrator involved with the high school closing who was still working for the district. He gave me a large cardboard box from his personal archives, filled with a gold mine of documentation that had been collected during the school-closing process, including newspaper articles from the *Minneapolis Star*, *Minneapolis Tribune*, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, and *North Hennepin Post* newspapers.

The documentation also included official reports to the public from District 281 administrators, district committee reports, district news releases, other official district documents, teachers' union publications, publications from each of the district's three high schools' parent organizations, personal letters, internal documents and memos, and legal briefings and legal decisions related to the process. Much of this information was original, one-of-a-kind information not yet stored in the district archives. After sorting, categorizing, and recording pertinent information on note cards from hundreds of documents, I later turned the material over to the district archives as Dr. Cameron had approved. This initial pot-pourri of original documentation, in addition to providing very useful nuggets of information, also helped

point me down those avenues that would be the most fruitful in my continuing search for data.

I then proceeded to the Hennepin County Library system's Brookdale branch, the only location where the weekly Robbinsdale area community newspaper, the *North Hennepin Post*, was stored on microfiche. I chose this newspaper to research because the district had utilized this particular newspaper for communication with the public. The *North Hennepin Post* had published all of the district's board meeting minutes during the 1980s, and it was the newspaper with the most extensive reporting of district affairs, including a large collection of letters to the editor concerning district matters. I reviewed all issues, cover to cover, of the *North Hennepin Post* from January 1980 through December 1983, a total of four years. I also did some spot checking of the Bloomington and Hopkins local newspapers and reviewed some articles from the *New Hope-Plymouth Post* and the *Plymouth Sun-Sailor* at the Minnesota Historical Society. I photocopied any relevant articles, including all board meeting minutes, ending up with about 400 photocopied sheets, and I again documented pertinent information on note cards.

Next I visited the District 281 archives. After Robbinsdale High School's closure, the archives had preserved issues of the high school's newspaper, the *Robin*, as well as the school's yearbook. I researched issues from the year the school opened and from the three years prior to its closure. Barb Southward, co-director of the archives and an active participant in the school-closing drama, also directed me to what would become an invaluable book on the history of the City of Robbinsdale.

The Armstrong and Cooper High School libraries were next on the list, where I reviewed school newspaper and yearbook information from each school's opening as well as from the four years of the high school closing process. Again, I documented all pertinent information on note cards. Since data was collected over a number of years, I also watched for relevant information

contained in district correspondence to employees through both paper mail and electronic mail.

The review of literature had also yielded important information on national, state, and local

metro area enrollment figures during the 1970s as well as measures undertaken by the state of

Minnesota to address enrollment decline. These were also included as part of data collection.

My original intention had been to contain the historical research primarily to the four

years of the high school closing process. However, as document review progressed, it became

clearer that in order to achieve a fuller understanding of the dissertation focus, some pre-history

to the four years of the school-closing dilemma, including some history of Robbinsdale, the town

in which the school district was born, would be valuable. Here, I primarily relied on the research

of Helen Blodgett (1983), who had written a book on the history of the City of Robbinsdale from

its beginnings in the 1880s through 1983. Blodgett had utilized primary documents from the

Minneapolis Public Library, the Hennepin County Historical Society, and various town historical

societies, as well as accounts from various local newspapers. Due to the thoroughness of her

work, I felt confident in using this secondary source for my research on the birth of the City of

Robbinsdale and the beginnings of the school district. I read her research in its entirety,

recording all applicable information on note cards.

This first phase of my journey through the "nuts and bolts" of historiography proved to

be concurrent with Tuchman's (1998) assessment of historical data research, described as "an

exercise in detective work. It involves logic, intuition, persistence, and common sense" (p. 252).

The historical document research ended up spanning 100 years starting from the very beginnings

of the school district and continuing through the 1983 Minnesota Supreme Court's ruling that

Robbinsdale High School had been lawfully closed. It took me over two years and over 800 note

cards (with an additional 400 bibliographical notation cards) to complete the document-review

portion of the research. Using setting, context, and process codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), note

cards were coded into four chronological sections: (a) pre-history to school closures, (b)

declining enrollment and the beginning of school closures, (c) high school closure process, and

(d) reaction to the high school closure. (Data that appeared more reflective, interpretive, or

analytical in nature were put aside for later coding in the formal data analysis section of the

dissertation.) Information from all 800 note cards was then entered into computer format, from

which a 20-page time line was created (see Appendix A) as an organizational mechanism for

later assistance in presenting my findings in the data section of the dissertation.

After this extensive review of documents, I decided to conduct a set of interviews with

key informants, those who had been active in the school-closing process, including school board

members, district-level administrators, school staff, parent advocates, students, teachers' union

officials, and city officials. Including interviews as part of my data research fulfilled three

objectives: (a) to help fill in the gaps in the documented research and to clarify some historical

data questions raised by the review of documents; (b) to hopefully illicit some interesting

vignettes, helping the story come alive; and (c) to help make sense of the story, through posing

some of the original research questions to participants during the interviews, in order to inform

my own analysis of the historical data.

The list of perspective interview participants was developed from names uncovered

during documentation research. Since most of the perspective participants were no longer

employed by the district or involved in school affairs, I began by talking with district staff,

asking if they knew which of the perspective participants could still be contacted. These

conversations led to the names of additional perspective participants. I then telephoned all

perspective interview participants, and with two exceptions, all those contacted agreed to be

interviewed in person. School board, staff, parent, and student interview participants included

representatives of the various factions within the school-closing predicament. A few participants

were also chosen to give perspectives from before and after this time period. I conducted 37

interview sessions with an average of two hours per session, comprising a total of 41 interview

participants (see Table 3).

Table 3

Categorization and Number of Interview Participants

Category of interview participants	Number of participants
School board members	8
District administration (superintendents and cabinet members)	5
School staff	11
Parents	11
Students	6
Teachers' union officials	3
Robbinsdale city officials (mayors and council members)	6
Newspaper reporters	2

(Total adds to more than 41 due to some interview
participants' inclusion in more than one category.)

Interview participants included (in alphabetical order) Bill Blonigan, Thomas Bollin, Willis

Boynton, Corinne Christensen, Gary DeFrance, Bill Fuhrmann, Paul Genadek, Gretchen Heath,

Anne Marie Hennen, Mike Holtz, Gary Joselyn, Alisa Lange, Harvey Lange, Joann Lange, Gary

Laurant, John Lloyd, Neil Luebke, Stan Mack, Myrna Marofsky, Elizabeth Miller, Keith Moberg,

Barbara Nemer, Irv Nerdahl, Barry Noack, Bruce Nolte, Shirley Nygaard, Elizabeth Olson, Carol

Peterson, Sandra Peterson, Elizabeth Reid, Bernard Reisberg, Ann Rest, Heather Robb McCollor,

Joy Robb, Jon Rondestvedt, Barbara Southward, David Southward, Thomas Walerius, Chuck

Webber, Fred Webber, and Susan Webber.

Most interviews were conducted at the participants' homes or places of employment,

although some requested to meet in a more public space, such as a coffee shop. All interview

participants agreed that they could be quoted in the dissertation, that a full transcript of their

interviews would not be included in the dissertation, and that the interview could be conducted

without recording device. I developed a list of questions to guide the interviews (see Appendices

B and C). However, due to the varying range of knowledge that interviewees possessed on the

school closing, not all interviewees were asked every question and some impromptu and follow-

up questions were also used. The interviews followed a qualitative format, in which

> "the interviewer never supplies and predetermines the phrases or categories that must be
> used by respondents to express themselves as is the case in fixed-response questionnaires.
> The purpose of qualitative interviewing is to capture how those being interviewed view
> their world, to learn *their* terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of
> *their* individual perceptions and experiences…The fundamental principle of qualitative
> interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express *their own*
> understanding in their own terms." (Patton cited in Alsbury & Shaw, 2005, p. 110)

Interview notes were taken by hand and then retyped into computer format soon after.

The interviews were later coded. Some data were placed into appropriate chronological sections

of historical data. Other data, being more reflective, interpretive, or analytical in nature, were

put aside for later coding in the data analysis section of the dissertation. It took over four months

to complete this portion of the research.

In addition to archival data and interviews, I also included some observation field notes to help round out my data collection. After personally touring each of the three buildings that had housed the district's three high schools in 1982, I attended an open house at a fourth building, the original old Robbinsdale High School building, which had later housed Robbinsdale Junior High and various district magnet programs. Following a prolonged controversy with Robbinsdale city officials, who had continually blocked any attempt by the district to dispose of the property after the 1982 closure of the new Robbinsdale High, the district had finally come to an agreement with the city to sell the old Robbinsdale High building and its land to residential developers.

Before demolition, the district and the city invited the community to an open house at the old Robbinsdale High building, to celebrate the nearly 70 years of service it had rendered to the education of area residents, the land having lodged various school buildings for over 120 years. Hundreds of former students attended the open house, from teenagers to senior citizens, some using walkers and oxygen breathing equipment, roaming through old hallways and reminiscing, "This was typing." "The band room was over there." "We used to have dances in here." "I wish they wouldn't tear it down. I wish they'd just leave it." The open house concluded with speeches by alumni, city officials, school board members, and district administrators. Observing community members' on-site reactions and listening to their memories provided an additional perspective not attainable from document research or personal in-home interviews. It was an invaluable affective experience which helped contextualize my prior research as I shifted into the actual writing of the data section of the dissertation.

In writing the data section of the dissertation, I was now able to draw on the three major

categories of qualitative research data as delineated by Bogdan and Biklen (1992): document research, interview transcripts, and observation field notes. The data section of the dissertation essentially consists of an historical reconstruction of the Robbinsdale High School closure, including what led up to the closure and what occurred in its aftermath. I chose an overlapping chronological time method to present the data, and I included quotes from primary source documents and quotes from interview participants as they remembered the events. Considered as part of my personal research data, quotes from interview participants were not formally cited in text within the data section. However, in accord with participants' permission, many quotes were attributed by name or position.

I divided the data section, at over 200 pages in length, into 10 separate parts and various subsections, each representing a different stage in the story's development. Titles and headings incorporated actual words from actors in the story. Although it may seem at first glance that using primary historical documents to re-live an historical event should be considered as a fairly straight-forward, unbiased, and fact-based endeavor, many historical research methodologists, including Butchart (1986), have pointed out that history is something that is "constructed" through (a) the use of only that evidence which is available, (b) the researcher's selection of the most important evidence from among the vast quantities of available evidence, and (c) the researcher's overall point of view. "'[History] is something that is done, that is constructed, rather than an inert body of data that lies scattered through the archives'" (Davidson & Lytle cited in Butchart, 1986, p. 3). Thus, even prior to data analysis, during data collection and data presentation, the researcher is set squarely in an interpretive mode.

As Butchart (1986) pointed out, "History is, roughly speaking, a form of collective memory. Both history and our personal memories rely inevitably on interpretation.... It is

impossible to tell a story 'as it was.' We will always interpret as well" (pp. 3-4). In a more direct

fashion, historian Edward Carr (1961), in his lively essay *What is History?*, asserted that "this

element of interpretation enters into every fact of history" (p. 11). In practice, interpretation is a

necessary component of historical research fact-finding, in that "a fact is like a sack—it won't

stand up till you've put something in it" (p. 9). The challenge in presenting the historical data

was to find a balance between fact and interpretation, to find some middle ground between

Carr's explanation of the two views of historical research as either (a) a hard core of facts with

the surrounding pulp of disputable interpretation, or (b) a hard core of interpretation surrounded

by a pulp of disputable facts. It required some caution on my part to achieve an appropriate

balance between fact and interpretation in my reconstruction of the story of the closure of

Robbinsdale High School.

Analysis of Data

Historical research can be thought of, roughly speaking, as including two basic elements,

the "what" and, to varying degrees, the "why." In the presentation of my research, these were

divided into separate sections, "data" and "data analysis." The data section related what

happened, reproducing the concrete events in the story of Robbinsdale High's closure. The data

analysis section, on the other hand, discussed how (and why) it all came about, making sense of

the collected historical material. Concurrent with qualitative research methodologies, the goal of

the data analysis section was to bring about an increased understanding of my topic, shedding

light on and illuminating the historical data. Because my research would be considered an

historical organizational case study, analysis focused on the complexities and difficulties

involved with this one particular school closure. Although, as previously discussed, a layer of

veiled interpretation exists even within the data section, the bulk of overt interpretation was saved for the data analysis section.

Keeping the original research questions in mind, data analysis began, to some extent, even during data collection. I was conscious of and looked for what could be considered more "interpretive" data during the review of documents, and I listened for the same during the personal interviews. These data primarily included community members' assessments of what was going wrong as the process was unfolding (mostly found in the document research), or their later reflections on what had gone wrong (mostly found in the personal interviews). Although a portion of these data were included as part of the historical account, most were saved for later incorporation and presentation in the data analysis section.

As data collection progressed further, using suggestions from Bogdan and Biklen (1992), I began to generate sporadic ideas for possible use in the data analysis section, writing "observer comments" and "one-page memos" to myself about what I was learning, what answers seemed to be emerging, and how these related to larger theoretical issues. I tried out some ideas and themes with interview participants. I speculated with colleagues, especially those that had lived through the school closure. I played with metaphors, developed analogies, created tables, drew diagrams, and mulled over various dissertation titles. All interpretive data and personal reflections were recorded on note cards for later deliberation during formal data analysis, once the historical data section of the dissertation was complete.

Upon completion of the historical data section, I began formal data analysis. I revisited data from the historical data section (the story), and I also began working with those data previously regarded as more interpretive and not included in the historical data section. This process involved organizing and reorganizing all data, breaking them into manageable units,

synthesizing them, and, above all, searching for patterns. For example, at this stage, the

interviews were further reexamined and recoded according to participants' definitions of the

other factions in the school-closing process. Previously recorded personal reflections were

reviewed, some discarded, and some modified.

Consistent with qualitative research methods, my data analysis followed a more inductive

pattern, in that I was not searching for evidence to prove (or disprove) a hypothesis already held

before data collection. Explanations and interpretations were built as the particulars of the data

were grouped together. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described this inductive analytical approach

using the following artistic metaphor. "You are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you

already know. You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the

parts" (p. 32). Specifically addressing historical research, yet drawing on scientific thought, Carr

(1961) offered an additional perspective on data analysis.

> A recent popular writer, speaking of the achievements of science, refers graphically to the
> processes of the human mind which, "rummaging in the ragbag of observed 'facts,'
> selects, pieces, and patterns the *relevant* observed facts together, rejecting the *irrelevant*,
> until it has sewn together a logical and rational quilt of 'knowledge.'" With some
> qualification as to the dangers of undue subjectivism, I should accept that as a picture of
> the way in which the mind of the historian works. (Paul cited in Carr, 1961, p. 136)

My experience with data analysis shared aspects of both these explanations, and in the end, I

found myself drawing on three sources of support to assist in my ragbag rummaging and my

picture-constructing endeavors. The three sources of inspiration which informed my data

analysis, all somewhat intertwined, included (a) my own view, (b) thoughts of interview

participants, and (c) theoretical perspectives, including previous consolidation research.

In qualitative research, the researcher's insight becomes a key instrument for analysis.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) explained that analysis does not only rise from the data, it also arises

from "the perspectives the researcher holds. For it is social values and ways of making sense of

the world that can influence which processes, activities, events, and perspectives researchers consider important enough to code" (p. 172). My own views of the school closure were likely influenced by the following aspects of my personal life-story. My father and his siblings all attended Robbinsdale High School. I grew up in a service-oriented family as an American in West Africa, where issues of class, race, and power were particularly magnified—my sympathies lying mostly with the underdogs. I attended smaller schools throughout my elementary and high school education. I also began my educational career teaching on the economically disadvantaged side of the Robbinsdale Area Schools. However, as a counterbalance to these components of my background, I majored in classical economic theory during college, and the bulk of my educational career has been spent teaching in the upper socioeconomic side of the Robbinsdale Area Schools. In addition to being influenced by my personal background, my personal perspectives were also undoubtedly colored by dialogue with interview participants and by the various theoretical works I was examining.

Using key informants to help make meaning out of data is another important component of qualitative research analysis and of historiography in particular. Tuchman (1998) noted, "Sometimes one can discern meanings—or make historical generalizations—only with the help of a knowledgeable informant, a historical figure who has been in a position to gather reliable information" (p. 236). In my case, I identified and interviewed 41 living historical informants, some more knowledgeable than others, but all adding something to data analysis. Not only was I interested in the different ways informants would make sense out of the school closure, I also tried to ascertain common ways of thinking about the school closure that were shared by various groups of interview participants. I was also genuinely interested in how they would answer some of my initial research questions, such as, "What made this high school closure such a festering

issue in the district over so many years?" A few interviewees had obviously pondered a number of these same questions over time, creating their own mini-theses in the process. One informant even put pen to paper in responding to these deeper and broader questions, offering an added written perspective to compliment the oral interview. Thus, in addition to adding to my data base, some interview participants became important contributors to data analysis itself.

Theoretical perspectives were my third source of inspiration in interpreting the historical data. Tuchman (1998) stated, "Whether done by social scientists or by historians, historical work requires a point of view. A point of view necessarily includes an interpretive framework that implicitly contains some notion of the 'meaning of history'" (p. 225). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described a theoretical orientation as "a way of looking at the world, the assumptions people have about what is important, and what makes the world work" (p. 33). Theory ended up being an essential tool in my data analysis, helping to shed light on and interpret the historical data, explaining the events that took place and the decisions made during the process.

The theoretical works highlighted in the dissertation were chosen as themes and concepts began to emerge from the historical data, and as warranted by their usefulness in interpreting the historical events. This was concurrent with Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) reflection that zeroing-in on a definitive theoretical framework and reviewing substantive literature early on, even prior to data collection, could be overly and unduly influential in determining theme and focus, thus curtailing inductive analysis, one of the important advantages of a qualitative approach to research. Among the theoretical orientations that were considered along the way as having potential to form the basis for my data analysis were empiricism, phenomenology, postmodernism, and neo-Marxism.

Empiricism was rejected early on in my research. The facts did not seem to "speak for

themselves" in this case study. On the contrary, the call by various parties within the school

district to simply base the school closure on "facts" actually seemed to be an exacerbating factor

in the process. Although some quantitative data on income and housing were used to understand

the conflict, rigorous statistical analysis did not lend itself well to a qualitative historical research

project focused on social and political concerns.   As Apple (1990) noted, "The atomistic,

positivistic, and strict empiricist frame of mind so prevalent in our thought...has difficulty with

the critically oriented notion of the necessity of a plurality of, and conflict about, ways of looking

at the world" (p. 131).

Phenomenology helped construct an understanding of how the various communities and

high schools viewed each other. As Peshkin's (1982) study of rural school consolidation showed,

> There is virtually no locale so small that it lacks a history distinguishing it from other locales that seem to look just like it. Its distinctiveness (no matter if it exists only in the eyes of the residents) sets it apart from others, makes it conscious of and sensitive to its boundaries, and gives rise to a feeling of inside-outside and of we-they. (p. 12)

Phenomenology was not particularly useful, however, in informing some of the deeper research

questions, such as analyzing the dominant hegemonic ideas and various bases of power at play.

Descriptive phenomenological analysis, while important, "inclines us to forget that there *are*

objective institutions and structures 'out there' that have power, that can control our lives and our

very perceptions" (Apple, 1990, p. 140). As Bernstein (1976) put it, "Phenomenology leaves us

impotent in the face of the concrete historical determinations of social and political reality" (p.

178). Furthermore, phenomenology lacked anything that could serve as a basis for critical

evaluative judgments.

Postmodernism presented some enticing features, especially its emphasis on multiple

relations of power and multi-vocality of texts, subject to multiple readings and meanings. But

postmodernism lacked the component of human agency that seemed important to interpreting

this school closure. In addition, as Apple (1995) contended, "posties" have underestimated both the very powerful structural dynamics in which we participate as well as the power of historical movements and historical agents, causing a worrisome situation in which "issues of class have been marginalized in critical work on education" (p. xi).

The theoretical perspective that ended up showing the most promise for data analysis was found in the arena of neo-Marxism, specifically critical theory. Carr (1961) wrote, "History is a process of struggle in which results, whether we judge them good or bad, are achieved by some groups directly or indirectly—and more often directly than indirectly—at the expense of others. The losers pay. Suffering is indigenous in history" (p. 102). Critical theory, with its assertion that social relations are influenced by power relations, and its portrayal of the intersection of social structure and human agency, seemed best suited to address this aspect of history. Additionally, as Apple (1990) explained,

> A critical viewpoint usually sees any object "relationally"…. First, any subject matter under investigation must be seen in relation to its historical roots—how it evolved, from what conditions it arose, etc.—and its latent contradictions and tendencies in the future…. Second, anything being examined is defined not only by its obvious characteristics, but by its less overt ties to other factors. It *is* these ties or relationships that make the subject what it is and give it its primary meanings. (p. 132)

As such, critical theory was the most useful in informing the deeper research questions, such as why this school closure became such a longstanding issue within the district.

Although critical theory was the predominant analytical viewpoint utilized, because I also drew to a lesser extent on the works of some political or social theorists and the findings of some consolidation researchers who operated on the fringes or outside the bounds of critical theory, in some ways my theoretical perspective could perhaps better be described as bordering on a sort of "eclecticism," as described by Tuchman (1998), in which historians use a "revealing montage" of various theoretical approaches to interpret their historical work. As Bernstein (1976) argued,

"An adequate, comprehensive political and social theory must be at once empirical, interpretative, and critical" (p. xiv).

I ended up using three foci in my data analysis: (a) exploring the notion of power and its shifting nature throughout the changing discourse; (b) attempting to resolve the question of what made this such a long-lasting, festering issue for the district; and (c) analyzing leadership and decision making during the school-closure process. Data analysis was interwoven throughout the data section in a series of short "critical discussion" pieces placed at the end of each part of the story, with a larger summarizing analytical portion following the data section.

The goal of my analysis was not to pass judgment, nor to argue some central thesis, but rather to help achieve a better understanding of this school closure, and, in the process, to look for practical implications to guide future action. Although these may not assure that future choices will be any easier, hopefully they will help make the process of reaching such difficult decisions more reflective and better informed. I also hoped that a secondary outcome of my data analysis, with the luxury of a nearly thirty-year settling period for community retrospection, would be to help the Robbinsdale Area Schools achieve some measure of peace, closure, or resolution to a most vexing issue in its history.

Using the past to guide us in the present and using our vantage point of the present to help in understanding our past are perhaps the overarching goals of historical research. Through my research and analysis, I found that there exists a sort of symbiotic relationship between past and present, with the historian-interpreter in the center of it all. As Carr (1961) concluded, "The past is intelligible to us only in the light of the present; and we can fully understand the present only in the light of the past. To enable [us] to understand the society of the past and to increase [our] mastery over the society of the present is the dual function of history" (p. 69).

DATA PART 1
PROLOGUE

People make their own history,
but not under conditions of their own choosing.
Karl Marx

For the Robbinsdale Area Schools, the culminating effects of a mid-century baby-boom wave followed by the ripples of a baby bust, a demographic event washing through the grand majority of American school districts, defined the decade preceding the 1982 closure of Robbinsdale High. National school-age population peaked in the 1971-1972 school year and dropped by 10 percent throughout the 1970s (Bishop, 1979). In Minnesota, the student enrollment peak and subsequent decline mirrored the national trend. However, those inner-ring suburban districts, such as the Robbinsdale Area Schools, that had recorded an above-average increase in enrollment during the 1950s and 1960s found themselves in accelerated decline during the 1970s. Robbinsdale registered an enrollment of over 28,000 at the beginning of the 1970s but ended the decade with about 17,000 students, a nearly 40 percent reduction.

For school administrative bodies, the challenge of declining enrollment was compounded by a period of high inflation coupled with a suspicion of governmental institutions in general. At the start of the 1970s, some viewed declining enrollment as just another management issue for school district leadership, whose competencies, acquired during periods of growth, could be transposed to deal with decline (Eisenberger, 1974). As the decade wore on, however, management principles used during growth seemed increasingly incompatible with the new era of decline. Dealing with shrinking enrollments and budgets created winners and losers. Questions of equity and entitlement arose (Boyd, 1983). Choices had to be made over whether downsizing would be undertaken equitably or efficiently, uniformly or differentially, in a

dispersed or concentrated manner.

Foremost among such difficult decisions involved the issue of addressing fiscal constraint through the closure and consolidation of school buildings. As Ward and Rink (1992) stated, "Few public policy issues touch the heart of a community more than the loss of the local public school through reorganization or consolidation of school districts" (p. 11). Advocates of consolidation believed larger schools would provide equivalent education at cheaper cost, or at least better education at equivalent cost, maybe even improving both efficiency and educational quality (Sher & Tompkins, 1977).

Critics of consolidation, on the other hand, questioned the claims of both economic savings and educational improvement, maintaining smaller was the ideal school size. In addition, they argued, local communities were tied to their cultures, their children, and their schools, and as such, the community school represented autonomy, vitality, local control, tradition, and identity. "'When a school closes, a community loses a part of its soul'" (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005, p. 115), stated one superintendent. In this view, the loss of the local school would be detrimental to community spirit, social cohesion, and community identity, resulting, furthermore, in increased community economic decay. Stakeholders wished to avoid this at all costs.

Nevertheless, in the 1970s, during the first eight years of enrollment decline, one third of schools were closed nationwide (DeYoung & Howley, 1990) with further consolidation continuing into the 1980s. For some, these school closures raised important questions about power and education, schools and society, and the political and ideological functions of schools. What social, political, economic, cultural, and ideological forces were at play in consolidation decisions? How appropriate was it to close schools as a means of resolving financial problems?

Surveying the scene, critical educational thinkers such as Michael Apple (in Carspecken, 1991)

later reflected,

> Education has been subject to immense fiscal pressures. Schools have been closed and
> consolidated, and have had their budgets squeezed mercilessly by a rapidly centralizing
> authority that cares more for the bottom line and the use of the school in meeting only the
> needs established by business and industry than it does about the lives, hopes, and dreams
> of the communities, students, and teachers who now inhabit these schools.
>   What happens when these ideological and fiscal pressures actually intervene at
> the level of the daily lives of schools? When a school is about to be closed, does the
> community sit back and passively acquiesce, knowing that "nothing can be done"? (p. ix)

The current research project attempts to ponder such questions by presenting a

descriptive historical reconstruction of events from the suburban, midwestern Robbinsdale Area

Schools during a 1980 to 1982 decision-making process leading to the closure of one of the

district's three high schools. Following the district's expansion from a first-ring suburbia with

small-town roots to include further westward second-ring additions, this school-closing dilemma

offered fertile ground for a conflict pitting the old middle and blue collar classes on the district's

east side against the new middle, upper middle, and professional classes on the west side.

History, tradition, community identity, and community bonds locked horns with modernity, as

educational, cultural and class issues, as well as administrative missteps, including participative

democracy run amok, all intertwined during the ensuing battle over which high school to close.

Although all sides placed great faith in scientific, neutral, factual, and objective outlooks during

the school-closing process, it seemed impossible for these to calm the underlying forces.

This high school closure dilemma represented a nexus where specific class and related

educational issues all converged. The historical account aspires to dramatize this conflict,

incorporating previous research on school consolidation as well as the insights of various social

and political theorists, including critical theory, to highlight the story's complex dynamics,

deconstruct its ideological aspects, and demystify the inherent power situation. At its base, it

might be argued that the eventual closure of Robbinsdale High primarily involved economic and political power, revealing a story of how the new middle class triumphed over the old middle class, a story of how a perceived injustice, one based on power and privilege, left lasting scars on a community. On another level, however, the closure seemed to be more a testimonial of how all actors had succumbed to an ideology of economic efficiency, one elevated to mythical status, acting as a hegemonic force.

Separated into 10 parts, narrative develops the different phases constituting the story of Robbinsdale High. The current section offers an overview of the study, setting it within a national historical context. The second section comprises a short history of the school district from its birth over 100 years ago to its apex in the 1970s, concluding with a phenomenological portrait of the three high schools—Robbinsdale, Cooper, and Armstrong—at the height of enrollment. In the third part, the district begins closing elementary and junior high schools, and community coalitions start to form as the district determines one of the three high schools should be selected for closure in the near future. The next three parts detail administrative, school board, and community action during the high school closure selection process while the ensuing two sections concern the fallout from the school board's decision to close Robbinsdale High. The last two parts feature efforts to appease Robbinsdale residents, including the eventual reopening of the building as Robbinsdale Middle School over 20 years later.

Research was compiled from the three major categories of qualitative inquiry—document research, interview transcripts, and observation field notes. Written documentation recovered from the historical time period included official district documents, publications from the teachers' union and the parent organizations, personal letters and internal administrative correspondence, legal briefings and decisions, community and high school newspapers, high

school yearbooks, state documents, and information gleaned from a review of school-closure literature. The story also includes information from over 40 interviews with key informants who were active in the school-closure process. Conducted over 20 years after the high school's closure, these interviews incorporated the views of school board members, district-level administrators, school staff, parent advocates, students, teachers' union officials, and city officials.

A series of "critical discussion" pieces has been placed at the end of each part of the story, serving as a sort of analytical mapping process. As the events unfold, this discussion attempts to illustrate: (a) the shifting bases of power; (b) the changing, competing, and dominant discourses; (c) the diverging venues and sources for decision-making; and (d) the cascading series of micro-level Habermasian crises (Habermas, 1975; Smyth, 1989b). The discussion also gives voice to the interview participants, sometimes within a descriptive phenomenological sense, but mostly within a critical framework.

In essence, the Robbinsdale research project represents a case study based on an historical reconstruction of events in a school-closure process, using analysis from a theoretical basis to help interpret and shed light on the historical events. It constitutes an interpretation of the historical through a theoretical lens, combining analysis with storytelling. The story of this traumatic period captured my imagination and led me to document the history of a high school closure and to analyze the event and its aftermath as a social and critical history of struggle within a community, with particular focus on class interests, power, and the control of discourse.

DATA PART 2
BUILDING A SCHOOL DISTRICT:
ROBBINSDALE AND DISTRICT 281

Without schools you don't have anything.
Robbinsdale resident

Pure Air, Pure Water, and Schools Second to None

Local legends report that in 1887, Andrew B. Robbins, a Minnesota state senator from a

transplanted eastern business family, was passing by train through the countryside a few miles

northwest of Minneapolis. According to the Robbinsdale town historian,

> Robbins was so pleased with the beauty of this part of the country that he could not get
> the memory out of his mind. He saw that because of its proximity to Minneapolis, and its
> many natural advantages, scenic and otherwise, it could become the best residential
> section in the Northwest. So he bought 90 acres of land...and proceeded to plat what he
> called Robbinsdale Park, planning to make it the site of a suburban town such as is found
> close to the larger cites of the East. He was concerned with everything connected with
> the advancement of the village. (Blodgett, 1983, p. 13)

There already existed in the area a small, one-room school house, built some 22 years earlier on

the Stillman Farm in what was known as Crystal Lake Township in School District 24.

> The school was a focal point for grange meetings, spelling bees, Singing School, Sunday
> School and town meetings and elections. School was held off and on during the year
> when the children were not needed to work in the fields. Often school was closed
> because there was no wood for the stove or when there was an epidemic of measles or
> diphtheria. (Blodgett, 1983, p. 12)

Early support for education, however, was evident in Crystal Lake Township. In the year of Mr.

Robbins' arrival, as a result of a tramp breaking into the school house and stealing the teacher's

watch, Mr. and Mrs. Stillman canvassed the area for money and presented the teacher with a gold

watch.

Three years after Mr. Robbins' arrival, in 1890, the school board of District 24 authorized

raising $10,000 in taxes for a new school building to be built in the Robbinsdale Park area of

Crystal Township and to be named the Parker School after Alfred Parker, one of the earliest

settlers in the area. The report of Hennepin County described the two and one-half story building

as

> "one of the finest school buildings in the state....   A brick building, with stone basement
> and trim, elegant in design, convenient in arrangement, supplied with all modern
> equipment, consists of eight rooms—four large school rooms, besides cloak rooms,
> office, and so on—exquisitely finished in oak. The basement contains the gymnasium
> and furnace room. It is well graded and will probably become one of the State High
> Schools within the next year." (Blodgett, 1983, p. 24)

Mr. Robbins was interested in attracting Minneapolis residents to Robbinsdale Park, but

he was unable to convince the Minneapolis Street Railway Company to extend its lines to the

area. So he formed his own company, built his own rails to match those of Minneapolis, and

opened for business with horse cars on June 1, 1891. Residents would take the Robbinsdale line

to its end and then transfer to the Minneapolis line. Robbinsdale was finally organized as a

village in a special election in 1893, when the people voted unanimously to dissolve the Village

of Crystal and the name "Robbinsdale" was made official. In the same year, an advertisement in

the weekly paper, *Picturesque Robbinsdale*, read,

> "To Shrewd Investors
> who desire a Suburban Home
> Either for a Residence or for Speculation
> One which has the advantages of
> PURE AIR, PURE WATER, FINE DRIVEWAYS
> FINE LAKES, AND BEAUTIFUL SCENERY
> GRADE SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, STREET CAR LINE
> Making direct connection on Hennepin Avenue
> Call on Alfred Parker, Robbinsdale." (Blodgett, 1983, p. 28)

The Village of Robbinsdale made many advances in the next 15 years. Residents

approved an electric line for the street car line, hired the first policeman, held fundraisers to pay

four dollars a month in salary for the librarian of the newly formed library, hired street lamp

lighters, formed a baseball team, and acquired a principal for Parker School who would later

become governor of Minnesota. In 1911, with a population of 765, Robbinsdale residents marched with banners and a float in the Minneapolis Industrial Parade. "Robbinsdale, Best Suburb of Homes, Schools Second to None, Come Out To See Our Lakes, Purest Water and Lots of Fresh Air" (Blodgett, 1983, p. 42). An advertising booklet in the same year described the village.

> "The little village has an electric light system which includes nearly all residences as well as the stores and provides arc lights for the streets. There is a village hall at which public meetings are held and entertainments frequently given. A large park, baseball grounds, bathing beach, pleasure boating and fine fishing are literally 'right in the town.' There is telephone and telegraph service, carrier postal delivery and, in fact, all the conveniences that are attainable in the city." (Blodgett, 1983, p. 41)

By 1913, Parker School had 200 students and a shortage of space. Bonds in the amount of $14,000 were issued to add four rooms to the front of the building, the name was changed to Robbinsdale Public School, and one of the state's first parent-teacher organizations was formed.

The next 20 years would see even further improvements to life in the Village of Robbinsdale. The village acquired new through street-car service from downtown Minneapolis to Robbinsdale in 30 minutes, opened the Robbinsdale library, built the Masonic Temple, purchased the first real fire engine, and boasted a population of 4,427. A 1922 community newspaper described a few of Robbinsdale's attributes.

> "Progressive community spirit, wide awake commercial club, thriving religious institutions, finest school in the state...best water (by analysis) in the state, thirty-minute car service, broad level streets, two miles of paving, four splendid lakes within or adjacent to its boarders, no palaces, no hovels." (Blodgett, 1983, p. 52)

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the village built the first high school (next to the old Parker School), celebrated the first annual Good Will Day, (to later become Whiz Bang Days), built the first water tower connected to its own wells, (Minneapolis city water proved to be unsatisfying), and on December 8, 1938, the village became the City of Robbinsdale. In

1940, Victory Memorial Hospital opened, later renamed North Memorial Hospital. Over the previous 50 years, Andrew Robbins' vision of Robbinsdale Park had grown into a city with a hospital, a downtown, a grade school, and a high school. A population of 6,018 independently-minded residents was opposed to annexation with Minneapolis and had defeated the proposal eight times.

Nest Building: Robins, Hawks, and Falcons

The Best Investment Robbinsdale Ever Made: Robbinsdale High School, 1936

Parker School, renamed Robbinsdale Public School, had never expanded beyond eighth grade. Robbinsdale and other District 24 students who wished to attend high school would take the street car to Minneapolis high schools. In 1935, the federal government under the Public Works Administration program donated $135,000 to build a high school. With this infusion of federal dollars, in addition to the $124,000 voted by district taxpayers, ground was broken on the new school building in March of 1936. Members of the school board during construction included Mrs. Edith Robbins Daniel, daughter of the founder of Robbinsdale, Andrew B. Robbins. Built 30 feet away from Parker School on 42nd and Regent Avenues, Robbinsdale High School (RHS) opened on September 11 of 1936, and a dedication ceremony was held later in May. "Comments during the years that followed proved the wisdom of the investment, called by many the 'best investment Robbinsdale ever made'" (Blodgett, 1983, p. 65). A former student recalled,

> When that facility at 42nd and Regent was brand spanking new, it was something to behold. The gloss on the long corridors on the first and second level as the light reflected off it, the huge study hall right above the main entrance, the spacious basketball floor that housed so many activities, including the prom and gala homecoming celebrations, to say nothing of class plays and Red's famous all-school boxing tourney. And the bike rack out back by the community room, in the days when boys wore clips on their trouser legs to

keep 'em from winding around the chain, no chain guards then. (Bork, 1981b)

New Traditions: The New Robbinsdale High School, 1956

Student enrollment in the Robbinsdale district stood at 2,627 by the end of World War II. It would more than triple over the next 10 years. During the 1940s, the district opened Lee Elementary School in Robbinsdale, and the district's geographic boundaries were extended significantly when one third of Brooklyn Center (Twin Lake Elementary), two thirds of Golden Valley (Oak Grove Elementary), and the New Hope area were all taken into the district. Further expansion occurred in the 1950s as the Medicine Lake area joined the district, and School District 27, (including Lincoln Elementary and Thorson Elementary), was assigned to the district by dissolution and annexation proceedings (*A brief history of Robbinsdale*, 1997). Because of overcrowding in the district's only high school, Robbinsdale High, in 1954 students began attending school in two shifts. Ninth through twelfth grades went to school in the morning and seventh and eighth grades used the building in the afternoon. By 1955, district enrollment stood at 9,410 and a new high school was under construction. The school district had originally considered constructing the new high school on 40 acres bordering Winnetka Avenue, considerably to the west of Robbinsdale, "but there was no water and no sewer out there," retired teacher Irv Nerdahl recalled. Instead, the district purchased 15 acres from the City of Robbinsdale for $50,000 on the west side of town. The district's new high school would remain in Robbinsdale.

In 1956, the building which had housed Robbinsdale High over the past 20 years became Robbinsdale Junior High School (RJHS), and Robbinsdale Senior High moved into the newly constructed building just a few blocks away. The yearbook described the birth of the new high

school.

> Our new school began as a hope in the minds of the students, teachers, and our school board of Robbinsdale. It then became a plan with the help of the architects...and was finally born on May 1, 1955. It grew and it grew, and it grew, until at last on September 5, 1956, it was ready to meet the 2,000 students who would attend classes within its walls.... Our building is young. It is itself new, and in it new traditions will be established. The life of our new Robbinsdale High School has just begun, and its future is yet to come. (*Robin*, 1957, p. 7)

"Robbinsdale High was the newest building in the area—a beautiful school. E. J. [the superintendent] used to catch hell for building it too nice. It was one heck of a building—the foyer all terrazzo, granite columns," recalled Nerdahl. Harvey Lange, a future Robbinsdale mayor, and his wife Joann moved to the district the year the new RHS opened. They bought a house close to RHS. Mrs. Lange remembered,

> It was pretty exciting for Robbinsdale to open that big, new high school. People would say, "Have you seen the money that went into that thing?" They were proud to have a school like that in their midst…. [At the open house,] we oohed and ahhed at the wonderful auditorium that we'd spent all this money on…. We'd sit on our lawn and [the high school band] would march by—we delighted in that.

The following year the school district's number was changed from Independent School District 24 to Independent School District 281.

"If Robbinsdale had not had a football team, nobody would know where Robbinsdale was," claimed former, long-time football coach Irv Nerdahl. The first Robbinsdale football team completed an undefeated season in 1936 and the *Minneapolis Tribune* voted it as the state's outstanding team (Froom, 2004). Nerdahl was hired as head football coach in 1942, and during the 31 years he coached the Robbinsdale Robins the team counted 174 wins, 64 losses, 11 ties, two state titles, 11 conference or division championships, and strong community support.

"The football games were a big deal, a community effort. That's what you did. You went down for the football game," said Joann Lange. Robin Field, somewhat behind the old high

school, included seating for about 5,000 spectators, but often 10,000 would attend the games. "When they beat Edina at the old football field it was standing room only—just huge," commented former RHS teacher Carol Peterson, recalling the Robins' rivalry with Minneapolis' wealthiest suburb, Edina. Traffic before a game was bottle-necked, with cars lined up for blocks. "People would start coming before 5:00 so they'd find a place to sit for the 7:30 game. If you wanted to park your car, you'd have to park it at least an hour before hand," stated Nerdahl. There were permanent stands on the west side, and moveable bleachers on the guest side. Lights were added to Robin Field in 1947. Robin Field was in a low-lying area, so a pumping system was used to evacuate water from the field after heavy rainfall. The water would pool four feet deep at times.

In 1961, a new football field was built on the south end of the new high school. Later named Mielke Field after long time Robbinsdale High principal, Milo Mielke, it was the nicest field in the suburbs. "The opening of Mielke Field was a major event. There were stands on both sides—a place for graduation events," said Peterson. "We'd have to put in an extra 1,000 seats of moveable bleachers when we played Edina in the late 1960s. Edina is populated with all the sports notables," recalled Nerdahl. After Robbinsdale won the state football championship of 1960-61, the Robbinsdale community sent Mr. Nerdahl and his wife to California to watch the University of Minnesota football team compete in the Rose Bowl. The team's roster included a number of RHS graduates.

A Modern Miracle: Cooper High School, 1964

By 1960 the district included all or parts of seven municipalities. Having pushed westward an additional six miles beyond the City of Robbinsdale, the district measured over

eight miles from east to west, and over five miles from north to south, encompassing over 32 total square miles. Former administrator Willis Boynton recalled the early 60s. "We couldn't build schools fast enough.... We'd have 35 to 40 students in a class." Nerdahl commented, "The growth in the district was like a forest fire. It sure happened quickly."

The district was building a school a year, or, as the superintendent put it, "'a new classroom every week'" (Blodgett, 1983, p. 65). There were 3,500 students at RHS, with one-way up and one-way down stair cases. Few teachers had their own class room. Because of the overcrowding at RHS, from 1962 through 1964, the 10th grade was split between RJHS and RHS with certain classes offered in each building. In the morning, half the sophomores were at RJHS and half at RHS. In the afternoon they would switch. "'Once a school gets over 1,500, you can't add enough teachers to take care of the additional problems that may arise,'" former teacher Neil Luebke remembered principal Milo Mielke saying. A new building for a second high school was in the works. "They were hiring teachers and they gave us a tour. We were all on this bus—Cooper High was taking shape with the circles," said former teacher and administrator Barb Nemer. As Cooper opened in 1964, district enrollment surpassed 22,000.

"From Brick, Glass, and Ideas Come Line, Form and Cooper" (*Talons*, 1965, pp. 14-15), read the headlines in the first Cooper yearbook. Cooper High School (CHS), home of the Cooper Hawks, was built three miles west of Robbinsdale High in the City of New Hope in a newer residential neighborhood. Before construction, the superintendent and principal had discussed the needs of each curricular department with the teachers. "'We found out the needs of each individual class and tried to plan with the architects a flexible building, one that would not be old-fashioned in 20 years'" (Curtis, 1965), commented the principal. According to the school newspaper, the new building incorporated many modern attributes.

> The people who were involved with designing and building Cooper High School had modern ideas in mind as well as practical ones when they planned the building.
>> The building itself is laid out in a way that saves space, money and steps.
>> Each major department...has a resource room.... Many of the rooms have smaller seminar rooms off to the side where students may go to work on group reports or do individual studying.... The double rooms will be used for team teaching and the showing of films to joint classes. (T. Johnson, 1965)

The yearbook mentioned Cooper's "modern brick patterns," "modern shops," "modern auditorium," and "uniquely constructed round towers." "All make E. J. Cooper High School a unique and modern building" (*Talons*, 1965, pp. 14-15). The building was also equipped with cable for closed-circuit television as well as a television studio. With its modern television and team-teaching facilities, Cooper High was proclaimed "'a modern miracle'" (Curtis, 1965), "Efficiently Run By Principals and School Board" (*Talons*, 1965, n.p.).

E. J. Cooper.

Stepping forward into modernity, but with one foot still in the past, the district named the new high school after long-time superintendent E. J. Cooper, the district's first and only superintendent up to that point, who was on the verge of retiring. The school yearbook noted,

> For the past three and a half decades, superintendent Edwin J. Cooper has, instead of seeking personal prestige, devoted his life to District 281, being directly responsible for the education of thousands.
>> When Mr. Cooper arrived at District 24, now 281, in 1930, the school had only 950 students and one brick building in the district.
>> Under his leadership, the district has erected 22 buildings and expanded to more than 22,000 students. It is appropriate that in the year superintendent Cooper retires, E. J. Cooper High School opened its doors.
>> It is a fitting memorial to the man and his service. (*Talons*, 1965, p. 5)

E. J. Cooper's father had been a professor of English and had helped develop the Delaware school system. His brother had been an assistant commissioner of education in charge of teacher training in the state of New York. The CHS newspaper applauded E. J.'s "careful picking and

choosing of what have proven to be superb faculties, a devoted handling of district finances, and a careful eye to the future in the planning and development of the physical plants now in existence" (Beddow, 1965).

"E. J. built a hell of a district," declared former school board member Keith Moberg. "The reason E. J. hired me is because I played poker and sang in the church choir," joked retired teacher Irv Nerdahl. "It was obvious when he was in the building, because you could smell cigar smoke. 'You've done a hell of a job this year,' he'd say. 'I'll give you a $25 raise for the year.'" Retired teacher Carol Peterson remembered Cooper's active presence in the building. "He would bring the teachers' contract to us personally, cigar in mouth. 'Get that contract out Louise,' [he'd tell his secretary]. You'd stand in the hall and sign your contract." Former administrator Gary DeFrance recalled,

> Cooper was an interesting character—unorthodox…. He had a great interest in buildings. He spent a lot of time meeting with architects. It was the thing he was most interested in. He was not a very detailed person, but his reputation was that he knew where everything was—like furniture.... He'd look in a teacher's file cabinet and if there was nothing in it, he'd take it.... You'd send a kid down for discipline and he'd take the kid fishing. He'd hardly ever close the school for snow. He really watched the money—tight, but kind of unorganized. He was a fun kind to work for. He had his pulse on everything.

Summing up E. J.'s legacy, RHS graduate Joy Robb declared, "Robbinsdale Schools in the early years were how schools should be. We were ruled by the iron hand of E. J. Cooper."

As CHS opened its doors and E. J. Cooper retired, the district hired a new superintendent from Kansas, Leroy Hood, 47 years old, nine years as superintendent of Garden City Public Schools in Kansas, a U.S. Navy World War II veteran, a former elementary teacher, social studies high school teacher, and high school principal. Among the qualifications the district was seeking in the new superintendent were a "broad knowledge of curriculum problems and development and a forward-looking approach to educational philosophy and practice" ("Boynton to assist

Kansan," 1965). In 1968, Superintendent Hood relocated the district's administrative offices from Robbinsdale High to the newly built and centrally located headquarters on the intersection of Winnetka Avenue and Rockford Road in the City of New Hope, just blocks away from Cooper High School.

Flexible-modular scheduling.

With new buildings would come the impetus to try new educational systems. Most notable among these was the flexible-modular system. Under the "flex-mod" or "mod-flex" system, during a typical week, a class room of 30 students would be scheduled on one day as a large group (a meeting with all other classes studying the same subject matter), on three days as a medium group (meetings with only the class of 30 students), on one day as a small group (half of the students from the class would meet), and on one day as an independent study, popularly called "resource" or "open time" (students would not meet with the teacher but would conduct research or study without direct supervision by the teacher).

"I was the mother of that devil—large group, small group. It made so much sense," said retired teacher Carol Peterson. In 1965, the district provided funds for four staff members to attend a conference on flex-mod. "I drove out in my blue convertible to a convention in D.C.," Peterson recalled. Two other Cooper teachers and the assistant principal, George Scarbrough, also attended. "The CHS staff was young. The staff was ready. We were growing this thing— the beginning of shaking education out of its sleepy time." There was a one-year turn around, and CHS started flex-mod in the fall of 1966, just two years after opening. "I thought in new patterns. We thought we were a lot smarter than RHS—always that feeling of being younger," said Peterson.

A Space Age School With Space Age Ideas: Armstrong High School, 1970

With a still burgeoning high school population, the district planned its third high school.

If RHS was "tradition," and CHS "modernity," the district launched full force into the "future"

with Neil Armstrong High School (AHS). The school yearbook reminisced,

> It was July 21, 1969, the day after the spectacular walk on the moon when the school
> board, caught up in the excitement that was sweeping the nation, named the third high
> school in District 281 after the first man to walk on the moon—Neil A. Armstrong. (*Gyre*,
> 1982, p. 18)

Original plans had called for the school to be named Medicine Lake High School because of its

hilltop vista of Medicine Lake on the far western end of the district. But Neil Armstrong's moon

walk changed all that, according to the school's yearbook.

> "That's one small step for man, a great leap for mankind," he bravely shouted. The
> dream had come true. And on Earth a school was being planned—no ordinary school,
> but a school for the new generation. It would have modular scheduling—"the modern
> system of education." Teachers and principals were magnetized by its promising
> future.... A space age school with space age ideas....
>
> Our good omen appeared when Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon. People
> perked up and wondered, "Doesn't education mean achievement and progress too? Why,
> this new school can be a giant leap on our part for mankind."
>
> So the school was christened Neil A. Armstrong High School—a space age school
> dedicated to a space age man. (*Gyre*, 1971, p. 7)

Armstrong was slated to open its doors in the fall of 1970, but construction fell behind

schedule and Armstrong students had to share the Cooper building with Cooper students in split

shifts. The 2,000 Cooper students attended the morning shift, and the 1,700 Armstrong students

attended the afternoon shift. "Armstrong was built on a shoestring," commented Gary DeFrance,

former district finance director. "We awarded contracts for seven million with a one million add

on—low budget. A lot of things were not included in this building that were included in the

other two." AHS students finally moved into their new building in December with the

auditorium and the gymnasium still incomplete. "There was no parking lot—mud everywhere.

The moveable walls weren't in yet. We just taught as if the curtain were there," recalled former teacher Ann Rest. The new Armstrong High bid a fond farewell to Cooper High in the school newspaper.

> To: Cooper student body, administration and faculty: Thank you for bearing with us and with the inconveniences caused by the split shift while our own building was being completed. We leave the Cooper building excited about our own building, but sad at the thought of early morning hours now. We leave you as friends. Peace. ("Thank you Cooper," 1970)

> Armstrong High, home of the Armstrong Falcons, was built in the City of Plymouth, two

miles west of CHS. On its wooded hilltop overlooking Medicine Lake, AHS was unlike either CHS or RHS in location and design, as the school yearbook described.

> Use some imagination and create a moon crater; better make it a size large. OK, now cut the crater in half and what do you got? Half a moon crater? Nope. You got the shape of the place, THE place—Neil A. Armstrong High School....
> Most school buildings are extensions of a rigid patterned method. Not Armstrong. It reflects an independent and flexible style. Inside, sky lights, drop ceilings, a courtyard, concourses and a commons opening onto a terrace, continuing the feel of spaciousness as big as outdoors. Eerily suspended on floor 2 1/2 with nearness to both classroom levels, the media center isolates itself from "distractions"....
> Over the loudspeaker system vibrates a deep, droning, moony sound like that of Captain Kirk on his Trek with the Star(s). (*Gyre*, 1971, p. 4)

The AHS building incorporated moveable walls in some classrooms and in two auditorium balconies to accommodate large groups for the flex-mod schedule. Resource rooms for each department were included for use by students during their flex-mod independent study time. Teachers who were particularly committed to the flex-mod system transferred to AHS from CHS. (CHS would abandon flex-mod and return to traditional scheduling shortly after AHS' opening.) Neither AHS nor CHS installed its own football field, both utilizing RHS' Mielke Field. In other nearby suburban districts, two new high schools also opened in 1970, Bloomington's Jefferson High and Hopkins' Lindbergh High. Edina West would open two years later, bringing an end to new high school buildings in first-ring, Minneapolis suburban districts.

School Identities and the East-West Divide

The Best Private Public School District Around

District enrollment had increased from 2,627 in 1946 to 9,410 in 1955, to 23,537 in 1965, and to 28,099 in 1970. The district had realized a building boom during this time period, ending up with 19 elementary schools, including the construction of Lee Elementary and Lakeview Elementary in Robbinsdale proper. When the last new building, Olson Elementary, opened in Golden Valley in 1971, the district was operating four junior high schools and three senior high schools in addition to its 19 elementary schools. The district enjoyed a solid reputation. At metro-area interdistrict meetings, educational leaders would say, "'That's the best private public school district around,'" commented former school board member Bernie Reisberg.

Former principal John Lloyd recalled, "I'd go to national principals' meetings and they'd say, '[Robbinsdale]—that's a great place! That's a great system!'" The district had implemented a consultant program for full-time curricular assistance in foreign languages, math, science, and reading. Its German program was televised into elementary schools. There was a thriving fine arts program. (The first Broadway musical produced at RHS in the 1950s was possibly the first in the state at the high school level.) The district boasted state-champion high school football and wrestling teams, and with the opening of AHS, an ongoing state-champion gymnastics team *(A brief history of Robbinsdale*, 1997).

"Robbinsdale schools were the place to be—progressive, best working conditions…, best teachers and administrators. It was a knock-down, drag-out fight to get [hired] here. The real estate ads would tout, 'Located in Robbinsdale Schools,'" retired teacher Carol Peterson commented. "Best teaching staff any place," recalled former teachers' union officer Barry Noack. "Many could have been teaching at the college level." A former English teacher

remembered his hiring date in 1961.

> How fortunate I felt to be hired into one of the state's premier school districts (I still have my acceptance letter!). E. J. Cooper was superintendent and master builder. Elementary schools were being built at the rate of nearly one a year.... Realtors routinely touted the excellence of 281 schools in their sales presentations. (Rondestvedt, 2000, p. 8)

The district's residents were firmly supportive of education. "It was a proud boast of 281 that voters had NEVER defeated a school bond," recalled Jon Rondestvedt. "We were leaders. 281 was the leader—the cutting edge. People looked to Robbinsdale," stated Myrna Marofsky, a former teacher and school board member. District loyalty remained strong. As Robbinsdale resident Joy Robb explained, "The reason we live in Robbinsdale is because I wanted my kids to have the same education I had. It was the schools. That's why we live here.... It's the highest accolade you can give."

In spite of the district's success, some unsettling trends were developing as the district matured—trends which would end up playing a significant role in the district's future. In 1978 the district's administration prepared a report comparing education at AHS, CHS, and RHS, after some parents had presented some concerns to the board about differences at the three high schools. The report contained some interesting revelations. The junior class at all three high schools had been polled during the 1976-1977 school year. When compared to CHS and RHS, at AHS, according to responses to the survey, twice as many AHS juniors expected to achieve a professional degree. Almost three times as many AHS juniors expected to achieve a master's degree. Twice as many AHS fathers had a graduate degree. Significantly more AHS fathers were employed in professional and technical fields. Significantly more families at AHS were in the highest income bracket. AHS had the highest composite score on the Iowa Test of Educational Development. AHS had only half the number of "D" grades. AHS had twice as many valedictorians and salutatorians (Cameron, 1978, pp. 13-14).

Data from home sales during the first six months of 1979, according to the Minneapolis Board of Realtors, affirmed this socioeconomic gap (S. Webber, 1980, p. 4B). The communities of Robbinsdale, Crystal, and New Hope, mostly in the RHS attendance area, showed an average home sale price of $58,966. The communities of Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, and Osseo, mostly in the CHS area, showed an average home sale price of $59,105. The communities of Golden Valley and Plymouth, mostly in the AHS area, showed an average home sale price of $74,641 and $87,493 respectively (almost 50 percent higher).

The differences in the three high schools did not include a racial component. Each of the three high schools would report a similar ethnic minority population of about three to four percent by 1981 (*North Central*, 1987, p. 16A). However, census-tract data from 1980 showed income levels to be significantly higher in the AHS attendance area when compared to the RHS and CHS areas (see Appendices F and G). Family income statistics from the 23 census tracts located within the district revealed that the wealthiest one-third of census tracts were located in the west and south, with the wealthiest tract located in Plymouth proper. The poorest one-third of census tracts were located in the east and north, with CHS drawing from the poorest census tract and the City of Robbinsdale incorporating the second poorest tract (*North Central*, 1987, p. 25E). Surveys mirroring census-tract data from the early 1980s would show that residents in the RHS attendance area were older, longer established, and less educated overall when compared to those in the AHS attendance area ("School controversy," 1982).

The district had grown into delineated community areas that represented, on the one hand, working-class and old middle-class households (mostly in the north and east), and on the other hand, professional and new middle-class households (mostly in the south and west). These north and east versus south and west social and educational disparities would become ingrained

in what was better known as an "east-west" divide as the three high schools developed their

identities. By the end of the 1970s, because of the location of the buildings, students and

residents from Robbinsdale and the RHS attendance area (and also, to some extent, those from

the CHS attendance area) would become known as "east-siders" and those from Plymouth and

the AHS attendance area, "west-siders." The east-west divide would also become evident in the

views each high school held of itself and of the other two high schools.

Robbinsdale High: Normal People With Normal Values

Robbinsdale High was a working-class, old middle-class school, a school from a "no

palaces, no hovels" neighborhood, as the Village of Robbinsdale had been described earlier. As

former RHS student Heather Robb McCollor defined it, "Robbinsdale High was how everybody

should be—normal people with normal values, not skewed with money and politics." However,

because the RHS attendance area included a part of the more affluent Golden Valley community,

RHS had a slight multi-class bent, according to former student Chuck Webber, in so much as it

included "people from the gentrified section, kids from more wealthy neighborhoods and those

from not so wealthy neighborhoods." The wealthy section represented only a small part of the

school, but was nevertheless present. Former student Paul Genadek recalled, "The rich kids

came in cars and the rest rode the bus.... Sixty percent rode the bus, 20 percent walked, and 20

percent drove."

In accordance with its old middle-class values, RHS was proud of its old-school

academics, considering its traditional system of education and its experienced teachers to have

stood the test of time. Chuck Webber, who at the time lived in the AHS attendance area but had

chosen instead to enroll at RHS, explained, "RHS had better academics, better enrichment

programs in biology, chemistry, math, and better teachers. The teachers were legendary in

academics—Hummel, Luebke, Plut." Alisa Lange, another former RHS student, said, "RHS was

working class, traditional, good education, hardworking…, cohesive with school spirit. [It had]

old-school teachers who had been in the district a long time. A lot of the RHS teachers my

parents knew or my brother had had them."

RHS was well known for its fine arts, especially its musical theater productions. When

RHS opened with *Brigadoon* in 1956, it was one of the first large high school musical

productions in the state. Six performances of the RHS annual musical would be offered over two

weekends. Tickets would go on sale weeks before hand, and they would sell out. Roles on stage

were very competitive, but over 150 students worked in supporting roles. Students often helped

make the costumes. The costumes for *My Fair Lady* and *Hello Dolly* were purchased by a

costume company. "The students took care of the costumes as if they were their own," recalled

former musical director Neil Luebke. Schools from throughout the state would bus kids to RHS

so they could see first-hand how to produce a school musical.

RHS was also renowned for its football program and the school spirit which accompanied

it. "From 1958 to the 1970s, RHS was a prominent football power—sold out. You couldn't get

into the stadium. The community was really behind the football program…. No one could beat

us," declared RHS alumnus Paul Genadek. School spirit also translated into community support,

according to former student Shirley Nygaard.

> RHS had tradition, lots of school spirit, and everybody came to pep fests. For away-games, 15 busses would line up. The biggest rivalry was Edina. "Beat those cake-eaters! We're not as well off as you are but we can compete with you!"… For homecoming there was a parade down West Broadway—floats on wagons, clubs, dance lines, the band, the mascot—a real community event.

A former math teacher, Tom Walerius, recalled the depth of school pride. "The city and school

were so proud of being able to compete with the likes of Edina. There was this feeling that, 'We're as good as anybody.'"

RHS was proud of its heritage as the district's first high school. It was located in the City of Robbinsdale, the historical center of the district, the namesake of the district, and home of the district's first elementary, first junior high, as well as its first senior high school. "RHS was the flagship, the old school, the heart of the district. And the craftsmanship—it's the best built," recalled custodian Bruce Nolte. Older teachers back in the 1960s and 1970s would refer to RHS as "THE high school," even after CHS and AHS were open. If a teacher said she was going "over to the high school," that meant RHS.

RHS identified closely with the City of Robbinsdale, even if its attendance area included parts of Crystal and Golden Valley. It seemed as if every block in the city had an RHS teacher. "The school and the city were one," asserted former RHS teacher Tom Walerius. Reflecting on the 1970s, former Robbinsdale mayor and RHS graduate Joy Robb explained, "RHS was the whole center of the town. It was our identity. It was our claim." Shirley Nygaard, community newspaper reporter and former RHS graduate, commented, "RHS was old Robbinsdale—what it had been for years."

This city-school connection made RHS a unique suburban school, because the City of Robbinsdale was itself an unusual city for suburbia. In spite of the fact that all three high schools had been built to accommodate 2,000 students, due to the City of Robbinsdale's unique nature, RHS was in some ways a small-town school. "Robbinsdale has a downtown—you know the song, 'Where, Oh Where is Downtown Bloomington?'—hospital, churches, schools, main street, all in a very close proximity. It all made for the small-town feeling that Robbinsdale had," remembered Robbinsdale resident Joann Lange. Former board member Bernie Reisberg recalled

that after parents had collected money at school fairs, the Robbinsdale police would often escort

them to the bank. Former teachers' union officer, Barry Noack, noted,

> Robbinsdale kept their Chamber of Commerce and didn't mesh in with the Northwest
> Area Chamber of Commerce. They're still doing their own thing.... Robbinsdale had
> more of a community sense, a downtown, a long history. You didn't think of it as much
> as a suburb—more as a community. It had a single downtown, like a small town. The
> others were true suburbs. [Robbinsdale was] a small town that happened to be in
> suburbia. None of the rest of them had a downtown. When you have a downtown and a
> history, it makes a difference.

Echoing this feeling, Robbinsdale resident Barb Southward recalled, "Going to the store with

[out-of-town] relatives, we'd know a lot of people in the store. 'This doesn't seem like the city,'

they'd say."

In the eyes of RHS, Cooper High was not as strong a school, either athletically or

academically, and lacked the community support which RHS enjoyed. RHS thought of CHS as

somewhat of a mixture between AHS and RHS, but closer to RHS with its return to traditional

educational scheduling, and in some ways even more working class than RHS. Former RHS

student Chuck Webber commented,

> CHS did not engender any of the feelings that AHS did. There was never that level of
> intensity. CHS drew from a population of blue collar, good, honest, working folk…. It
> was an absolute classic middle child—like Switzerland…. CHS just more closely
> resembled RHS.

"CHS was a good, solid, working-class school—just plugging away," recollected Dave

Southward, a former Robbinsdale resident and school board member.

Being the newest school, and the only one with the flex-mod educational schedule, AHS,

on the other hand, was the object of some strong opinions within the RHS community. Retired

teacher Neil Luebke recalled,

> There was a feeling of AHS being elitist. "We're the new kid on the block. We've got
> things that you don't have. You're dealing with old toys. We've got the new ones." The
> parents from RHS saw AHS as being experimental with flex-mod. AHS got bad press

about students who left school during open time—something about three to a bed. There were students who should never have been on flex-mod.

The higher socioeconomic status of the AHS community did not go unnoticed by RHS. "AHS was preppy, hoity-toity, snotty people—the rich," said Heather Robb McCollor. A common characterization of AHS by RHS was "the cake-eaters," harkening back to the queen of France's reported pronouncement that the poor should just eat cake, as she did, whenever she ran out of bread. RHS student Chuck Webber explained,

> AHS was wealthy—flashy. It provoked particularly strong reactions from RHS. It was the rich kids' school. They had money to have their kids go to athletic programs. It was an enclave in the western side that catered to the rich. Scarbrough [AHS principal] said, it is rumored, "Going to Armstrong is like going to school in a country club." AHS was sleeker, fancier, and sportier. It engendered some resentment. They would rub it in everybody's face. Modular scheduling—people didn't know quite what it was. As a reaction there was a certain amount of pride at RHS. It was style versus substance. We had substance.

In addition to the economic discrepancies, RHS saw AHS as being culturally different, lacking work ethic. Joann Lange recalled,

> RHS felt like the poor cousins—still of the old school…. At AHS the drug problem was worse, discipline was worse. At RHS you didn't sass your mother…. AHS was more elitist. They were too close to that Minnetonka bunch—people out in Minnetonka lived a wild life.

Custodian and hockey coach Paul Genadek commented,

> The attitude on the west side was different. [The students would] throw garbage on the floor and expect [the custodian] to pick it up. [But in the east,] at RHS, they'd say, "Geez, I better not make this old guy bend down or he might not get up".... In midget hockey, the Robbinsdale-Crystal kids had a work ethic. The Plymouth kids would say, "I paid my money, I'll play." They didn't know what outside ice was.

RHS and AHS were located at opposite ends of the district. As such, AHS seemed distant to RHS, almost other-worldly. For adult Robbinsdale residents, the Plymouth area was still the country side. "It was so far out—it was another country," commented Robbinsdale resident Joy Robb. "Plymouth is where they ruined some pretty good duck hunting," said Dave Southward.

Barb Southward noted, "The opening of AHS wasn't even a blimp on the radar. We were very content in our little part of the world."

Cooper High: The Classic Middle Child

Cooper High lacked the stronger self-identities that characterized both RHS and AHS. "CHS was warm and comfortable," said CHS parent Anne Marie Hennen. Another CHS parent, Liz Reid, noted that because of CHS' geographic location between RHS and AHS, and being the second built of the three schools,

> CHS was sort of a mix between RHS and AHS—but didn't have any fancy stuff like AHS.... It was a welcoming place for young people. The staff said, 'We're going to do the best for ALL these kids.' It had the inner school—more caring. We felt we were second-class citizens to the western group in administrators' eyes.

Not particularly stellar in either sports or academics, "CHS was a dedicated school…drawing from the less privileged," according to former teacher Gretchen Heath.

For CHS, Robbinsdale High, although housed in an older building, was similar in cultural identity. RHS, like CHS, was "middle class, traditional expectations, un-monied, regular folk," said Anne Marie Hennen. AHS, on the other hand, represented what CHS was not. CHS parent Liz Reid commented,

> AHS was the gem of the district. They bragged about it all the time. It was completely flexible—touted all over for their modular scheduling. The people acted as if they were better than everyone else. Scarbrough was noted as the best principal. The media center was a big deal…. People in Plymouth were overwhelmingly supportive of schools. There were more college people—people who liked leadership things.... The Robbinsdale-Crystal community was more middle class. The farther west you went, the more financially capable the people were. They never let you forget it. It was the attitudinal thing that bothered people. Robbinsdale-Crystal-New Hope was the part that didn't think they were privileged.

Observing the differences between AHS and CHS feeder elementary schools, CHS parent Anne Marie Hennen noted, "When you told third graders at Cavanagh [in Crystal] 'Paris is in France,'

they'd just stare at you. But when you told that to third graders at Zachary Lane [in Plymouth],

they'd say, 'Yes, I was there last month.'"

Armstrong High: Like Going to School in a Country Club

Armstrong was the newest school, with a unique educational system in flex-mod. "AHS

was younger, more adventuresome, more progressive," commented former school board member

Gary Joselyn. "More hip, innovative," said former board member Myrna Marofsky. The

building had been designed with significant staff input. "AHS was radical—a mod-flex school, a

new endeavor, a new experiment," said former teacher Sandra Peterson. The school enjoyed

particularly strong support from its teaching staff. According to former AHS teacher Barb

Nemer,

> We knew we were the best school in the country. AHS was built around an educational
> concept…. It was higher socioeconomic. We were the best…. We kind of did our own
> thing. We had modular scheduling.... In 1982 [even 10 years after AHS' opening],
> Camelot was still there. We were blessed with administration. There couldn't have been
> better working conditions. AHS was the little kingdom we'd created.

Another former, long time AHS teacher, Carol Peterson, remarked,

> The staff [at AHS] was the strongest staff I've ever seen in my life. Nobody worked
> harder than that staff—meetings, workshops—and we partied!... George [the principal]
> accepted some of the hardest people to work with. At one time there were eight past or
> present union presidents in the building. George liked them. We felt safe with him....
> We were treated more like adults by administration at AHS than at any other school…. It
> was not a prison. I just loved working there. I loved the building. We liked the student
> body and each other…. AHS was leading the vanguard.

Former AHS teacher, parent, and current state senator, Ann Rest, recalled,

> [AHS] was every teacher's dream of collegiality—interesting students and a benign
> neglect administration who said, "Teachers know what to do, I'll just support you." The
> people I taught with remain my closest friends. That is very unusual for teachers. They
> were the most intellectually stimulating collection of teachers. It was so great, nobody
> believes it. Teachers didn't leave because it was too good to leave.... AHS was a dream-
> world for teachers. We were encouraged to be creative and innovative…. They were the

Camelot years…. The highlight of my professional life was the 10 years I spent at AHS.

AHS' location in the wealthier, higher-educated part of the district was also reflected in its identity. "AHS was the yuppie life—parents who really wanted the best for their kids," recalled Barb Nemer. Former AHS student Liz Olson recalled, "You had a lot of expansion [in Plymouth], big new houses—very flashy, a community where parents were very ambitious for their children. We were all going to college."

AHS viewed RHS as its complete opposite. While AHS was young and energetic, "RHS was old and tired," according to Liz Olson. While AHS was "flexible," at RHS, "the desks [were] nailed to the floors," according to Ann Rest. While AHS was innovative, "RHS was more traditional, less willing to take chances—'Don't rock the boat,'" according to Gary Joselyn. For AHS, RHS was far away, both philosophically and geographically. "RHS fell off the map for me—wasn't on the radar. It was old-fashioned, traditional," said Carol Peterson. As former AHS teacher Barb Nemer explained,

> RHS was traditional—a building built in that concept—old, the old faculty. We didn't give RHS too much thought…. We beat RHS that first football game [after AHS opened]. I don't know if CHS ever beat RHS. RHS had never had a school that matched it in the talent of the kids, in music etc. CHS just wasn't as good as RHS—but AHS was.

The Robbinsdale community represented a contrast to the Plymouth community. "Crystal and Robbinsdale were less affluent. You could see the difference looking at the houses. It was an older community, an aging community. Plymouth was young and growing," said Liz Olson. Plymouth resident Myrna Marofsky remembered the small-town atmosphere on the east side.

> There was a main street in Robbinsdale, people who walked on the sidewalks, Merwin's drug store with the counters where people would meet. People over here didn't even think about Robbinsdale High School. Plymouth was yuppie, people coming up financially—new houses. It contrasted with Robbinsdale—a well-established, strong community, lots of history, tradition. This area didn't have a downtown. Robbinsdale

was the other-side-of-the-tracks syndrome.

For AHS, as for RHS, CHS was a sort of nondescript mixture of its sister schools, evoking little feeling. "CHS was this non-entity.... It was a hybrid of the [other] two schools.... It was a mediocre school with nothing special about it," recalled former AHS student Liz Olson. However, AHS did see CHS as more closely associated with RHS, more "east side." "CHS was the hardest one to pin down—a derivative of RHS, but the hardest one defining itself," said Ann Rest. Former AHS teacher Carol Peterson described CHS as "struggling to catch up—a working-class school." "CHS was always the step sister. It didn't have a winning football or basketball team. Cooper was never a threat to anybody."

Critical Discussion

From its beginnings in a one-room school house, to the construction of Robbinsdale Public School, to the school building boom of the 1950s and 1960s, District 281 stretched across three different suburban belts by the end of the 1970s, including all or parts of seven different municipalities. Due to the excellent reputation of the district, the newer suburbs had joined Robbinsdale's school district.

The Robbinsdale Area Schools represented a large district in land size, and over the years it had developed into a demographically unusual district—somewhat urban, with its range of social classes; mostly suburban, with its location on the border of Minneapolis and its lack of an inner city or concentrated commercial and industrial base; and somewhat rural, with the small-town atmosphere of the City of Robbinsdale. The attendance-area boundaries drawn as the last high school was built in 1970 facilitated the development of place-based and class-based school identities. These identities, evident in the historical data from the 1970s, the 1980s, and from

more recent interviews, were reflected in how the three high schools' differing populations understood themselves (see Appendix H) and how they understood each other.

Robbinsdale High School, opening under the banner of "new traditions," considered itself at the end of the 1970s to be a traditional, spirited, flagship school primarily serving the old middle-class families residing in the first-ring, suburban area of Robbinsdale, the district's historical center. Cooper High School, opening under the banner of "efficiency and modernity," considered itself at the end of the 1970s to be a traditional, warm, caring school, named after a legendary district superintendent and primarily serving the old middle- and working-class families residing in the second-ring suburbs of Crystal and New Hope. Armstrong High School, opening under the banner of "futurism and flexibility," considered itself at the end of the 1970s to be a progressive, innovative, flex-mod school primarily serving the new middle- and upper-middle-class, wealthier families residing in the third-ring suburb of Plymouth.

The socioeconomic and cultural east-west division that had evolved, with RHS and AHS on opposite ends and CHS in the middle, represented a place-based split, older small-town versus modern suburbia, on the one hand, and a class-based divide, old middle class versus new middle class, on the other, a sort of "serf and turf" rivalry. Reflecting on this evolution, former teachers' union president, Sandra Peterson, commented, "RHS saw AHS as a little bit elitist. There was an awful lot of competition between the two. The big competition was between east and west."

A tangible power shift from east to west had begun as the western suburbs joined the district and as most new development occurred on the west side. On a symbolic level, a further east-to-west power shift took place as the district's headquarters moved from Robbinsdale to New Hope and as AHS defeated RHS in their first football game.

DATA PART 3
CLOSING SCHOOLS:
THE PUBLIC AND THE FORMATION OF COALITIONS

The closing of a school is like the death of a child.
School board member

Teaching Ballet and Feeding the Polo Ponies:

The District Faces the End of the Camelot Years

With explosive growth in student population and expanding revenues, the 1950s and 1960s had proven to be unprecedented periods of prosperity for District 281. "It was a golden age.... I got everything that I ever asked for," recalled RHS musical director Neil Luebke of those days. "It was a gentler time," stated retired teacher Barb Nemer. Olson Elementary, which would be the district's last new building project, opened in 1971, the same year that district enrollment peaked at 28,300.

The district continued on growth-mode autopilot, however, even purchasing land for a fifth junior high school to be built in the west end of the district in the Zachary Lane area. Fortunately, at the last hour, the school board postponed bid letting for the new junior high when one board member, who was also a member of the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Board, came to the board meeting with some population statistics and some strong reservations. "He said it didn't make sense. He actually showed numbers and projections. He was the ONE guy in the district who didn't have a build mentality," recalled then recently-elected, fellow board member Gary Joselyn.

The "build mentality" was not that unusual for school districts at the time, however. One district had projected a peak of 25,000 students but had begun to decline after a peak of 17,000. Another district, at 8,500 students in 1965, anticipated growing to 15,000, but by 1978 had

declined to 8,000, after peaking at only 12,000 students (Fowler, 1978). In Minnesota, during

the height of the baby boom in 1959, 88,000 babies were born. By 1973, there were only 53,000

births (*School building utilization*, 1979). Minnesota's overall public school enrollment, like

District 281's enrollment, had peaked in the 1971-1972 school year, and Minnesota demographic

forecasts in 1976 estimated that in the decade of the 1970s, 16 Minnesota counties would see a

40 percent reduction in school age population. Between 1970 and 1974 elementary enrollment

statewide had already dropped by 50,000, although secondary enrollment had increased by

32,000, softening the blow to a net 18,000 student loss.

As the elementary decline began to move into the secondary level, districts' financial

circumstances would become acutely worse, however, because districts received 40 percent more

in state aid for secondary students than elementary students (*Planning for declining enrollment*,

1976). Declines in state aid to school districts were problematic, given that school districts faced

certain fixed costs. As one school official explained, "'If you have a hundred fewer students you

still have to pay your telephone bills and your heat, lights and utilities'" (Stuart, 1978, p. 6A).

The director of the Minnesota State Planning Agency summed up the atmosphere for school

districts in the mid-1970s, declaring, "The earlier expansive, innovative mood in the schools is

giving way to pessimism and rigidity...., the lowering of planning horizons and doubt about the

future" (*Planning for declining enrollment*, 1976, n.p.).

In addition to declining revenues from the state, districts were not immune from the high

inflationary period of the 1970s. As Cuban (1979) observed, "If demographic changes are one

arm of pincers squeezing schools, the other arm is rising costs of schooling.... Combine inflation

with less revenue coming into the county, then the pincers close" (pp. 368-369). In District 281,

as in other districts, student enrollment declined throughout the early 1970s, bringing on reduced

state financial contributions and increased pressure on the district's budget. By 1976, District

281 had already closed two small kindergarten schools and the superintendent began to prepare

residents for the closure of some elementary schools.

> The one item of great concern to parents and other taxpayers is the closing of school
> buildings. There are those who believe that closing buildings is the least harmful way to
> reduce spending. One of the major arguments for closing buildings is that regardless of
> the building a student attends, the same opportunities are offered. The fewer buildings
> the district has to maintain and operate, the more educational opportunities can be
> provided....There are approximately 7,000 fewer students today than during the past
> years. This makes the argument to keep all buildings open extremely difficult to defend.
> (Hood, 1976)

But what procedure would district leadership employ in selecting the buildings to be closed?

The Criteria for Closing Schools

In the fall of 1976, the board appointed an advisory committee to study facilities and

enrollments. In early 1977, 30 citizen and staff members of the Long-range Planning and

Facilities Use Committee began working on an assignment given them by the school board.

> The task was to determine the criteria the school board could use to decide which two
> elementary schools to close at the end of this school year.
> It was a difficult job, made easier because of the talent, knowledge, and expertise
> of the committee members. One person represented each of the 19 elementary schools in
> the district.... They searched for clear, concise wording of the sentences they wrote.
> ("Group establishes criteria," 1977)

Committee members who would play prominent positions in the district's downsizing over the

ensuing years, (all would eventually become board members), included Bill Fuhrmann, Noble

Elementary representative, Joy Robb, Lakeview Elementary representative, and Fred Webber,

Neill Elementary representative. On February 22, the citizen-staff committee presented its list of

criteria to the board. "The idea for the criteria came from the administration—so there would be

something tangible," explained former assistant superintendent Willis Boynton. Affirming this

sentiment, former committee member Fuhrmann recalled, "The idea came out of the headquarters of the district.... The general format and content of the closings criteria was presented to the committee by the central office."

The committee's criteria included three broad categories for evaluating whether a building was a good candidate for closure: (a) displacement of students, (b) completeness and flexibility of the facility, and (c) financial cost per pupil per square foot. Also important was building location—whether or not students could easily be housed in adjacent schools ("Where will the children go?," 1977). "They did an outstanding job of trying to put some objectivity into a job that was ultimately subjective in nature," commented former board member Bernie Reisberg on the formation of the criteria. The month after the committee reported its criteria, the board voted to close Cavanagh Elementary and Thorson Elementary, both in Crystal, at the end of the school year. There was relatively little public outcry.

In early 1978, the board committed to closing two more elementary schools at the end of that school year and one junior high at end of the next school year. Superintendent Hood again prepared the public for a new round of closings. "Closing school buildings is one way of cutting the budget. For some people, it is the 'least harmful' way to reduce spending. This action certainly does not affect students as drastically as other board action could" ("Board votes to close three buildings," 1978, p. 1). At the February 6 board meeting, Hood recommended closing Fair Elementary in Crystal and Winnetka Elementary in New Hope. "The superintendent substantiated the recommendations by reading the criteria that had been used to rank all 17 elementary buildings in the district. The six people on the superintendent's cabinet worked the criteria" ("Two elementary schools are recommended," 1978).

At the legally required public hearing on the proposed school closures, the district had

prepared seating for 500 people—only about 75 attended. At its next meeting, the board voted to

close Fair and Winnetka elementary schools. Commenting on the relative smoothness of the

closings, the district's newsletter explained,

> One of the reasons the closings were easier was because of the work done by the members of one sub-committee of the Long-range Facilities and Planning Committee. This blue-ribbon committee was appointed by the school board to study some of the future problems facing the district....
>
> The sub-committee on "criteria" established standards for closing schools a year ago. This last fall the committee looked at the criteria again, made a few minor changes, and submitted the list.
>
> The criteria are printed here with the numbers to the left [out of 100] being the amount of "weight" given the item. Each elementary school was rated, using these criteria.

<div align="center">1. STUDENTS, STAFF, AND COMMUNITY</div>

13   A. Displacement of Students
          1. Number of students affected
          2. Severity of displacement's effect on district
          3. History of displacement and possible displacement
          4. Continuity between elementary and secondary schools

9   B. Minimum Enrollment Needed To Provide Effective, Efficient, Comprehensive Educational Programs and Supportive Services

9   C. District Population Patterns and Trends
          1. Potential change (growth decline) of a neighborhood
          2. Type of housing—consider balance between single and multiple dwellings
          3. Density of population

5   D. Role (use) of School by Community
3   E. Unique Educational Programs
5   F. Relationships of Schools and Municipalities

<div align="center">2. PHYSICAL FACILITIES</div>

11   A. Completeness and Flexibility of Facilities
          1. Adaptability to different types of teaching organization and methods
          2. Physical facilities for support activities such as music, physical education, art, special education, food service, staff work, activities, etc.
          3. Those physical characteristics which could not easily be duplicated or would be impossible to replace such as pools, theaters, athletic facilities, air conditioning, etc.

10   B. Physical Condition of Building
          1. Age and future useful life
          2. Planned building improvements

        3. Short-range and long-range maintenance and construction characteristics
        4. Safety (OSHA)
        5. Barrier-free considerations for handicapped

<u>7</u>   C. Appropriateness of site location—traffic patterns—home to school
        1. Ease and safety of access to building
        2. Proximity to community facilities
        3. Suitability to surrounding zoning

<div align="center">3. FINANCIAL FACTORS</div>

<u>12</u>   A. Cost Per Pupil and Per Square Foot (consider present school population and optimum enrollment)
        1. Maintenance
        2. Operation
        3. Fixed cost
        4. Energy conservation

<u>8</u>   B. Alternative Use
        1. Potential sale or lease
        2. Use by district
        3. Zoning
        4. Adaptability to remodeling or expansion to alternate use for in-district purposes and/or by outside agencies
        5. Mothballing and retrievability

<u>8</u>   C. Transportation Costs Per Pupil (present-future). Length of bus routes in terms of energy savings.

("Two elementary buildings will be closed," 1978)

The district's school-closing selection process could be summarized in the following manner. 1. Citizens and district staff would establish the criteria. 2. Administrators would apply the criteria to the buildings in a point system and make a recommendation to the board on which school to close based on these point totals. 3. The school board would review the selection, propose a building for closure, and make the final decision after public hearings. The process seemed to be working, but larger battles were ahead.

Closing Robbinsdale Junior High School

In the summer of 1978, Hood presented a report showing how three more elementary schools and one of the district's four junior high schools could be closed by end of the 1982-83

school year. Three junior high schools would have 85.3 percent occupancy in 1982-83 whereas

there would be only 64 percent occupancy in four buildings if no school were closed. Annual

savings to the district would be approximately $460,000 (Watz, 1978b). The district's four junior

high schools included Plymouth Junior High, on the western end of the district in Plymouth;

Hosterman Junior High, in the middle, in New Hope, near Cooper High; Sandburg Junior High

in the south, in Golden Valley; and Robbinsdale Junior High (RJHS), in the east, in Robbinsdale,

housed in the original old Robbinsdale High building. The school board, having previously

stated its commitment to close a junior high, requested that the administration recommend one of

the junior high buildings for closure.

At the September 11 board meeting, Hood recommended closing Robbinsdale Junior

High School at the end of the 1978-79 school year. The administration had again grounded its

decision in the criteria for school closings. As the community newspaper reported, "These areas

listed in the 'criteria for closing schools' were weighted according to standards set by the Long-

range Planning and Facilities Committee in 1976 and 1977. The top six district administrative

personnel used this rating system to objectively determine which school should be closed"

(Watz, 1978e, p. 1). The criteria and weightings were the same as previously used in elementary

school closures. The administration's research had produced the following results out of a total

of 100 possible points per school: Robbinsdale Junior High, 55.2; Sandburg Junior High, 59.7;

Hosterman Junior High 60.5; Plymouth Junior High; 69.8.

"'The criteria did clearly identify which building should be closed'" (Watz, 1978e, p. 1),

said Hood. In his justification of the Robbinsdale Junior High recommendation, Hood stated,

> Dr. Leroy Hood, Superintendent; Willis Boynton, Assistant Superintendent, Secondary;
> William Forsberg, Assistant Superintendent, Elementary; Loren Johnson, Director of
> Staff Relations; Gary DeFrance, Director of Business Affairs; and Robert Cameron,
> Director of Administrative Services, were the individuals involved in applying the criteria

and arriving at a final recommendation. They are the only individuals knowledgeable about each of the buildings, as well as the many long-ranged district concerns....These were the individuals who were in the best possible position to weigh all factors and make neutral, objective judgments.... Every possible resource was consulted.... Applying the criteria took many, many hours.... When all the numbers were added up, the criteria served a useful purpose: it identified which building should be closed.... Application of the criteria indicates that the junior high to be closed is Robbinsdale Junior High School.... To many residents and members of the district staff, Robbinsdale Junior High is the historic and sentimental 'heart' of District 281. This fact did not make the final decision any easier. (*Recommendations for closing a junior high*, 1978, pp. 6-8)

Among the primary reasons Robbinsdale Junior High was selected for closure were the following: it had the fewest number of students that would be affected in a move, it was the only school not built on one level, it was near a heavily travelled street, and, although it included a more recent 1972 addition, overall it was the oldest building, and the most costly for utilities, maintenance, and upkeep (Watz, 1978e). In summarizing the decision, the district's newsletter stated, "The most important factor in deciding which building to close was how many students would have to be moved. At RJHS the fewest number of students by far will have to be moved" ("Tough decision," 1978).

At its September 25 meeting, the school board proposed the closure of Robbinsdale Junior High. About 75 people attended the meeting, speaking mostly in opposition and stating that the public had not learned until late in the previous week that RJHS would be recommended for closure. The board agreed that there had been a communication problem. In an attempt to appease the crowd and referring to a possible future district need to close a high school, board member David Olson, a future bishop of the Lutheran Church in America, stated, "'It was part of our thinking that it would be difficult to close Robbinsdale Senior High if this junior high is closed this year'" (Watz, 1978c, p. 2).

More than 250 people attended the legally required hearing on the proposed RJHS closure, held two weeks later at RHS. Over 30 residents spoke against the closing, mentioning

overcrowded classrooms, a loss of a sense of identity, a decrease in real estate values, the bussing

of some students over a distance of two communities away, and a preference for closing the

administrative building rather than the junior high. "Most felt that the human needs of the

students were far more important than the financial needs of the district" (Watz, 1978a, p. 6).

The crowd requested that the district's long-range plan be widely publicized so that next time

residents would know the district's plans in advance. They then presented the board a petition

with 1,417 signatures from Robbinsdale citizens, asking that the community be allowed to make

use of the facilities in the building if RJHS were closed.

At the October 16 board meeting, Robbinsdale residents arrived with a petition bearing

400 signatures and asking the board to run a district-wide referendum to raise $500,000 to keep

RJHS open. "[Board member] Joselyn made a direct appeal to the group to refrain from forcing

such a referendum" (Watz, 1978d, p. 1). The board had been entertaining the thought of running

a spring referendum for overall school operations, and, by law, the district was allowed to hold

only one referendum a year. In the end, the petition was not formally presented to the board and

the board did not formally accept it. The six school board members then voted to close

Robbinsdale Junior High on a 6-0 vote, including board member "Red" Sochacki, long-time

Robbinsdale resident, former mayor, and former RHS coach, who would later have a

Robbinsdale park named in his memory. The next district newsletter stated,

> The decision was made last January. One junior high school would have to be closed.
> Facts supported that decision. Since 1970-71 there had been a drop of 8,000
> students....
> The superintendent's cabinet tabulated, discussed, studied, evaluated, weighed,
> worried, agonized. Board chairperson Gary Joselyn said it well when he quoted Luther
> Gerlain, noted anthropologist, "The closing of a school is like the death of a child." It has
> been a traumatic affair for everyone involved. ("It all started last January," 1978, p. 1)

The forum for discussion on the RJHS closing had not been restricted to school board

meetings. The Robbinsdale city council as well as the Robbinsdale Lion's Club had been equal

arenas. The Robbinsdale Lion's Club included many then current and former district

administrators, including Superintendent Leroy Hood, former RHS principal Milo Mielke, Lee

Elementary principal Keith Ironside, and district finance director Gary DeFrance. Frank

Hosterman, E. J. Cooper, and other earlier school district leaders, had all been members at one

time or another. A typical Lion's Club meeting would usually begin with a half-hour civic issue

presentation, often including the financial picture of the school district, followed by social time.

Joann Lange, wife of a former Robbinsdale mayor, recalled,

> Lots of business got talked over and decided in clubs. Whenever they got done with the Lion's Club meeting, they'd stay up to 2:00 a.m. playing poker…. It was kind of prestigious to belong to the Lion's Club. All the bankers were part of it. [The members] went to the same churches, they interacted, they went to Whiz Bang celebrations.

Lion's Club member and then mayor of Robbinsdale, Harvey Lange, in later reflection on the

RJHS closure, commented,

> There was a conscious decision by me not to lobby against [the RJHS closing]. It was a conscious decision because we were told by administrators that if we didn't make waves about the junior high, we'd never have to worry about the senior high…. People on the Robbinsdale city council were saying, "We should get involved." At council meetings people would say, "We think you ought to take a stand." People said we should have gotten more involved in the early days. The council had work sessions. We really discussed it. "We're here to run the city. We should not interfere with [the school board]. This is their business"…. In informal discussions in the Lion's Club, [school administrators] would ask, "You guys gonna get involved in this?" We'd respond, "It's not the best thing for the city—but if that's what you think is best [for the district]"…. The fact that District 281 was expanding was due to guys like Hosterman, Mielke, Cooper. All these guys had helped push through tax increases that helped build the schools in the other cities. The implication was, for all the things these pioneers had done, that RJHS would be a sacrifice, but that would be the end of it. It was a general impression created on an informal basis. The people in the Lion's Club felt the same way as me. We thought it extended to the school board….a gentlemen's agreement.

Echoing this sentiment, former RHS parent and current Robbinsdale resident Liz Miller

remembered, "The word out there was, 'If we let go of the junior high, we'll save the senior

high.'"

The week following the school board's vote, in his weekly editorial piece, community

newspaper editor and RHS alumnus Bob Bork (1978) wrote,

> This week I joined thousands of other grads, scattered across the nation, in wiping away a tear as the final news was passed along last week that yes, Robbinsdale Junior High, 42nd and Regent Ave. N., will be closed when classes dismiss for the summer in June of 1979.
>
> Until the present high school opened about 20 years ago, the facilities at 42nd and Regent served as the center of education in the district. Back around World War II, the buildings housed the entire system, from kindergarten to 12th grade.
>
> It was an architect's masterpiece when the building opened in 1936....
>
> Two names which are synonymous with that school are E. J. Cooper and Milo M. Mielke. Cooper was the superintendent and Mielke the principal.... Both are retired now, and both still live in Robbinsdale. I'll bet each felt a moment of sadness when the final closing news was passed along.

All Under One Roof?

The Birth of the East-Side Coalition

In early 1979, the *Minneapolis Tribune* published an article on declining school

enrollment projections for inner suburbs. Between 1971 and 1982, all 10 inner-suburban school

districts included in the article were projected to decrease in enrollment by about 50 percent, due

to lower birth rates and migration to outer suburbs. This school enrollment decline would

continue to squeeze districts' budgets for a number of reasons. 1. State aid, based on the number

of students, was decreasing along with the enrollment decline. 2. Districts were required to lay

off newer, less costly teachers first, keeping more experienced, more educated, and more

expensive teachers in employment. 3. Certain fixed costs, such as utilities, were not decreasing

(Brandt, 1979). Opinions differed on the plight of these inner-ring school districts. "'I don't

mind paying higher property taxes for my children to get an above-average education'" (p. 4A),

stated one resident. Others charged suburban districts with mismanagement and extravagance,

accusing them of "'teaching ballet and feeding the polo ponies'" (p. 4A).

In the winter of 1979, the board decided that another elementary school should be closed at the end of the school year. Superintendent Hood, realizing that RJHS would also be closing at the end of the school year, expressed some reservation with the board's decision. "He worried that closing the junior high had traumatized parents so that it might be best to wait a year before having to close another building" (Andersen, 1979, p. 1). Board member Joselyn disagreed, saying that voters would not vote favorably for an increased school tax referendum "when they learned that the district would have 64 surplus classrooms" (p. 1). Board member Webber added that "the district is considered excellent because of its people and its educational programs, not its buildings" (p. 2). Hood would have to make a school-closing recommendation to the board.

At the February 26 board meeting, Hood recommended closing Lee Elementary in Robbinsdale, the district's oldest surviving elementary, built in 1948. The board expressed some concern with this recommendation being that RJHS, in Robbinsdale, would also be closing. Red Sochacki, board member from Robbinsdale, suggested no elementary school be closed at the end of the year, letting district residents decide by a referendum how much money they wanted to spend on education and buildings (Watz, 1979).

Attendance at the next board meeting surpassed 200. The board, facing pressure from the public, voted to reverse its decision and to not close any elementary school at the end of the 1978-79 school year. Instead, it would close two elementary schools at the end of the 1979-80 school year. As one east-side parent, Anne Marie Hennen, recalled later,

> It felt like that end of town was being hit in a quick manner.... We could do this a little more evenly…. They kept saving the Plymouth schools for families not even there yet…. It began to look like, "Those poor uneducated slobs." You weren't as worthy. You were just nice people who would be understanding. "Those blue collar workers on that end [the east side] of the district, they'd just go along with it, they wouldn't be obstructive—there would be less parental disruption."

That summer, the district published and distributed a brochure of programs and services available for the upcoming school year. The brochure, picturing a sketch of an old-fashioned, one-room school house, was entitled, *All Under One Roof.* Superintendent Hood wrote, "'All under one roof' are the children, schools, programs, and special services of an organization we call Independent School District 281" (*All under one roof,* 1979, n.p.).

Unity would prove to be elusive, however, with elementary enrollment at one half its peak and with more promised school closings on the horizon. In the fall of 1979, Lee Elementary parents began to organize themselves in anticipation of the school board's naming two more elementary schools for closure. They feared that Lee would again be nominated. David and Barb Southward headed Lee's Future Concerns Committee. The committee encouraged the City of Robbinsdale to become involved. Barb Southward, commenting on the unequal distribution of school closings, questioned, "'Our committee is also wondering why there are so many schools in such close proximity which, up until present, have been allowed to remain open. One will find a circle of five schools in about a 1.2 mile radius'" (Chuba, 1979b, p. 2).

Later that fall, the parents of Lee, Noble, and Lakeview elementary schools, the three eastern-most schools in the district, banded together under the East-side Coalition, hoping that the school board would not name an east-side school for closure. "We had buttons with three rings, like the Olympics. We organized politically," recalled Dave Southward. Showing that district precedent had been to close schools with the greatest enrollment decline, the coalition suggested that the board look at the south-central area of the district, where the district was losing the most elementary students. "'Fifty percent of the empty classrooms will be those south-central area schools'" (Chuba, 1979a, p. 1), stated Barb Southward.

The East-side Coalition was also concerned about the district administration's application of the school-closing criteria. In later reflection on the criteria, Barb Southward explained,

> Isn't it interesting that they apply the systematic criteria but the school that closes is always in the lower socioeconomic area. Lee had a theater, a huge gymnasium, a cafeteria. We went after the criteria…. They had better fix the criteria. The criteria always seemed to end up pointing to a school in our area.... We went to every board meeting. It was grassroots. We knew we needed people and we needed money. We needed facts, figures. We started researching and researching. There was a hairdresser who said, "I never thought I'd do this!" They all came [to meetings] with notebooks and took notes.

Barb's husband and fellow East-side Coalition member, Dave Southward, commented,

> District leaders said, "Don't bring up the socioeconomic issue, because you don't want people to feel bad or inferior"…. But Bernie Reisberg [board member] had the courage to bring it up. "We're not doing it right," he said. People just kind of rose out of the grass. We learned how to lobby. We lobbied the district with written stuff and facts. There was a lot of information.

At its December 3 meeting, the board reversed its decision and voted to close just one elementary school at the end of the school year, not two as previously planned. Board member Webber frustratingly remarked, "'The board is very much concerned with the effect that closing a school has on its children and staff but the time has come to put some focus on the financial concerns'" (Haas, 1979).

Lee Versus Olson

At the December 17 school board meeting, on request of the school board to recommend another elementary school for closure, Hood again recommended Lee Elementary in Robbinsdale for closure. This time, however, he also provided the board with two additional options, Crystal Heights Elementary in Crystal, or Olson Elementary in Golden Valley. Olson was the newest elementary building in the district. Lee was the oldest. Olson was considered an "alternative" school because grades three and four, and grades five and six were grouped

together with teams of teachers. Lee offered traditional education. Olson was located in a wealthier neighborhood in the southern, middle area. Lee was located in a lower socioeconomic neighborhood in Robbinsdale, on the east side. The administration's application of the criteria had produced the following results: Lee, 48.8; Crystal Heights 52.6; Olson; 52.6. At its next meeting, the board debated for five hours on which elementary school to propose for closure. A proposal to close Lee failed 2-4. A proposal to close Crystal Heights also failed 2-4.

In voting against the closure of either Lee or Crystal Heights, board member Reisberg stated, "'Year after year, this board has used declining enrollment and the number of students dispersed as criteria for closing buildings'" (Haas, 1980c). Hood replied that the administration had not changed the criteria in midstream and had applied the same factors to both Lee and Crystal Heights as it had in the past. "We knew we had the support of the board members from [our] side of town—Sochacki, Reisberg, Fuhrmann," recalled Barb Southward.

At its January 21 meeting, the board voted to propose Olson Elementary for closure on a 4-2 vote. Board member Joselyn, in opposition, cited Olson's open classroom with mixed grades and stated that closing Olson would constitute a loss of educational choice for students. "'The administration has already recommended that Lee be closed three times in previous years, but the Eastside coalition controls certain members votes.... What really counts is how the pressure is applied'" (Haas & Nygaard, 1980, p. 2). Board member Webber, who felt that not deciding to close a building would be the biggest sin the board could commit, stated, "'We have to close a school.... The troubled budget is a burden shared by the entire district'" (Haas & Nygaard, 1980, p. 2). In defending his vote to close Olson, board member Sochacki noted that Robbinsdale had provided land free or at a low price for schools. "'The people of Robbinsdale did their share'" ("Lee outlasts Olson," 1980, p. 1B). Board member Reisberg later remembered,

There was a division within the administration. To let Olson remain open would have required a re-evaluation of the criteria…. If we would apply the same criteria, Olson should have closed. I could not go out and face those voters if we did not close Olson. I felt that what was sauce for the goose was good for the gander. If what we did with the criteria was appropriate for the other schools, it was appropriate for Olson.

At the public hearings on the proposed closure of Olson, Olson's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) president, Bill Bergquist, armed with his own new "Cluster Option" plan, chided the school district for not having a plan for the future. "'I suggest that Olson is being proposed for closing by default. You don't have a plan'" (Haas, 1980h, p. 1). Board member Fuhrmann, recalling the public hearings, later remarked, "A hundred percent of parents from the Olson area were professional, executive-type people which allowed them to better express themselves and their views." In agreement, board member Reisberg later explained, "They were very articulate parents from Olson. Up north, people were coming to school without breakfast. Those parents were not as fully engaged. That was not the situation at Olson. The further south you got, the more organized the parents become.... It was clear—how well people were dressed, how educated and articulate they were."

East-side Coalition member Barb Southward attended the public hearings.

Olson was a small school, a very expensive school to operate—a nice little, neat little school. At the public hearing for closing Olson, we were the sweatshirts, blue-jeans crowd from Robbinsdale. An Olson parent rushed in late and said, "Oh it's been such a terrible day today. My cleaning lady didn't show up".... Another parent asked, "If Olson closes, who's going to tell Sigurd Olson [noted environmentalist]?" We said, "We will."

"The class warfare was there—you bet it was," concluded Dave Southward.

Residents wrote many letters to the editor in the community newspaper concerning the proposed closing of Olson Elementary. Letters against closing Olson characterized the school as offering unique, progressive, quality-option, alternative educational program. "We strongly feel a vote to close an existing alternative program is a vote against quality education. District 281's

quality will be diminished if alternative methods of teaching children are lost" (Davis & Davis, 1980), wrote two parents. Defending the board's decision, Dave and Barb Southward wrote,

> The democratic process has proven to be sound....It would seem inconceivable that any area of our district would expect to escape some of the pain and inconvenience brought about by school closures.
>   Crystal children have been affected by every closure to date. Robbinsdale has been involved in two elementary closures and the loss of Robbinsdale Junior High is still causing repercussions in our community.
>   The closure of a school in the southern part of the district was correct and the board should be commended for their decision. (Southward & Southward, 1980)

At its February 26 meeting, with 300 people in attendance, and after two hours of debate, the school board voted 4-2 to close Olson Elementary. The *Minneapolis Star* newspaper depicted the Lee versus Olson debate as "an argument that pitted one neighborhood against another amid charges of elitism and underhandedness.... Olson parents charge that the board, heavy with representation from Robbinsdale, had disgraced itself with the politics of provincialism by not closing the district's oldest building, Lee, instead" (Young, 1980). The discussions had become so heated that one board member had walked out of a meeting in frustration. "It was a mini-version of the [future] high school debate," recalled former board member Fuhrmann. "It didn't get better after Olson," said former board member Reisberg.

Closing Lee Elementary School

During the summer of 1980, some dissatisfaction with the criteria for closing schools began to emerge. As one parent and original member of the criteria committee noted,

> "It is my observation that the original intent of the criteria was to make a difficult decision a bit more objective...although it appears that the criteria are not discriminating enough. Administrators are not applying the ratings so that there is a wide enough point spread between schools. This suggests that perhaps the criteria are not doing their job." (Haas, 1980e)

Superintendent Hood contended that he had examined many lists of criteria used by school

districts throughout the country, and he believed that District 281's were the most comprehensive and complete.

> "I do not think a major revision of the criteria is needed.... If any changes are made, it should be to the weightings assigned each of the criteria....
> No committee will come up with a list of criteria that will be acceptable to all. If my school ranks high, the criteria used are satisfactory. If my school ranks low and the chances are that it will be closed, criteria are no good and a major revision is needed." (Haas, 1980d)

Further defending the criteria, Assistant Superintendent Forsberg asserted, "'Throughout the years the criteria have proven to be a workable, flexible tool for the district. The criteria have by no means been static and have gone through extensions and clarifications. However, the original instrument is still intact'" (Haas, 1980e).

Nevertheless, board member Fuhrmann and recently-elected board member Bergquist met with the administration to develop a working draft of possible changes. The proposed changes consisted of reducing the weighting for "displacement of students" from 13 to 12, and then splitting it up into two categories, "displacement of students" and "placement of building," with scores of seven and five respectively. "Role (use) of school by community" would lose one weighting point, and "unique educational programs" would gain one. "Financial factors-cost per pupil per square foot" would also gain one weighting point, moving from 12 to 13 (Haas, 1980i).

Board member Webber suggested that a public hearing be held. "'The criteria represented the will of the citizens...and I think the people should be aware of the change and, in effect, tell us whether they are in agreement with it.... Most people don't realize the impact one weighting point can have, because a lot of these schools come in so close'" (Haas, 1980b). After a public hearing, the board adopted the changes to the criteria on October 20.

That fall, the school board decided that yet another elementary would have to be closed at the end of the school year. On December 1, Hood recommended again to the board that Lee

Elementary should close. Hood stated,

> "This is a night no one enjoys.... No one is eager to name a school for closing, although no one will argue the need to close a school. You would think that this task would get easier each year, but I assure you it does not. However, with our declining enrollment it is just a simple fact that we don't need all our school buildings." (Haas, 1980g)

The administration's criteria application had produced the following point totals: Lee, 48.6; Lakeview, 49.0; Lincoln, 49.6; Noble, 49.8; Northport, 51.3. Lee, Lakeview, and Noble schools, founders of the East-side Coalition, were the eastern-most elementary schools. Lincoln and Northport were located in the lower socioeconomic, north end of the district. "'In the east cluster...you could close any one of those three schools. But Lee is the oldest, and it is really no surprise that we recommend Lee'" (Haas, 1980g), Hood told the board.

On January 5, 1981, the Robbinsdale city council presented the school board with a resolution opposing the closing of Lee Elementary and opposing any future closing of Lakeview Elementary, also in Robbinsdale. Ray Mattson had recently won election as mayor of Robbinsdale, replacing retiring mayor Harvey Lange and running on a platform to lobby to prevent any further school closures in Robbinsdale. Most city council candidates had run similar platforms (Chuba, 1980). "Robbinsdale citizens seem to have a high political awareness" (Blodgett, 1983, p. 97), noted the town historian, pointing out that 89 percent of registered voters in Robbinsdale had cast votes that year in the November presidential election, compared to a national average of only 50 percent.

The community newspaper reporter described the scene at the January 19 board meeting, where the closing of Lee Elementary was on the agenda. "A boisterous crowd of over 200 persons was there to applaud anyone who spoke in opposition to the closing of Lee.... They questioned the district's criteria for closing schools which rated Lee a two out of 10 possible points in physical facilities" (Wilary, 1981e). Hood responded that Lee was a three-story

building, not accessible to the handicapped, not as safe, and that the roof needed repair. "'It is wise planning to close your oldest building'" (Wilary, 1981e), said Hood. Recently-elected board member Bergquist, who as a parent had lost the Lee versus Olson battle the previous year, made the motion, and the board carried through, voting to propose to close Lee on a 5-1 vote. Lone Robbinsdale board member Sochacki cast the only opposing vote.

The legally required public hearing was held in early February. Barb and David Southward, parents of Lee students, led the attack. "Armed with maps, charts and graphs, they staged an elaborate 20-minute presentation showing why Lee Elementary should not be closed.... 'This doesn't make sense.... We want to maintain schools where the kids are.... It is a grave mistake not to assess the buildings in a more objective way'" (Wilary, 1981d, pp. 1, 6), said Dave Southward. Board member Olson frustratingly stated, "'The criteria, a guide given by the citizens so buildings can be rated, which I trusted, has left me grasping at .4 of a point'" (p. 6). Nevertheless, on February 23, the board voted to close Lee Elementary on a 5-1 vote. "Despite strong objections by local residents, there was no wavering among board members this time" (Wilary, 1981a, p. 1), wrote the community newspaper reporter.

In a letter to the editor, Barb Southward delivered the homage to Lee Elementary.

Lee Elementary school, Age 32, 3630 Lee Ave. N., Robbinsdale, died Feb. 23, 1981. She was the victim of a disease currently present in District 281 called declining enrollment. Although she herself manifested only slight symptoms of the disease for the past several years, it was decided by the doctor in charge and his staff of consultants that she would be used as a donor, giving her students to other schools in the area, thus insuring their survival against the dread disease.

She provided facilities for numerous community activities, summer school and was the "launching pad" for several church congregations.

The community fought valiantly to save her but to no avail. Those who had the power to intervene put their faith in the doctor's diagnosis and the treatment plan. Lee School was a member of District 281 and at her inception held the honor of being the largest elementary school in Minnesota. During the past 32 years she helped to educate thousands of children. She provided facilities for numerous community activities, summer school and was the "launching pad" for several church congregations.

She was preceded in death by Robbinsdale Junior High and five sister elementary schools. She is survived by the remaining District 281 schools and a large community of

friends who mourn her loss. Reviewal will be from now until June 3, 1981.

Memorials may be directed to the District 281 general fund to be used to transport students to alternate programs all of which will be in the western part of the district, or for the purchase of a new communication system in the administration building. (Southward, 1981)

A few weeks before the end of the school year and the closing of Lee Elementary, the school held an open house. Hundreds of parents, old friends, and old students turned up to say farewell to Lee. The PTA president commented, "'We're real small town at Lee.... I really think what the Lee parents will miss the most is the neighborhood school. We're giving up part of our community. We're joining the bus troops'" (Gonzalez Ettel, 1981, p. 3). A reporter for the *Minneapolis Star* described the community sentiment.

They know that their children will settle in Lakeview and Noble elementary schools; they know that buildings and bus rides have little to do with the quality of education.

But it won't be the same. Lee is the pride of their neighborhood. And they like having a school where three out of five students live close enough to walk. (Gonzalez Ettel, 1981, p. 3)

Barb Southward later explained, "We didn't like it, but we went along with it. We could get [all the students] into Lakeview and Noble by then, avoiding a long bus ride."

By the summer of 1981, over a four-year period, the district had closed seven school buildings, including the district's first elementary school and its first junior high school (originally its first high school). These included closing two of the four schools within the City of Robbinsdale. But the largest battle was still ahead.

Should a High School Be Closed?

If It Were Done, Better It Is Done Quickly

In the fall of 1981, the *Minneapolis Star* published an article on declining enrollment entitled, "Inner-ring Schools Now White Elephants" (Peterson & Hoose, 1981). According to

the article, districts with shrinking student populations were trying to confine school closings to

elementary schools and junior highs, by moving sixth grade into the junior high or putting ninth

grade into the senior high. Closing a high school was only being considered as a last resort.

> High schools are bigger, costlier, more specialized. An elementary school can, without
> much ado, become an office building, with graceful lawns and plenty of parking. But
> high schools have science labs, swimming pools, stadiums. And whole cities identify
> with them, with their bands and football teams and proud school songs. (pp. 1A, 10A)

A proposal in the Minnesota Legislature, a few years earlier, to merge Minnesota's school

districts, cutting the number from about 430 to 90, had been scrapped when legislators became

nervous about the political fallout. Communities didn't want to merge high schools, they didn't

want to merge school districts, and they didn't want to buy closed high schools in neighboring

districts. They wanted their own high school in their own community.

Over the previous school year, the closing of Lee Elementary had not been the only item

of magnitude on District 281 leaders' agenda. From a peak of over 28,000 students, the district

was now enrolling just over 17,000, a nearly 40 percent decline, with only 950 kindergartners

replacing the 2,000 graduating seniors. Tiny neighboring Golden Valley School District had just

closed its high school and the whole district had merged with the Hopkins School District. The

District 281 school board had spent the year evaluating whether or not it could accomplish a

senior high closure, reviewing its criteria for closing schools, and wondering what role the

school-closing criteria might play in a possible senior high closure.

These issues had played prominent roles in both the 1980 and 1981 school board

elections. The district's financial environment had also continued to deteriorate. Between 1977

and 1980 enrollment had dropped by 24 percent, staff had been reduced by 11 percent, four

elementary schools and one junior high had been closed, and yet due to inflationary pressures,

overall general expenditures had actually increased by eight percent *(Grade reorganization*

report, 1980, p. 151).

As early as 1978, Superintendent Hood had urged the board to create a committee to study the possibility of replacing junior high schools with middle schools, grouping elementary students in K-5 buildings, middle school in 6-8, and high school in 9-12. Moving ninth grade into the high schools, which at the time housed only 10-12, would create higher occupancy in the high schools, postponing a high school closure (Watz, 1978e). Hood had repeated his proposal in 1979. In the fall of 1979, the board appointed the Grade Reorganization Committee to study various options for reorganizing the district's grade divisions, but the committee was instructed only to study the various options and not to make any recommendations. Its job was to collect, organize, analyze, and present data. The 15-member, citizen-staff committee was allowed a consultant. It met periodically over the course of a year.

On October 20, 1980, the committee submitted a seven-chapter, 175-page report to the board, analyzing five different grade-organization possibilities, detailing how many buildings could be closed under each plan, in which year they could be closed, and the cumulative savings of each plan to the district. "The report was packed full of data, numbers, charts, some comparisons and some summaries, almost to the point of being overwhelming" (Haas, 1980i, p. 1), the community newspaper reported. Plan number one would keep the current grade-organization system of K-6, 7-9, 10-12. This would allow for the closing of four elementary schools between 1981 and 1985, and one high school in 1982. According to the committee, this plan would net the district a cumulative savings of seven million dollars through 1985. Other plans included shifting ninth grade to senior high, adopting a middle school plan, shifting elementary students into junior high buildings, or closing all junior high buildings and using elementary schools for K-8. Cumulative savings through 1985 under these other plans ranged

from three and one-half million dollars to six million.

"'We were not asked to make any recommendation.... However, some of the data is inherently conclusive'" (Haas, 1980i, p. 1), noted the chairperson of the committee. The administration reported to the public.

> The whole process of finding, evaluating, and organizing the data on school organization plans was a complex one.... In spite of the fact that committee members obviously had their own preferences, they were able to separate these, preparing an objective analysis. This is the strength of the report. ("Which organizational plan," 1980, p. 6)

"'Saving money is the number one reason for the reorganization'" (C. Thomas, 1980), the administration emphasized.

A Robbinsdale parent on the Grade Reorganization Committee, Joy Robb, said in later reflection, "The committee was set up by the administration to close a high school." Robb contended that the committee had indeed made a recommendation, one to stay with the then current K-6, 7-9, 10-12 pattern. Although the written record stated that the committee was not asked to make any recommendation, three later recorded comments, one by board member Olson (see Adair, 1981c, p. 2), one by outside consultants (see Sheran, Hetland, & Maas, 1982, p. 2), and one by Assistant Superintendent Boynton (see Adair, 1982g, p. 3), affirmed that the committee had in some fashion recommended keeping the then current grade pattern. According to Robb, the committee members were asked to vote on one of the six different grade patterns under consideration.

> The current pattern received the most votes out of six different patterns, but if you added up the votes on all the patterns that included sending ninth grade to high school, they received more votes than the current pattern. They wouldn't look at it any other way. You had one vote only for one of six patterns. Even though the majority vote was for a change, no one change pattern received more votes than the current one.... Teachers on the committee were really behind keeping the current pattern. [They] didn't want to change the system and move ninth up…. It was going to wreck the school district.

Robb wrote a minority dissension report, to be included with the committee's final report

to the board, arguing against the current grade pattern and explaining why middle schools were better for kids. The community newspaper reporter also urged the board to study the middle school option, believing it would be a viable option to avoid closing a senior high. She was afraid that closing a senior high would be detrimental to the district and that the choice would be based on politics instead of what was in the best interest of students (Haas, 1980f).

During January of 1981, the board held three informational meetings for the public to learn about and give its thoughts on the six different plans to reorganize the district's grade divisions. "'We want your input.... We want the residents of District 281 to tell us what they want. That is the only way we can make wise decisions'" (Wilary, 1981c), said Hood during the second meeting. The administration showed the declining enrollment projections to the public, adding that if the district were to stay with the current grade-division system outlined in plan number one, the district would have to close a high school by June of 1982. Commenting on plan number three, moving to middle schools, board member Bergquist noted that by 1988 there would only be enough students for two high schools anyway in grades 9-12. He felt the district should adopt plan number one because it would save the most money. Board member Olson said, "'We would probably look at our criteria for closing elementary schools and see what applies'" (Wilary, 1981c).

On January 15, Bob Cameron, district Administrative Services Director, sent a memo to the superintendent entitled "Follow-up on Plan I Adoption." "If the board adopts Plan I, we then need a strategy for implementation—closing a senior high" (B. Cameron, personal communication, January 15, 1981). Cameron suggested that in April the board should authorize the administration to make a recommendation on which high school to close. The administration would make the recommendation in May, after the school board election. Public hearings would

take place during summer or fall, with the board taking final action in the fall.

> A well-conceived plan will do much to take away arguments against closing a building— or putting it off a year.... The longer the time allowed the greater the strength of the opposition. These dates avoid involving a board election in the decision...all details worked out before the next and it would be too late—I hope—to reverse the decision. (B. Cameron, personal communication, January 15, 1981)

Doubting that the board possessed the fortitude to vote that fall to close a high school in June of 1982, Cameron advocated the phased-in closing of the senior high. The building to be closed would operate with just 11th and 12th grades for the 1982-83 school year, with only one grade then having to move to new high schools when the building closed in the summer of 1983. Absent this scenario, Cameron felt the board would hold off on naming a building. "A year's delay in the decision creates several possible problems; staff and community uncertainty and tension, involvement in board elections (maybe over two years), and involvement in a referendum vote. I agree with Shakespeare—'If it were done, better it is done quickly'" (B. Cameron, personal communication, January 15, 1981).

At the January 19 board meeting, Superintendent Hood recommended that the district stay with its current organizational pattern of K-6, 7-9, 10-12, that the board close a senior high at the end of the 1981-82 school year, and that four elementary schools close by the fall of 1984. The net cumulative savings would be seven million dollars over five years. "'The process of closing a senior high school would be the most traumatic period in our district's history.... But this plan would best serve the needs of the district in the foreseeable future'" (Wilary, 1981b), declared Hood. Board member Olson responded, "'I question if this community is large enough to close a senior high school. If we made this decision, one-third of our district would be at war with the other two-thirds'" (Wilary, 1981b). Hood replied that even if the district adopted a middle school pattern, a senior high would still have to be closed in 1987. "'Why postpone the

inevitable for four or five years'" (Wilary, 1981b)?

A public hearing on the administration's grade-organization proposal was held, with the stipulation that under the plan a senior high would close by next year. "It all came down to economics, and this plan would save the district the most money" (Wilary, 1981g, p. 1). "'There would be just as much pain in closing a senior high school in 1986-87 as there would be in 1982-83. Let's get it over with and get on with the business at hand'" (p. 2), said Hood. District residents at the meeting mostly agreed. "'The public would best be served by an early decision so people's energies will not be used fighting each other'" (p. 2), said one resident. "'Don't drag it on'" (p. 2), said another. The teachers' union had polled its membership and found that 76 percent of teachers favored plan number one. "'We support this plan, but we want your criteria for closing a school to be as objective as possible'" (p. 2), union official Barry Noack informed the board. Joy Robb, Robbinsdale resident, disagreed. "'Don't close it so soon,...it should be a last resort'" (p. 2).

On February 2, the board unanimously approved staying with the current organizational pattern. The district newsletter reported,

> Maintaining the present organizational structure will save the greatest amount of money. According to the grade reorganization report, the net cumulative savings would be approximately 7 million dollars through the 1984-85 school year.... The district has preferred to close buildings as the student enrollment drops, rather than cut educational programs....
>
> Since each senior high building is designed to hold a maximum of 2,200 students, two (not three) senior highs would adequately house the 4,402 students projected for the 1982-83 school year. ("Grade structure will stay same," 1981)

On February 12, the community newspaper published an article accusing the school board of having met secretly to give the superintendent its opinion on grade reorganization before the superintendent made his recommendation to the board. The meetings had allegedly taken place on January 12 and 16. In an editorial opinion, *North Hennepin Post* editor, Margaret

Chuba, stated that the meeting on January 16 at 7:30 a.m. constituted a violation of the state's

Open Meeting Law.

> As we understand it from a conversation with the chairperson of the board, the meeting was to poll the board on their support of a plan for grade reorganization, a topic of vital interest to all with children in District 281 schools. For some reason, the board was to come to unanimous support of Plan 1 which would not change the way the grades are currently organized....
> As a result of this meeting, the District 281 board will be monitored more closely in the future. (Chuba, 1981d)

The Minnesota Legislature had passed the Open Meeting Law the previous decade, with

the goal of keeping the business of publicly-elected bodies out in the open and within a public

forum. Board member Joselyn, in a later interview, recalled the functioning of the District 281

school board before his election in 1970 and before the Open Meeting Law had been passed.

"[Back then] the school board was a private club. It was a sin not to have a unanimous vote.

They'd decide everything at [private] dinner meetings, then take 20 minutes for board meetings."

On April 6, the school board made a firm commitment to close a high school at the end of

the 1981-82 school year. There would be no phased-in closing of the building, and all students

would be transferred to a new school for the following school year. The administration would

make a recommendation in August on which high school to close, and the board would take final

action by October 5, 1981, just six months away. Board member Fuhrmann later recalled,

> We'd closed a number of grade schools, we'd closed a junior high, logically the next thing you do is close a senior high.... Why were we closing buildings? It was to save money we didn't have…. Closing a senior high was going to save one million dollars a year.

"The economics were there. We had to close a [high] school. The data proved that we didn't

have the students—we didn't need it," recalled board member Marofsky. Teachers' union

president Sandra Peterson commented, "'It isn't the beautiful buildings, but the excellent

teachers and programs that make our schools good'" (Pohlmann, 1981). In opposition,

Robbinsdale resident Joy Robb later remarked, "That decision was bad news. The most disruptive thing they could do to the district was close a high school."

Critical Discussion

Commenting on the politics of managing declining enrollment during the 1970s, Iannaccone (1979) stated, "Declining enrollment problems tend to heighten, or make manifest, the latent political tensions kept out of the political arenas. These tensions are present because they reflect fundamental unresolved and potentially divisive issues" (p. 426). In District 281 the latent cleavage which had begun to surface was the class-based, east-west socioeconomic disparity.

As noted in interview data, residents characterized east-siders as "poor uneducated slobs," "blue collar workers," and "the sweat shirts, blue-jeans crowd," who all lived on "the other side of the tracks." West-siders, on the other hand, were "professional, executive-type people," "very articulate," living "the yuppie life," with big houses, cleaning ladies, and kids that were all planning for college. This socioeconomic split, in the making over the previous 20 years and distinctly present in the minds of residents, was ripe for some divisive issue to bring it to the forefront.

East-siders, in particular, used this socioeconomic divide as a framework to understand the administrative decisions being made to address declining enrollment. In their view, too many schools were being closed on the east side, "the lower socioeconomic area." At the extreme, this pointed to "class warfare." They began to fight back by organizing and lobbying board members. They succeeded in saving the oldest school on the east side, Lee Elementary, from closure, convincing the school board to instead close the newest school on the west side, Olson

Elementary.

The closure of Olson Elementary, however, brought about the political awakening of the west side. If the district's newest elementary school could be closed, one which offered alternative educational grouping of grade levels, perhaps in the not so distant future, Armstrong High, the newest high school, might not be off-limits during a high school closure scenario. Armstrong was located on the west side and offered flex-mod alternative education. The west side counter attacked, and a further east-to-west power shift occurred when west-sider Bill Bergquist, defender of Olson Elementary and champion of alternative education, won election to the board, replacing retiring east-sider Bernie Reisberg. The board was now split evenly, 3-3, between east-siders and west-siders.

Habermas' (1975) theory on crisis tendencies in advanced capitalist democracies was developed to explain the then prevailing socioeconomic scene from a macro point of view, however others, such as Smyth (1989b), have used this analysis in understanding the local educational setting. The story of decision making which led to Robbinsdale High's eventual closure and the ensuing community turmoil could be described through a similar cascading series of micro-level Habermasian crises emanating from an economic crisis, spilling over into the political sphere as rationality and legitimation crises, and finally ending in a socio-cultural motivation crisis.

At this point in the story, District 281 faced a full-blown economic crisis, partly a result of changing macro-economic circumstances, and partially due to changing demographics. The decade of the 1970s, portrayed as a period of "stagflation," resulted in slower than average, or stagnant, growth coupled with higher than average inflation. Slower growth put constraints on state budgets and their ability to finance local school districts. Rampant inflation put pressure on

local districts' budgets through increased costs for salaries and energy consumption. Demographic changes stemming from the end of the baby boom brought about a nearly 40 percent decline in the district's enrollment from its height at the beginning of the 1970s to the end of the decade, further reducing state funding.

In analyzing and critiquing the story of Robbinsdale High's closure, the dire economic circumstances facing District 281 should not be underestimated. During the last three years of the 1970s, the district had reduced staff by 11 percent and closed four buildings, and yet expenditures had still increased by eight percent. Every budget forecast looked worse than the previous one. By 1980, the district was spending one million dollars more than it was receiving. Although the unfolding story would be comprised of changing and competing discourses, it was no wonder, then, that at the outset, in the face of an economic crisis, the dominant discourse was financial in nature.

As elementary enrollment was cut in half, and as the district began closing elementary schools, financial savings became an important component of decisions on which particular schools to close. However, in the decision-making process on whether or not a high school should be closed, a more focused form of financial rhetoric, an ideology of economic efficiency, was elevated to mythical status, acting as a hegemonic force.

The job of the Grade Reorganization Committee, as instructed by administration, was to study whether staying with the current grade pattern and closing a high school would save more money, (or be more efficient), or whether moving to a middle school pattern or other elementary configuration by closing additional elementary or junior highs would produce more savings. In other words, operating under in a sort of "corporate-managerialist" mindset, one of district administrators' top priorities was to ensure school buildings were as economically efficient and

productive as possible.   The reorganization committee's conclusions showed this efficiency emphasis in its recommendation: closing a high school would render the most economically efficient and productive use of district physical plant, (even if only modestly more efficient), when compared to the other options such as moving to a middle school pattern.

That such a narrow focus on relatively minimal savings within such a high-stakes decision-making process would make undisputed sense to so many—administrators, committee members, board members, teachers, and ordinary citizens—was evidence of the hegemonic nature of economic efficiency. Hardly a word of dissonance could be found in the written record. Brookfield (2005) noted that in decision making, when we turn to obvious, commonsense responses without conscious deliberation, this often indicates an ideological basis to our response. It is so much a part of us that our response seems objective and neutral. Ideology becomes hegemonic when the ideas are lived in our decisions and judgments.

Boyd (1979) pointed out that public sector policy making generally placed more emphasis on criteria of consensus and compromise, distinguishing it from the private sector, where criteria of efficiency were more likely to be utilized. Apple (1990) noted, however, that an ideology of economic efficiency was increasingly encroaching on public institutions such as schools, because this perspective lay at the heart of all corporate societies, constituting a dominant framework for thought and action. Within public education, Rizvi (1989) observed,

> Efficiency is a goal, the preference for which over other goals…has to be argued for in specifically moral and political terms. Efficiency is, moreover, not an ideal which is self-evidently worth pursuing—especially when it conflicts with other human interests. (p. 214)

There were those, such as Superintendent Hood, who acknowledged that closing a high school would be "the most traumatic period in our district's history," or board member Olson, who stated, "If we made this decision, one-third of our district would be at war with the other

two-thirds." However, both would eventually succumb to the allure of economic efficiency. The district's educational leaders had failed to consider political and social harmony as an important and necessary financial cost (or opportunity cost) of running important social institutions such as schools, gravitating instead almost solely toward economic efficiency in decision making.

DATA PART 4
CLOSING A HIGH SCHOOL:
A HESITANT DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

The district is practically broke.
Superintendent Hood

Some Preliminary Groundwork

In response to the state's declining school-age population, in 1977 the Minnesota state legislature had passed a mandatory planning law for school districts. The year following the law's passage, District 281 administrators, along with many other Twin City metro-area school officials, attended a state-sponsored workshop concerning school building utilization in the 49 metro-area school districts. The workshop's goal was to help district officials plan for the best use of their educational facilities in the given declining-enrollment environment. Statistics gathered for the workshop showed that out of the 604 school buildings in the larger metro area, about half of the buildings had been built prior to 1960, and about half of the buildings included subsequent additions, but overall the buildings were, at the time, in fairly good condition. Over 96 percent of the buildings built after 1941 were considered to be in good or excellent condition. However, out of a total of 604 school buildings, 56 were now closed, and 22 more were anticipated to close. The most popular disposition for a closed building was to sell or lease it to a non-profit agency, or to convert it for other uses in the community (*School building utilization,* 1979).

Minnesota's governor, Al Quie, delivered the workshop's keynote address. Citing from a popular book at the time, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as Though People Mattered,* the Governor asked school officials to consider the kind of restructuring plans that took into account social as well as financial costs, with a need for community input into the planning process. "By

'true' cost, I mean long-term social and emotional costs as well as financial costs" (*School building utilization*, 1979, p. I-4), the Governor stated. After advocating for an educational system in which all children could develop to their fullest potential through smaller neighborhood schools that reflected their communities' values, the Governor concluded his remarks.

> I believe strongly that today's crises can provide tomorrow's opportunity if we plan now for flexibility, by examining the long-range implications of our decisions and by involving the people in the process. As we plan for the future, I caution you to remember always that bricks and mortar are only a means for achieving an end. Our foremost objective must always be to help our young people develop to their fullest potential.... I look forward to working with you in the upcoming years to help us make our excellent educational system even better. (p. I-8)

The workshop also included a panel discussion on the politics of closing school buildings, along with some case-study presentations by metro-area superintendents who had already faced school closures. Edina's superintendent stressed that the community should be involved in the process of school closures and that the community should be given all the data. "If the data is sound, it should carry the decision" (*School building utilization*, 1979, p. IV-2), he said. He acknowledged, however, that the political process was a series of compromises, no one idea was always acceptable, and objections were sure to materialize. Hopkins' school district had developed finite criteria for school closures. The board had recommended the buildings to be closed but had then worked with groups to improve the decision before holding public hearings. Golden Valley officials noted, "It is not possible to get 100% agreement. The right decision should not antagonize more than 49% of the constituents" (p. IV-3). In St. Louis Park school officials had retained their closed buildings for public use, converting them into community centers and renting others to the United Way and the Red Cross.

Organizers of the workshop had also surveyed metro-area school staff and board

members, asking them to rank the degree of importance of 39 different criteria (pulled from a

review of literature) that were of possible use in identifying buildings for closure. The top-

ranking specific criteria identified by the survey were (a) district long-range plans, (b)

anticipated attendance area growth, and (c) building condition (*School building utilization*, 1979,

p. III-7).

The summer following the workshop, Robbinsdale's assistant superintendent, Willis

Boynton, began a year's sabbatical leave to visit various school districts around the United

States. Summarizing his travels for a community newspaper interview after returning from

sabbatical in the summer of 1980, Boynton remarked, "'You name it and it is probably an

educational issue in some community. The most often mentioned were those in the financial

area—taxes, closing schools and referenda.... Many schools have discarded such things as

modular scheduling, team teaching and open schools'" (Haas, 1980a). His remarks were a

foreshadowing of debates to come in District 281. Within a year, Boynton and the rest of the

district's leadership would find themselves immersed in the educational dilemma of their careers,

with a school closing, a referendum, and a controversy over the relative merits of modular

scheduling all swirling around them.

Gathering All the Data:

Tradition, Money, or Modernity?

After the school board's vote in February of 1981 to maintain the district's then current

grade-organization pattern, (which included the closure of one high school the next year), the

superintendent's cabinet began meeting on a weekly basis concerning the high school closing

issue. They knew they would soon be called on to recommend one of the district's three high

schools for closure. In 1981, the members of the superintendent's cabinet included Dr. Leroy E.
Hood, Superintendent; Willis A. Boynton, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education;
William Forsberg, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education; Robert Cameron,
Director of Administrative Services; Gary DeFrance, Director of Business Affairs; Loren S.
Johnson, Director of Staff Relations; and Dr. Adele Hellweg, Assistant to the Director of Staff
Relations.

In March the board set August 3 as the deadline for the cabinet's school-closing
recommendation, with the possibility of postponement if the district decided to hold a fall levy
referendum. The cabinet began gathering data, working on a decision-making process, and
planning how best to keep the public informed. "'We know from experience that closing a school
doesn't endear people to us,….a substantial part of the community might be a little upset'" (C.
Thomas, 1981), said Boynton.

For the cabinet, early data gathering would center on financial concerns. An early
document was compiled showing the annual custodial and maintenance costs at the three high
schools: Armstrong $438,436; Cooper $365,290; and Robbinsdale $324,568. The data was then
recalculated showing costs per square foot in each building: Armstrong $1.39; Cooper $1.27; and
Robbinsdale $1.21. Recalculated yet again, costs per pupil in each building were listed:
Armstrong $199.29; Cooper $166.04; and Robbinsdale $147.53 (*Plant operation*, 1981). "'The
prime reason for closing a senior high school is money'" (C. Thomas, 1981), stated Boynton,
elaborating that in the current year, the district was spending one million dollars more than it was
taking in. Superintendent Hood also requested a report on the physical condition of each
building. All buildings appeared to be in good condition, although Armstrong needed a complete
set of new bleachers (A. Traeger & A. Reichert, personal communication, May 7, 1981).

Armstrong also showed a higher level of vandalism.

After the school board's formal vote in April, committing itself to closing a high school at the end of 1981-82 school year, the cabinet distributed an informational pamphlet to the public. Financial concerns took center stage in the pamphlet. The cabinet informed the public that closing Armstrong would annually save $1,328,306; Cooper $1,158,691; and Robbinsdale $1,074,508. The bonded debt on each building was reported as Armstrong $3,782,750; Cooper $1,854,190; and Robbinsdale $648,172. The cabinet also addressed how the school closing would impact class size, teacher assignments, extracurricular activities, coaching staff, activity busses, class rings, towel service, and attendance-area boundary lines. The community was informed of the time line: August 3, the administration would recommend one high school for closure; September 14, the board would propose one high school for closure; October 1, public hearings would be held; October 5, the board would take final action (*Questions and answers*, 1981).

The cabinet decided to use the list of criteria already utilized in elementary school closures to guide it in making a recommendation. Whether the priorities within the criteria would remain the same, whether the weightings would remain the same, or whether any numeric weighting at all would be used would all be decided at a later date. In addition to gathering reams of data on the three high schools, the cabinet asked the district curriculum coordinators to analyze the departments in each building so the cabinet could better understand the strengths and weaknesses of various departments in each building and better understand the impact the closure would have from a curricular standpoint. The cabinet would also tour and personally inspect each of the high schools. But in what would become its most controversial decision, the cabinet requested that a committee from each building make a formal presentation concerning the

reasons why its high school should remain open.

On April 14, Superintendent Hood sent a letter to each of the three high school principals explaining the concept of the building committees' presentations. The building principal would be in charge of the committee, which would include as many different constituents as possible, and the principal would preside over the committee's presentation. Although the presentation meeting would be open to the public, only the committee and the cabinet would be allowed to speak during the meeting. Inviting a large group of spectators was discouraged. The committee would only present data about its building, without making comparisons to the other high school buildings. "The purpose of the meeting is for the cabinet to ask questions and discuss the material presented" (L. Hood, personal communication, April 14, 1981), Hood wrote.

In a more detailed letter to the three principals, Assistant Superintendent Boynton requested that the committees "discuss the strengths and weaknesses, if any, of each school.... The topics we are interested in are those included in the school closing criteria" (W. Boynton, personal communication, April 16, 1981). The 17-member committee would be comprised of the principal, the head custodian, five students, five teachers, and five parents. The committee would give a short 20-minute presentation followed by an informal discussion. "No need for each building to attempt to collect all [the financial] data. The Central Office has complete access to all the facts and will consider them at the proper time" (W. Boynton, personal communication, April 16, 1981).

Visiting Armstrong

On May 11, the cabinet met with Armstrong's committee at Armstrong High. Superintendent Hood spoke first, focusing on financial concerns. Hood characterized the district

as "'practically broke'" (*Presentations…: Armstrong senior high*, 1981, p. 1). Surmising that the legislature would not bail out struggling districts, Hood reminded the committee that the law did not permit school districts to operate deficit financing. "The board must take drastic steps in order to have a balanced budget. 'Closing schools is one of the best ways to economize'" (p. 1).

Armstrong principal George Scarbrough began the committee's presentation pointing out that Armstrong was a flexible building, built with a commitment to change and a new approach to secondary education, "virtually limitless in terms of educational innovation" (*Presentations…: Armstrong Senior High,* 1981, p. 1). Committee members then proceeded to highlight the flexible-modular scheduling design of the building, emphasizing the moveable walls in classrooms and the partitionable auditorium balconies used to accommodate large groups. The resource rooms for each department allowed students to utilize their independent study time, helping them learn how to study independently, teaching them self-responsibility, and preparing them for college. The unique media center, "the heart of the academic program" (p. 2), allowed students to become good information users. It had carrels, circle conference rooms, and a TV center. Armstrong was "'a school of the future'" (p. 4).

The committee also stressed future student population growth for the Armstrong area, speculating that by the year 2000, there would be an additional 2,000 to 4,000 high school students in the western side of the district due to the development of vacant land over that time period. Principal Scarbrough summed up the strengths of Armstrong as its design flexibility, its capability to accommodate change, and its attendance area's population growth potential. One committee member then belatedly added that the committee was aware it had not spent any time on financial concerns, even though he knew "that would be the driver behind the decision" (*Presentations…: Armstrong Senior High,* 1981, p. 5).

At the end of the one hour and 45 minute time-limit the cabinet had prescribed for each meeting, the Armstrong committee presented the cabinet with a five-page document. The document asked the cabinet to consider three questions as it proceeded to make its decision on which high school to close. First, "Which facilities will match up with the population of the future" (*The future of District 281*, 1981, p. 2)? Here, Armstrong argued that future growth would be in the western portion of the district. Second, "Which facilities will match up with the educational programs of the future" (p. 3)?

> Alternative programs have become a fixture in American education because they provide an option for students. Private schools want to fill that role and the growing interest in educational vouchers is testimony that parents are serious about alternatives.... The use of media centers, sound tapes, video tapes, cable television, computer terminals, and other electronic wizardry is clearly growing....Facilities have to be flexible and adaptable to these changes. (p. 3)

Third, "Which facilities, over the long run, represent the best educational payoff per dollar" (p. 4)? Here, the committee argued that remodeling, upgrading, rearranging space, replacing outdated equipment, and adding new technology were costs which would probably increase in the future. By inference, because Armstrong was the newest building, Armstrong would actually be the cost-saving building in the long run, since it would require less remodeling, even though its annual operating costs were higher than Cooper's and Robbinsdale's. "Present short term costs must be measured against the future long term costs of operating various facilities" (p. 4).

The committee also presented the cabinet another three-page document summarizing the flexible-modular program. At Armstrong, with its large groups, medium groups, and small groups, with its class sessions varying from 40 to 120 minutes in length, and with its independent study time, "there is room within the scheduling process for each course to be individually designed for maximum learning opportunities....Every department makes some use of non-traditional options and every course can use all or none of the options—the teachers decide" (*The*

Armstrong program, 1981, p. 1). The resource rooms provided students with direct access to individual teachers for assistance in that discipline, and students could complete missed testing from absences. Because each resource room included an office for teachers, it became the center of the department, facilitating the exchange of ideas.

Whereas the other two district high schools had libraries, Armstrong had a media center, which strongly supported students' independent study time. During independent study, "students are not containers to be filled with information by teachers but must become active learners who have been taught to find information independent of a teacher's direct supervision….Students find, select, and categorize information" (*The Armstrong program*, 1981, p. 1). In a media center concept, students could find news, read a book, watch a video, or read a pamphlet. There were multiple ways to receive information. And because curriculum was constantly changing, the media center allowed for information to be constantly updated, discarded, or replaced.

> The media center network is designed so that students can progress from passive receivers of information to active searchers, processors, and analyzers of information....
> The physical facility of the Armstrong Media Center—its technological state of the art, its flexibility, and its potential for the future—is far in advance of public libraries, many colleges, and all but a few of the best-equipped high schools in the nation. (pp. 2-3).

Flexible-modular revisited.

Although Armstrong had chosen to feature its flexible-modular program as its strength, the reviews on flex-mod within the district had been mixed over the years. The Armstrong school newspaper had reported vandalism to be a problem in the first year of Armstrong's opening. Its continuing vandalism problem had been largely blamed on flex-mod. "They ripped the building apart," stated custodian Paul Genadek. A student poll conducted by the school newspaper in the year Armstrong opened found that what the students liked most about the

school was "the freedom," most probably due to the open hallways and independent study time, or "free time."

But it was this very freedom, critics contended, that allowed some students to slip through the cracks and that contributed to a general disregard for school by many other students. In a recent letter to the editor on various forms of curricular delivery, a 1971 graduate from District 281 reflected on her seventh to 12th grade experience with "Modular Scheduling," which she described as "time to learn 'independently' in the 'Resource Centers' (library, class-rooms with books and a 'monitor' not a teacher" (P. Olson, 2012).

> How many 13-year-olds to you know mature enough to take all that time to learn independently? 16-year-olds? 18-year-olds? Even though I was a good kid and a good student I spent most of my time writing notes and hanging out in the band practice rooms. So did my fellow students. As an adult I look back and feel cheated out of an education. (P. Olson, 2012)

In later comments on Armstrong's flex-mod program, former Robbinsdale student Heather Robb McCollor observed,

> Flex-mod was an easy way to skip class. A friend of mine's brother skipped a whole quarter before anyone called his parents. His friends would tell the teachers he [had transferred] to Cooper. People had lots of open time and didn't do anything.

"We didn't have a very good attendance system" admitted former Armstrong teacher Ann Rest. "People would sign up for courses and we'd never see them.... We felt under attack on mod scheduling."

Many schools statewide had dropped flex-mod by 1980. Cooper High School had adopted flex-mod in the late 60s, even before Armstrong was built, but Cooper had abandoned the program in 1973, returning to the traditional kind of program which Robbinsdale High had kept since opening. John Lloyd, former assistant principal at Cooper High, recalled Cooper's experiment with flex-mod.

What we thought we were getting wasn't what we ended up getting. "Maybe next year things will get better," [we'd say]. Each day was a surprise…. There would be parties at the bowling alley during school time…. A day would seldom go by when you didn't have to call the police over drugs.... Students and staff were free to do things out of the ordinary, but administration was FORCED to behave differently. There was no control.

When Armstrong opened, the strongest supporters of flex-mod among the teaching staff transferred to Armstrong. Once Cooper had returned to traditional scheduling, Armstrong began sending some of its more vulnerable students to Cooper. John Lloyd recalled,

> The Armstrong staff is what kept [flex-mod] going. George [the principal] couldn't say, "This isn't working." There was no way he would have been able to turn it around. He just lived with it. Maybe he believed in it…. When an Armstrong student was in trouble, Ron Main [Armstrong's assistant principal] would say, "Go over to Cooper. They've got structure." The student would say, "Mr. Main said I should come over here because it would be a better place for me."

Armstrong's problems had not gone unnoticed by the district's central administrators and board members—increased vandalism, attendance issues, racial problems. Some Armstrong students had phoned into a local radio station saying they would have sex in neighborhood homes during independent study time. "This upset [Superintendent] Hood. He thought these were problems of mod-flex scheduling, but he never really pressed to eliminate it," recalled former assistant superintendent Boynton. "Leroy [Hood] didn't want to make the decision not to have flex-mod," concluded John Lloyd. Former board member Bill Fuhrmann recalled, "There was a continuing discussion about the form of education at Armstrong. It was too loose a format…. The kids in the top 10 percent are going to thrive in any format. The further down you get, they need more structure." Keith Moberg, former long-time board member and outspoken critic of flex-mod commented,

> A student who graduated salutatorian from Armstrong told me, "I had to drop out after the first quarter of college because I found out I could not compete with traditional students." E. J. Cooper said flex-mod was a system built for teachers, not for kids. George Scarbrough [the principal] gave away the leadership of the building to the teachers. The teachers ran that building.

On the other hand, flex-mod did have its supporters, including the staff, students, and parents of Armstrong, (evident in its committee's presentation), board members Gary Joselyn, and Bill Bergquist, as well as recently-elected board member Myrna Marofsky who lived in the Armstrong area. Supporters advocated that, because flex-mod included a hefty independent-study component, it facilitated the excitement and joy of discovery. They pointed to statistics at Armstrong, such as a 96 percent retention rate, higher standardized test scores, and 80 percent of students continuing into post high school education. For the cabinet, however, in the school-closing recommendation they were about to make, financial concerns took top place. "Mod-flex wasn't a factor as far as administration was concerned," recalled Boynton.

Visiting Cooper

The day after their meeting at Armstrong, Superintendent Hood and his cabinet met with Cooper's presentation committee. Hood started the meeting, focusing on declining enrollment, decreasing state aid, and the legal prohibition of school districts to spend in the red.

> It is absolutely imperative that the school board close a senior high building.... He asked the group to tell the cabinet why their building should be kept open. That is the reason for their meeting. The cabinet is very interested in gathering all the data. The superintendent also assured the group that no decision had been made at this time. No one knows because there has been no decision. He asked them if they hear otherwise, to please consider the information a rumor. (*Presentations…: Cooper Senior High*, 1981, p. 1)

Cooper's presentation committee pointed to the flexibility of the building in accommodating any educational schedule. Cooper had the distinction of having operated under both flex-mod and traditional programs. Although it lacked some of the flex-mod extras that Armstrong possessed, Cooper did have moveable walls in some classrooms. Cooper's central geographical location, between Armstrong and Robbinsdale, was seen as an advantage,

especially if sometime in the future the district could operate with just one high school. The committee also invoked the building's namesake, former long-time superintendent E. J. Cooper, "the 'godfather' of the school" (*Presentations…: Cooper Senior High,* 1981, p. 2), who at 84 years of age still regularly attended school functions and was an inspiration to the students. "It's important the school has a 'living symbol' that the school was named for" (p. 4). Cooper High was seen as a "'close knit family'" (p. 3) with caring teachers. "'Cooper just feels like home'" (p. 2), stated one student.

Then a parent addressed financial concerns. "As a taxpayer, the issue has to be dealt with as an economic one. It certainly is dollars and cents. It would make sense to close a building that costs the most to operate. Cooper is economically sound to operate" (*Presentations…: Cooper Senior High,* 1981, p. 2). The committee brought up energy costs of the future, with estimates of the price of gasoline increasing to a possible eight to ten dollars a gallon. Principal Elmer Kemppainen summarized. "[Cooper] is a well-constructed, well-preserved 17-year-old. It is economical to operate. The location is good. It has more than adequate facilities for alternative educational programs. It has flexibility" (p. 4).

The Cooper committee presented the cabinet with a two-page document which summarized Cooper's strengths as: (a) its central location; (b) its structurally sound and economical operation which cost only $142,000 in annual operating expenses for electricity, water, sewer, heating, and contracted repairs, while Armstrong's cost was $238,000; and (c) its flexibility to accommodate either traditional or modular scheduling (*Why keep Cooper?*, 1981). The Cooper Parent's Organization belatedly sent the cabinet a supplementary five-page document summarizing the Cooper committee's presentation in more detail. Here again financial concerns were emphasized. The document contended that by closing Armstrong rather

than Cooper,

> after four years the District would save an additional $536,987.00.... We want to emphasize that economic factors should be the primary consideration in closing a High School. A decision by the board based on economic factors will insure the continuing support of the District 281 taxpayers. (A. Hennen & L. Reid, personal communication, June 30, 1981)

Visiting Robbinsdale

Two days later, on May 14, the cabinet met with the committee of Robbinsdale High. Hood started the meeting by repeating his concerns about the district's financial situation and the need to close a senior high. "Within two years, the 4,400 senior high students can be housed in two buildings" (*Presentations…: Robbinsdale Senior High,* 1981, p. 1). Robbinsdale principal G. David Knutson began the committee's presentation, introducing Robbinsdale residents Joy Robb and Barb Southward who had previously conducted a meeting of 125 people, brainstorming what was unique about Robbinsdale High.

Speaking first about the community, Joy Robb, who had graduated from the old Robbinsdale High, described the neighborhood as a "'wonderful place to be—the Robbinsdale area.... While we are an old area, we also have paid taxes the longest. We helped to pass that bond issue a year that went on for about 15 years'" (*Presentations…: Robbinsdale Senior High,* 1981, p. 1). She described the school as the center of the community in Robbinsdale, with heavy after school community use. The Robbinsdale High attendance area had experienced a disproportionate number of students displaced in earlier school closings: 1,679 in the Robbinsdale area, 1,074 in the Cooper area, and only 299 in the Armstrong area. "'Kids are terrified of the thought of another move'" (p. 1), said Robb.

Disputing the notion that district population was moving west, the committee showed that

current elementary student population in each of the high schools' attendance areas was roughly

the same, with a little over 2,000 in each area. As for current high school students, 806 lived

west of County Road 18 (now Highway 169) in the western part of the district, 2,460 lived

between County Road 18 and Douglass Drive in the central part of the district, and 1,750 lived

east of Douglass Drive in the eastern part of the district. "There is a real need for a secondary

school in the eastern part of the district" (*Presentations…: Robbinsdale Senior High,* 1981, p. 1),

the committee asserted.

Although the oldest of the three high schools, the RHS building had been remodeled in

1976 with the addition of a second gymnasium, and it was located adjacent to Mielke Field, the

only district football stadium. "The building is in excellent physical condition, primarily because

good materials were used when it was built" (*Presentations…: Robbinsdale Senior High,* 1981,

p. 2). The committee also pointed to the low cost of operating Robbinsdale, showing a

substantial savings to the district by keeping Robbinsdale open.

As for the traditional educational program at Robbinsdale, the committee contended that

"learning is best achieved in a structured setting" (*Presentations…: Robbinsdale Senior High,*

1981, p. 3). Principal Knutson noted, though, that the differences between traditional and

modular scheduling were not all that extreme. Robbinsdale had some resource rooms, some

block scheduling, and some independent study time, though not to the extent of Armstrong.

However, the parents lauded Robbinsdale's traditional program as one that engendered "a

climate that was conducive to learning, and placed emphasis on teaching basic skills" (p. 3). The

committee concluded that a traditional approach to the basic skills was the approach most

favored by the community.

At the end of the meeting, responding to questions about the district's school-closing

criteria, Hood said the same criteria would be used as in previous school closings. "However, he was not sure what the cabinet would decide to do about the weightings.... The superintendent said he would like to ask everyone to help scotch the rumor that the decision has already been made about which building to close" (*Presentations…: Robbinsdale Senior High,* 1981, p. 4).

A few weeks later, principal Knutson sent a 26-page document to the cabinet outlining the information from the Robbinsdale committee's presentation. The document mentioned the "deep roots" (J. Robb in G. Knutson, personal communication, June 11, 1981) of the high school in the community and its status as the "only high school in [the] eastern half of [the] district." Financial factors were again stated as the main reason for closing a high school, and the document showed that the extra cost to the district of closing Robbinsdale High, the most economical school to operate, could be $4,044,741 over 10 years (B. Southward in G. Knutson, personal communication, June 11, 1981). "To Sum Up: —We have taken our lumps—The kids are still here and will be—We need a secondary school in the area—We have the most economical high school" (J. Robb in G. Knutson, personal communication, June 11, 1981).

The document concluded with the advantages of Robbinsdale's traditional educational program.

> One of the hottest topics in public education today is a "return to the traditional, structured, or basic approach" in education.... The Robbinsdale staff and administration concluded that the traditional school, with a built-in flexibility and adjustments in programming for exceptional students, established a sound educational format.... Time has proved that the decision to remain a traditional school was a correct decision. To be traditional in this era of change is unique! (no author in G. David Knutson, personal communication, June 11, 1981)

Principal G. David Knutson sought again to minimize the differences between flex-mod and traditional programs.

> Just as virtually all traditional schools have been positively affected by mod-flex, so too have the total mod-flex schools been reshaped by traditional schools....

Traditional schools have…Variable Period Scheduling...Independent Study Time...Large Group Instruction...Resource Rooms.... I believe that it illustrates the point that there are possibly more similarities than differences when comparing traditional with mod-flex schools. (G. Knutson, personal communication, June 11, 1981)

On May 19, 20, and 22, the cabinet members were given a tour of each senior high building by the school's principal "so they could all see the building one more time before beginning their decision making process" (W. Boynton, personal communication, May 22, 1981).

Undaunted Cabinet Members:

Objective Numbers or Subjective Judgments?

As the data was being gathered, the cabinet began to work on finding a system to sort, analyze, and apply the data. The cabinet had already decided to use the school-closing criteria from the elementary and junior high closures in the high school closure decision-making process, but whether or not the old weightings within the criteria would be appropriate for high schools was still open to debate. The question of whether or not to use numeric scoring also remained undecided. On May 5, Assistant Superintendent Boynton presented to the rest of the cabinet his thoughts on how to re-prioritize the established criteria for use in the high school closure. Boynton ranked the original school-closing criteria in a new order from most important to least important.

1. Placement of building
2. Financial factors
3. Facilities-completeness and flexibility
4. Physical condition of building
5. Unique educational program
6. Displacement of students
7. Appropriateness of site location
8. Alternative use
9. Transportation costs

10. District population patterns and trends
11. Role of school by community
12. Relationships of schools and municipalities
13. Minimum enrollment
(W. Boynton, personal communication, May 5, 1981)

On May 18, one cabinet member submitted to the others some thoughts on a new weighting

system, the 10-7-4 system, in which the first four items on Boynton's priority list would receive a

weighting of 10 each, the next six items a weighting of seven each, and the last three items a

weighting of four each. In this new system, "placement of building" and "unique educational

program" would gain the most weight when compared to previous years (no author, personal

communication, May 18, 1981).

Shortly thereafter, one cabinet member used this new 10-7-4 weighting system to

privately score each building, penciling in some rough-draft numbers on a practice "criteria work

sheet" and arriving at point totals which gave Cooper the loss: Cooper 578, Armstrong 580, and

Robbinsdale 594. Perhaps these total scores were not to the evaluator's liking, however. By

manipulating the scores for "population patterns and trends" and "role use of school by

community," Cooper's score was crossed out and increased to 593, Robbinsdale's to 597. Now

Armstrong was the loser (no author, personal communication, ca. May-June, 1981).

On May 21, Bob Cameron, Director of Administrative Services, sent a two-page memo to

Superintendent Hood expressing some grave concerns with the criteria weighting and scoring

scheme.

> The criteria, even when translated into "objective" numbers, are nothing more than
> subjective judgments. If the traditional weightings are not appropriate to a senior high,
> we could simply admit the fact and proceed with data and rationale independent of
> "numbers"....
> Whatever new weightings are utilized the school recommended will certainly (I
> sure would) accuse the cabinet of rigging the criteria to dictate a certain school be
> closed....
> Arguing and defending a revised weighting system could shift the focus from the

facts and rationale to pointless arguments over weighting. The cabinet's judgment as to weightings, let alone the recommendation, would be on trial and we would end by spending time and energy on defending the weighting system....

If no weighting were used, it is relatively simple to communicate the reasons. While some (many) might not agree, there would be little specifically that they could argue about. The focus of attention would have to be on the facts and rationale presented and not on the arbitrary system used to arrive at some numerical score. (R. Cameron, personal communication, May 21, 1981)

After some discussion, another memo was circulated within the cabinet.

We have concluded that there is no one best method to which all would agree.... The data collected, the rationale and the conclusion will be the same regardless of the weighting system employed. If the School Board believes that weightings (and ratings) better serves to communicate the rationale, we are quite able to translate the rationale into numbers (weightings and ratings).

If numbers are to be used, either the "traditional" (present) weightings or the alternate "10-7-4" system would appear to work. The decision as to weightings seems to evolve into a judgment as to which set of numbers would best serve in communicating the rationale to the community. (no author, personal communication, ca. May-June, 1981)

The cabinet decided to utilize numeric weighting with the 10-7-4 system. On May 27, on request of the superintendent, Bob Cameron sent a three-page memo to his fellow "undaunted cabinet members." "Dr. Hood asked if I would write up our position—recommendation?—on the criteria. It is attached.... Please, go over very carefully as there are a number of key words which could come back to haunt us—check them carefully—this is a first draft" (R. Cameron, personal communication, May 27, 1981). The memo entitled, "Applying the 'Criteria' to Senior High Schools," would serve to persuade the board and the public that the elementary school-closing criteria were appropriate at the high school level, that a numeric scoring system was best, but that the weightings should be changed to the 10-7-4 system.

The "Criteria for Closing Schools" has served the district well over the years and is accepted as a fair and equitable method for comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each building with all the other buildings in the district. The essential question was; Would the Criteria in the traditional form be adequate for judging the merits of the senior high schools?...

A variety of formats and several different types of weighting and ratings were analyzed. Many, many hours were devoted individually and collectively by the cabinet to

these various approaches.

The conclusions arrived at are: The Criteria do adequately cover all the essential factors which must be evaluated in making the decision as to which senior high building should be closed. The present weighting system does not appear to give sufficient credit to the essential factors which must be considered in deciding which senior high school buildings best serve District 281 over the next decade. (R. Cameron, personal communication, May 27, 1981)

The memo then explained that the cabinet had considered two options—first, not to use any weightings and ratings at all, just written rationale, or second, to revise the weightings.

It appears that a sizeable number of staff and residents are more comfortable with a numerical weighting system. We have always utilized the weighting/rating system in applying the Criteria and to abandon this system might confuse the citizens and create additional doubt as to the fairness of the Criteria and its application.

The Cabinet has concluded that the Criteria should be used, but that the current weighting system should be adjusted to more adequately reflect the priorities which should guide the district in making a decision as to which two buildings will best serve students in the next decade. (R. Cameron, personal communication, May 27, 1981)

The memo concluded that it would be best to divide the criteria into three sub-categories, with the criteria inside each sub-category receiving weightings of ten, seven, and four points respectively.

On June 1, the cabinet presented the new weighting system to the board. The board responded unenthusiastically. The next day, Bob Cameron sent a note to the rest of the cabinet.

As the discussion with the School Board clearly proved, any change in the weightings assigned the Criteria immediately leads to quibbling over the meaning of the numbers. If the weightings are changed, the attack on the final recommendation will focus on the weightings and not on the merits of the rationale for the recommendation.

If the board insists on weightings, then we are forced to conclude that the present weightings should be used. (R. Cameron, personal communication, June 2, 1981)

On June 15, the board of education approved the use of the "traditional" weighting system to be used by the cabinet in making their high school closing recommendation (Adair, 1981j, p. 1).

Compatriots in Confusion:

Dozens of Variables

The cabinet continued meeting to discuss the strengths and weakness of each building. It would now use the traditional weightings as preferred by the board, whereby each of the criteria carried a predetermined percentage of weight assigned for the total calculation (see Table 4).

Table 4

High School Closure Criteria Ranked by Weight

Criteria for scoring high school buildings	Weighting (out of 100)
Cost per pupil and per square foot	13
Completeness and flexibility of facilities	11
Physical condition of building	10
District population patterns and trends	9
Minimum enrollment	9
Transportation costs per pupil	8
Alternative use	8
Displacement of students	7
Appropriateness of site location	7
Placement of building	5
Relationships of schools and municipalities	5
Role (use) of school by community	4
Unique educational programs	4

Source: *More information on closing a senior high school.* (1981)

In June, a 13-page document was circulated among cabinet members. It had been labeled "confidential." The document contained a first-draft scoring of the buildings on each of the criteria, with rationale supporting the scores (A. Hellweg, personal communication, June, 1981). According to the rationale in the document, keeping RHS open would be advantageous because it was the only secondary school in the east side of the district, and 50 percent of students lived

east of Adair Avenue, near the City of Robbinsdale's boundaries. Residents made much more use of RHS after hours than either CHS or AHS. Additionally, RJHS and Lee Elementary, both in Robbinsdale, had already been closed, causing a history of displacement for some RHS students. Keeping RHS open also would enable a more desirable redrawing of high school attendance areas (see Appendix K). According to the memo,

> If AHS or CHS close, then we divide the district in an east-west pattern. This is desirable because of traffic flow and the socio-economic pattern of the district.
> —If RHS closes, then we divide the district into a north-south pattern which is not desirable for transportation and socio-economic reasons. (A. Hellweg, personal communication, ca. June, 1981)

The future growth potential in Plymouth was seen as an advantage for keeping AHS open. It was also the newest building with excellent science labs and the best media center, and it was the only building equipped with air conditioning. AHS was the only building with a modular-scheduling program. Keeping AHS open would also avert a "ripple effect" of displaced students, providing an excellent balance between RHS and AHS if they both remained open.

Keeping CHS open was advantageous because it was more economical to operate than AHS. It also had the largest number of students who walked to school, saving on transportation expenses. CHS was closer than AHS to some community facilities, such as the hockey arena.

Each building came up short in a different section of the three main criteria sections. A Cooper closure was favored in the "Student, Staff, Community" category because this would displace the fewest number of students. Robbinsdale lost in the "Physical Facilities" category because it was the oldest building. Armstrong lost in the "Financial Factors" category because it was the most expensive to operate. On a 100-point scale, the first round had produced a virtual tie, with Cooper on the bottom, but Armstrong only .3 of a point higher, and Robbinsdale only 1.6 points higher (A. Hellweg, personal communication, June, 1981).

Financial concerns were still high on the cabinet's list, however. In addition to completing its own analysis on operating costs for each building, the cabinet had requested that an independent consultant calculate energy usage and cost among the three buildings. The consultant's 33-page document, delivered to the cabinet on July 1, detailed operating expenditures related to energy use in the previous year for each of the buildings, including labor, benefits, supplies, repairs, and utilities costs. Armstrong had cost $490,884, which was $141,541 (or 41 percent) more than RHS, and $111,162 (or 29 percent) more than CHS (*Energy use,* 1981, p. 2). The cabinet then asked the same consultant to project a cumulative difference in energy costs among the buildings over the next 15 years. According to the consultant, "the cumulative difference [between AHS and CHS] at the end of 1985-86 would be $391,980 and at the end of 1994-95 it would be $1,434,244" (G. DeFrance, personal communication, September 21, 1981).

As the summer drew to an end, the cabinet was still unable to reach a conclusion on which school to recommend for closure. On September 9, Bob Cameron sent a memo to his fellow cabinet members. "Compatriots in Confusion—Cabinet, thought maybe if we started at the end and worked back, maybe we could make all the pieces fit—Anyway, rough draft of what might be our conclusion—Fill in blanks as appropriate" (R. Cameron, personal communication, September 9, 1981)! In a one-page rough draft of what the final statement from the cabinet might be on the senior high closing, Cameron wrote that after all the data had been analyzed and all the numbers crunched, the results showed a complete tie.

> Since last March, the members of the Superintendent's cabinet have devoted literally hundreds of hours to the task of analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of each of the senior high buildings.... We have collected great amounts of information and detail data. We have studied these data....
> The basis for all our information gathering, discussion and listening has been the Criteria for Closing Schools. We find the criteria, once again, to be an excellent guide for evaluating all significant aspects of each school building....
> In this situation, the criteria clearly establish the individual strengths and

weaknesses of each building, but when all the elements are added up, the three buildings come out exactly even. (R. Cameron, personal communication, September 9, 1981)

However, because geography was of primary importance, the document stated that there should be one school in the east, and one school in the west. Therefore, RHS should remain open.

Between AHS and CHS, CHS was less costly to operate, but AHS was newer and more flexible.

Here the cabinet was stuck, Cameron wrote.

> Summarizing all our efforts, the cabinet analyzes the future senior high school needs of District 281 can best be met in this manner.
> Robbinsdale Senior High School should remain open to serve the students on the east side of the district. While it is the oldest building, the facilities are adequate to provide for a first-rate instructional program. Robbinsdale is a very efficient building and is least costly to operate.
> Only one building is needed to serve the students in the western areas of the district. Armstrong is more costly to operate but contains the most modern and flexible facilities of all the senior high buildings. Cooper is quite flexible and only four years older than Armstrong. Cooper costs less to maintain and operate than Armstrong, yet can serve the same number of students.
> The cabinet recommends that _____ be closed at the end of the 1981-82 school year and _____ and Robbinsdale continue to serve the senior high students and all the citizens of District 281 in the future. (R. Cameron, personal communication, September 9, 1981)

Commenting on the difficulty of making the decision, former assistant superintendent Willis Boynton later recalled,

> RHS had so many ties from a historical standpoint, and the community had close ties to the high school. AHS was the most expensive to maintain but it had a larger, nicer site. What made the decision so tough was the newer buildings on the one hand, and then the roots and the previous school closings on the other. We couldn't come up with 100 percent on any one building…. Bob Cameron said, "I just don't think we can close THAT school [RHS] in THAT community"…. From the outset in the cabinet, there was the thought that AHS should close, that it would be the easiest to close. We could justify it on a cost basis. RHS had deeper roots, more community involvement. Even though we'd now closed our newest school [AHS], from the standpoint of the community as a whole it would be more easily accepted.

Former finance director Gary DeFrance added,

> The cabinet's position initially was that AHS should close. It was the newest building but the poorest constructed. The architect had been more concerned about aesthetics and the

setting than the function of the building. There was going to be a fight anyway and we didn't think closing AHS would be any different from the others. In fact, it probably would be easier—AHS was not so identified with the community…. We wanted RHS open—the way it split the district socioeconomically. We'd still have the east-west split with either CHS or AHS closed. We wanted that split, and either one would give us that split. Socioeconomics was a major factor. It could have been somewhat offensive to people living up in the north of the district, but I know it was a big concern of the administration…. RHS was an efficient building. We'd just closed a junior high in the area. We needed a high school on that side of the district. It was a very well built and constructed school.

Throughout the summer of 1981 the cabinet received many letters from proponents of each of the high schools. The Plymouth city manager sent a letter to the board and the superintendent showing that between 4,480 and 7,840 dwelling units were going to be built in Plymouth (J. Willis, personal communication, August 20, 1981). Board member Myrna Marofsky, an Armstrong supporter and former teacher, sent the superintendent a letter requesting the answers to some of her questions before she would be able to vote on a high school closure. Stressing the Armstrong themes of technology and the future, Marofsky wrote,

> I worry that the criteria as it stands has no evaluation of our educational priorities for the children of the future of the district…. What educational assumptions and priorities can be made for the next 10-15 years in this district?… What innovations in educational programs, methods and technology will we face in the near future?… What two buildings will offer us the broadest educational opportunities for the future? (M. Marofsky, personal communication, August 30, 1981)

Armstrong principal Scarbrough also sent a letter to the cabinet urging that Armstrong remain open. Highlighting the Armstrong themes of flexibility, technology, alternatives, change, and the future, Scarbrough wrote,

> My belief is that we must protect and preserve two basic concepts—first, facilities must be flexible and adaptable, and second, we must provide technological support….
>   I believe technology will be a major part of any solution…. Obviously technology has a place in education and, as teachers catch up with and master new technology, its use accelerates.
>   I am also concerned about the growth of private high schools and the possibility of an educational voucher system. The best way to neutralize the appeal of those alternatives to public education is to be certain we can provide alternatives which will

match or exceed our competition. We cannot win if we are anchored in the past. Our district must preserve the capability to adapt to change and we must not only master the technology that's available to us now but be receptive to our increasingly technological future.

I believe it is a time when we must look ahead; the answers are not in the past. (G. Scarbrough, personal communication, October 2, 1981)

In contrast to board member Marofsky's letter, the superintendent received a letter from a Cooper sympathizer, board chairperson Fred Webber, stressing Cooper's theme of economics. Webber asked for more information on transportation costs, remodeling costs, cost differences between alternative and traditional programs, and the effectiveness of alternative versus traditional programs (F. Webber, personal communication, September 11, 1981).

Robbinsdale also applied strong pressure. In May, Robbinsdale's city council had appointed a council member to attend board meetings, because "what might make the school district happy, could be disastrous to Robbinsdale" (Chuba, 1981c), according to some residents. In May the council had placed the RJHS property (the old Robbinsdale High) under interim zoning and ordered a study on the best uses of the property, effectively blocking the district from selling it to a chiropractic college that had been willing to purchase it. The study would not be complete until after the district's high school closing intentions were known. At a later summer meeting between the district and the council, concerning the sale of RJHS, the council let it be known that, "'the community plans its own future'" (Chuba, 1981e, p. 3). But board member Bergquist, previous supporter of Olson Elementary, which had been closed two years earlier under pressure from Robbinsdale's East-side Coalition, suggested that as long as the council was looking into future uses for the vacant Robbinsdale Junior it should also look into long-range uses for Robbinsdale Senior "in case it is the high school the board selects for closing" (p. 1).

Personal letters from community members to the cabinet in support of RHS mentioned its low cost, its fine construction, its tile floors, its location next to Mielke Field, its tradition of

academic and extracurricular excellence, and the need to maintain a high school on the east side.

Bob Bork, community newspaper editor and graduate of the old Robbinsdale High School,

wrote, "I can only guess the debris about to hit the fan if anyone suggests they close down RHS.

Every fleet has to have a flagship, and Robbinsdale High with 45 years certainly fits that

category" (Bork, 1981b). He later added,

> I would like to see the flagship of the fleet remain open.... Most people refer to District 281 as the "Robbinsdale" school district, and that makes people from Cooper and Armstrong simmer. Many publications (not ours) have referred to both Cooper and Armstrong high schools as being in "Robbinsdale."
> Can you imagine closing the school that brought the entire district its original name? (Bork, 1981a)

A Referendum

As early as March 1981, the superintendent and board members had considered holding a

fall referendum for increased school funds, holding off on naming a particular high school for

closure until after the referendum vote. Parents and the teachers' union had disagreed with this

time line. "'If you don't name the school before the referendum, the people will feel

manipulated.... It looks like you are trying to pull a fast one on them'" (Wilary, 1981f), said one

parent. "'I have a gut feeling that the referendum would do better if we didn't name a school'"

(Wilary, 1981f), said board member Joselyn.

In June the board had unanimously approved a fall referendum, and in July it had set the

date for the referendum as October 5, postponing the administration's deadline for

recommending which high school to close from August 3 to October 12. The new time line for

the school closing would be as follows: October 12, the administration would recommend which

building to close; October 19, the board would propose which building to close; October 22 and

29, the board would publish its intent to close the proposed building; November 10 and 12, the

board would hold public hearings; November 16, the board would vote in final action to close

the building. With some disagreement among board members on postponing the administration's

recommendation until after the referendum, board member Joselyn reiterated, "'We aren't

playing games with the public on this issue.... We are holding off naming the school because we

need full force towards the referendum'" (Adair, 1981h, p. 2).

Although the board's action bought some time for the cabinet in its school-closing

recommendation, it now had its plate full. In addition to working on the school-closing issue,

Superintendent Hood began to prepare for a successful outcome on the referendum. Appealing

to district residents in the district's August newsletter, Hood wrote,

> Everyone knew it had to happen sooner or later....
> The school board is asking residents to provide necessary funds to maintain the tradition of excellence.
> The request is relatively simple: Do people want to maintain the quality programs?...
> If the taxpayers are not willing to provide an additional 6 to 10 dollars a month, there will be no choice but to severely reduce both the quality and quantity of the educational services provided to all ages in the community….
> District 281 is one of the few major metropolitan school districts which has not asked for a general fund levy increase.... Boards have managed the district's finances in a prudent, efficient manner....
> While we can respect good management, the real pride in District 281 must come from the reputation the district has established for quality education. It is not unusual for people to refer to 281 as "the best in the state." (Hood, 1981)

Pressure on referendum supporters mounted when, in September, voters in Bloomington's school

district rejected a referendum by a three to one margin. Letters to the editor in District 281's

community newspapers expressed some misgivings about postponing the administration's high

school closing recommendation. Some tied their support for the referendum to the closing of

Armstrong, the most expensive school to operate. "District residents vote yes on the referendum

Oct. 5. We owe it to ourselves. District planners make that money stretch as far as possible by

closing the schools which use the largest portion of our tax dollars. You owe it to us" (Leland &

Southward, 1981), wrote two Robbinsdale residents.

On October 5, in record district turnout for a school levy issue, district residents passed

the referendum in a 6,960 to 5,783 vote. The east-side precincts in Robbinsdale and Crystal

voted mostly against the referendum, while support was strongest in Plymouth, Golden Valley

and New Hope (Andersen, 1981). With the referendum successfully completed, the cabinet

returned to the difficult task of finalizing its recommendation on which high school should close.

The recommendation was due the following week.

Don't Decide

The cabinet presented its high school closure recommendation to the board and to the

public at a school board meeting on Monday night, October 12. The meeting, held in the

Hosterman Junior High cafeteria, lasted two and one-half hours. Cabinet members spoke in front

of a large crowd, including a large group of Cooper High students wearing their orange and blue

school jackets (Hoose, 1981a). The cabinet had printed its findings and recommendations in a

32-page document, *More Information on Closing a Senior High School* (1981). Blank "criteria

work sheets" were distributed to members of the audience so they would be able to record and

tally the numbers as the cabinet, armed with dozens of overhead transparencies, presented the

scores for each high school building in the different categories of the criteria for closing schools.

Various members of the cabinet spoke during the presentation. The meeting began with

an explanation of the reasons a high school needed to be closed.

> The basic reason for closing school buildings in District 281 is the loss of students. One
> way to cut the budget very effectively is by closing a building. Although this process can
> be excessively painful for some people, it is only fiscally prudent to do so. (*More
> information,* 1981, p. 1)

The cabinet explained to the audience that, two years earlier, the school board had appointed a

citizen-staff committee to study the grade organization of the district. The committee had

determined that by staying with the current grade pattern, and closing a high school in 1982, at

which time all students would fit into two buildings, the district could save $1,100,000 a year.

The board had then studied the various grade-pattern configurations, conducted public hearings,

adopted the current grade pattern, and directed the administration to recommend one high school

for closure, using the district's school-closing criteria, "so that the savings of $1,100,000 a year

could be realized as soon as possible" (*More information,* 1981, p. 1).

> Since last February 1981, the superintendent and the six members of his cabinet have studied the dozens of variables involved in the significant decision of which senior high building to close. Hundreds of hours have been spent, reams of data generated, many ideas discussed....
> The school board charged the superintendent's cabinet with the task of recommending which senior high building should be closed.... Judgments had to be made and these people are in the best possible position to obtain information, weigh all factors, and make neutral, objective decisions. (pp. 1-3)

The cabinet informed the audience that cabinet members had met at least once a week

since February, they had listened for one hour and 45 minutes to a committee of 17 people from

each high school present the strengths of each school, they had toured each high school, and they

had met with district curriculum coordinators to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the

various departments in each school. The cabinet then gave a brief history of the district's criteria

for closing schools, reminding the audience that the criteria had been formed by a citizen-staff

committee in 1977 with only slight modifications since then.

> The criteria used in the closing of six elementary schools and one junior high were thoroughly reviewed by the cabinet and the school board. The conclusion was that the criteria do adequately cover all the essential factors which must be evaluated in making the decisions as to which senior high should be closed....
> The criteria were designed so that each specific item is rated on a scale of 1 to 10 for each of the 12 areas.... The rating on each item was multiplied by a weighting established by the Long-Range Planning and Facilities Committee. The sum of these scores, divided by 10, is the final rating for each building.
> As in all previous school closings, the "Criteria for Closing Schools" is only a

guide in arriving at a final decision. (*More information,* 1981, p. 3)

The cabinet then outlined the criteria and the weightings.

I. Students, Staff and Community
      <u>7</u>   Aa. Displacement of students….
      <u>5</u>   Ab. Placement of building….
      <u>9</u>   B. Minimum enrollment needed….
      <u>9</u>   C. District population patterns and trends
      <u>4</u>   D. Role (use) of school by community
      <u>4</u>   E. Unique educational programs….
      <u>5</u>   F. Relationships of schools and municipalities

II. Physical Facilities
      <u>11</u>   A. Completeness and flexibility of facilities….
      <u>10</u>   B. Physical condition of building….
      <u>7</u>   C. Appropriateness of site location….

III. Financial Factors
      <u>13</u>   A. Cost per pupil and per square foot….
      <u>8</u>   B. Alternative use….
      <u>8</u>   C. Transportation costs per pupil….
(*More information,* 1981, pp. 5-6)

Bob Cameron summed up the cabinet's scorings for the first section, "Students, Staff and Community," as the audience kept track of the scores. He noted that RHS was the only senior high east of Winnetka Avenue, the east side of the district, and that 60 percent of the students lived there. Closing RHS would mean longer bus rides for students, as RHS students would be bussed six miles to AHS and five miles to CHS. He also noted that an elementary school had closed the previous year in Robbinsdale, and a junior high had closed there three years prior. The 10th and 11th graders at RHS that year had been closed out of RJHS as seventh and eighth graders. The fewest number of students would be displaced with a CHS closure. AHS had the greatest potential for population growth. Armstrong was awarded 406 points, Cooper 371, and Robbinsdale 397 in this category.

Willis Boynton presented the scorings for the section, "Physical Facilities." He noted the

age of the buildings. RHS had been built in 1956, CHS in 1964, and AHS in 1970. AHS had

been built on a 52-acre site, Cooper on 42 acres, and RHS on 22 acres. Each building could

accommodate about 2,200 students, but AHS was larger with 315,000 square feet compared to

CHS 288,000, and RHS 268,000. AHS had cost about seven and a half million dollars to build,

while CHS had cost four million, and RHS three and a half million. The present bonded debt on

AHS was almost four million, almost two million on CHS, and less than one million on RHS.

AHS had been specially designed for flexible programs, had a finer media center, and an

auditorium that could be split into three sections. "None of the three buildings can be considered

old by any standard" (*More information,* 1981, p. 19). Armstrong was awarded 273 points,

Cooper 248, and Robbinsdale 227 in this category.

Gary DeFrance summed up the cabinet's scorings for the third category, "Financial

Factors." He noted that the 1979-80 plant operation and maintenance costs were $486,930 at

AHS, $379,623 at CHS, and $349,343 at RHS. Electricity costs alone differed by over $90,000

between AHS and RHS. Closing AHS would save the most in transportation expenses. The

central location of CHS was most favorable for lower transportation expenses. Cooper was

awarded 277 points, Robbinsdale 274, and Armstrong 214 in this category.

Audience members keeping track of the scores realized at this point that the buildings

were essentially tied (see Table 5 and Appendices I and J). Dividing by 10 to give a score out of

100 points produced 89.3, 89.6, and 89.8. Board member Olson, who in previous school-closing

recommendations had complained about being left "'grasping at .4 of a point'" (Wilary, 1981d,

p. 6), would now grasp at a slimmer .3 of a point. Superintendent Hood summarized.

> During this decision process, the superintendent's cabinet occupies a unique position, for
> it is this group which has access to the relevant data. Not only are the facts essential, but
> the data must be organized and applied in the present educational program of the
> district.... Also, the cabinet members are not emotionally attached to any one school....

As the criteria ratings clearly indicate, each senior high building has strengths and weaknesses. When the positives and negatives were balanced out, there is no one school which stands out as a prime candidate for closing. Yet one must be closed.

When all the evidence was evaluated, weighed, and judged, the essential elements which provided justification for the cabinet's final recommendation really came down to three points: location, flexibility to meet future educational needs, and costs of operation. (*More information,* 1981, pp. 27-28)

Table 5

Administration's High School Point Tally

Criteria category	Point tally		
	AHS	CHS	RHS
Students, staff, community	406	371	379
Physical facilities	273	248	227
Financial factors	214	277	274
Total (out of 1000)	893	896	898
Total (out of 100)	89.3	89.6	89.8

Source: *More information on closing a senior high school*. (1981)

Hood again reviewed costs, showing RHS was the cheapest and AHS was the most

expensive in operating costs, quoting from the independent consultant's report. The operating

costs of an AHS-CHS combination were $866,553, an AHS-RHS combination $836,273, and a

CHS-RHS combination $728,966. He also noted that Robbinsdale was the only high school in

the eastern part of the district to serve the hundreds of students living there.

Hood announced the final score tally and the audience hushed as he made his recommendation. "Finally, a recommendation must be made to the school board. Weighting all the facts as we know them, the cabinet recommends that Robbinsdale Senior High be one of the two District 281 high schools to remain open" (*More information,* 1981, p. 30). Then Hood "dropped his bombshell" (Hoose, 1981a, p. 3). He would not recommend either Armstrong or Cooper for closing. Hood said it was up to the board to determine its priorities. If its priority was to save the most money, then Cooper should remain open. If its priority was to continue to offer a flex-mod alternative program and retain the newest building, then Armstrong should remain open. An attending newspaper reporter observed, "An angry murmur rippled through the audience. It was as if the host of the Miss America pageant had ripped open the magic envelope and found nothing inside" (p. 3). The superintendent concluded,

> The members of the superintendent's cabinet have lived with the responsibility of this recommendation for seven months now. Facts, figures, and data have piled high on our desks....
> The recommendation from the cabinet to the school board is a judgment based on all the cabinet knows to be true about the present senior high buildings. (*More information,* 1981, p. 31)

The leading line in the next day's *Minneapolis Tribune* newspaper article read, "Tradition will be salvaged, but money and modernity are still at odds" (Banaszynski, 1981, p. 1B).

Trying to make the best of a controversial recommendation, board chair Webber commented after the meeting,

> "The cabinet was only asked to give us a recommendation and they did their work well.... We have disagreed with their recommendations before, and it is now our responsibility to decide.... We must look at the flexibility of Armstrong and how much it costs to maintain.... It really comes down to whether flexibility is worth the dollars and cents involved." (Adair, 1981k, pp. 1-2)

In later reflection, former assistant superintendent Willis Boynton explained,

The board wasn't that interested in the administration's opinion. They didn't care which building closed as long as it wasn't Armstrong. Marofsky and Joselyn were afraid that Hood might recommend Armstrong. They put their heels in the sand early on…. A lot of people were critical of us not coming up with one recommendation. I think that some board members told Hood privately, "Don't make a firm recommendation, let us do it"…. The cabinet thought there were four or five members who would vote to close Cooper.

Critical Discussion

As administration grappled with the question of which high school to recommend for closure, a further east-to-west power shift occurred with the election of Myrna Marofsky to the school board. Even as late as the spring of 1980, the six-member board had still included four east-siders, including two members from the City of Robbinsdale itself. The board had become evenly split between east-siders and west-siders with the retirement of Robbinsdale board member Reisberg and the election of Bergquist the previous May. With the retirement of lone Robbinsdale board member Sochacki and the election of Marofsky in May of 1981, the board now had four west-siders to two east-siders (with no members from the City of Robbinsdale) as it prepared to vote on the administration's high school closure recommendation. In a little over a year, a 4-2 east-to-west school board had become a 4-2 west-to-east board, with board members Marofsky, Bergquist, Joselyn, and probably Webber more west-side in principle and board members Fuhrmann and Olson more east-side.

Throughout the six-month time period used by administration to formulate its recommendation on which high school to close, the dominant discourse within administrative circles continued to be financial in nature. The assistant superintendent asserted at the outset that "the prime reason for closing a senior high school is money." Administration published calculations on how much money each high school building would save the district if it were closed. Data gathered on maintenance, custodial, and energy costs among the three high schools

and presented to the public showed a clear focus on the importance of financial concerns in administrators' thinking.

Superintendent Hood commenced the first high school presentation meeting at Armstrong by declaring the district "practically broke," and he began the community meeting called to disclose administration's final decision on which high school to recommend for closure by stating it "fiscally prudent" to close a high school, as doing so would "cut the budget very effectively." Cooper parent Anne Marie Hennen remembered, "[Hood's] line was, 'If you can find the money for it, I'll support it.' Money was a primary thing on his mind. He wasn't a complicated man." "Leroy's main area was finance," recalled teachers' union officer Barry Noack. "He was always worried whether the district would have enough money to function properly."

Administration used "cost per pupil per square foot" as the highest weighted criteria to rate the high schools. This was somewhat of a divergence from metro-wide administrative preference given that a survey two years earlier had shown school officials ranking financial considerations only in third place within six broad categories, with the top three specific criteria including no financial factors (*School Building Utilization*, 1979, p. III-8). Although some rumblings could be heard among the public concerning the high schools' differing capacities to accommodate alternative programming needs, and although the criteria used to rank the schools included "unique educational programs," Assistant Superintendent Boynton seemed to downplay curricular-delivery talk, having remarked earlier, "Many schools have discarded such things as modular scheduling, team teaching and open schools."

In arriving at its high school closure recommendation, administration had embarked on an expert-oriented, technical-rational decision-making process. The technical-rational model

represented positivistic and empirical ways of knowing, a kind of scientifisation of decision making which claimed neutrality and objectivity as it limited itself to "the facts," often quantitative in nature. Boyd (1983) noted, "To minimize the controversial aspects of school closings, school officials usually try to emphasize the use of neutral, technical criteria in selecting schools to be closed. But...there is no simple 'technological fix' that will ensure equitable and popular decisions" (p. 258).

The superintendent and his cabinet stated they were in a "unique position," in fact, "the best possible position," to render a school-closure decision since they had "access to the relevant data" and were "not emotionally attached to any one school." They considered "the facts essential," having studied "dozens of variables," generated "reams of data," "organized and applied" the data, and "evaluated, weighed, and judged" the evidence to make a "neutral, objective" decision. The basis for their decision was the weighted criteria for closing schools, an "instrument" that, when "all the numbers were added up," would "identify" the building which should be closed. Blank criteria worksheets were distributed to the audience during the final school-closure announcement in order to allow residents to add the numbers for themselves.

The basis for this technical-rational model, the school-closure criteria, had been put together four years earlier when administration presented the general format and content of the criteria to a committee of residents who were asked to help formulate the final product. This model had been advanced by some within the corpus of professional literature and others within the educational circles of state government. These criteria, originally designed within the district for recommending specific elementary school closures, were also used for the high school closure recommendation, because they did "adequately cover all the essential factors which must be evaluated in making the decision as to which senior high should be closed."

Administration's request that a committee from each high school participate in a formal presentation about why its building should remain open was not a recommendation found in professional literature. It could be viewed, however, as an extension of the technical-rational model, in that administration may have wanted to cultivate the impression that it was leaving no stone unturned in uncovering all the facts regarding the high schools and their relation to the school-closure criteria. In further empirical mode, administration concluded these presentations with one more on-site tour to observe all the buildings one last time before making a decision.

Apple (1990) described how science had come to perform a legitimating or justificatory function within education. Legitimation provides justification of action, with the intent of making the action more socially acceptable. In their use of the technical-rational, scientific model and their claims to expert knowledge, members of administration were engaging in a legitimatory exercise. They understood that science and expertise carried legitimatory weight. This explained the fascinating discussion within administration that the criteria, "even when translated into 'objective' numbers, are nothing more than subjective judgments," but that the weightings, ratings, and numbers better served "to communicate the rationale" to the public.

Technical-rational objectivity seemed to enjoy support from a wide array of district stakeholders. During the most recent school board elections, most candidates had agreed that the district's school-closure criteria were an asset to the closure process. The criteria seemed to provide an objective method to decision making in the view of most candidates. The community newspaper reported that during the closure of Robbinsdale Junior High, administrators had used this rating system "to objectively determine which school should be closed." Teachers' union officials were on record for decision making to be "as objective as possible," and even when unhappy parents, such as Lee Elementary's parents, learned the criteria had pointed to their

school for closure, they still seemed comfortable with the technical-rational process, arguing administrators just needed to "assess the buildings in a more objective way" when awarding the respective points.

Critical theorists have questioned the inclinations of educational administrators to reduce very complicated problems to the observable and measurable in an attempt to solve them through scientific procedures of numbers and formulas. When educational leaders defined decision making as neutral, rational, and linear, and they translated complex educational and valuative issues into mere "puzzles to be solved by…technical expertise" (Apple, 1990, p. 119), it resulted in impoverished decision making by missing the broader social, political, and cultural contexts of education. Often, as would seem to be the case in District 281, technical-rational measures were employed to disguise the political nature of decision making or to ensure the suppression of latent fissures.

As later interviews would confirm, the district's east-west socioeconomic split, although not part of the school-closure criteria and mostly absent from public discussion, was on the minds of administrators during the decision-making process. They were keen not to recommend a high school closure that would result in attendance areas even more socioeconomically disparate than the current ones; the assistant superintendent later described this as a "big concern of administration." The dominant financial discourse, which lent itself well to technical-rational quantitative analysis, helped to disguise these political and social considerations.

The technical-rational model, however, was unable to produce a solution on which high school to recommend for closure, even in face of the continued need to confront the district's economic crisis. Although the model acknowledged the location of Robbinsdale High as the only high school on the east side, it failed to produce a result between the lower operating costs

of Cooper High and the alternative educational distinctiveness of Armstrong High. This non-decision had extended the district's economic crisis into the first phase of a rationality crisis, a rationality crisis in professional administrative expertise.

Due to conflicting pressures on the macro-economic scene, Habermas (1975) described this shift from an economic crisis to a rationality crisis. "A rationality deficit [or crisis] in public administration means that the state apparatus cannot...adequately steer the economic system" (p. 47). On the micro level of District 281, administration was at an impasse between the relative values of lower costs or alternative education, and its rationality crisis was putting the district in jeopardy of foregoing a million-dollar annual savings. The unresolved high school closure decision would now be handed over to the school board where the political nature of problem would no longer be disguised.

Smyth (1989b), who applied Habermas' crisis tendencies to the educational sphere, noted the existence of a rationality crisis within educational leadership during the 1970s and 1980s that was in large part due to leaders' attempts to substitute technical-rational administrative solutions to complex social questions of equity and to issues of access and distribution of society's resources, mostly by translating, justifying, and wrapping these up in the language of cost efficiency and cost effectiveness.

> In taking on economistic language and methods to analyze and resolve our social problems, we are required not only to write off the accumulated wisdom and cultural traditions that have enabled us to resolve our social problems in the past, but more importantly we destroy the cultural habitus that has held educational communities together. (p. 3)

Although not widely apparent within District 281, there was some occasional disenchantment with the technical-rational model, one board member complaining that a model he trusted "has left me grasping at .4 of a point."

DATA PART 5
CLOSING A HIGH SCHOOL:
A PARALYZED SCHOOL BOARD

Keep alternatives in District 281!
Armstrong supporters

A Regular Civil War—Costs Versus Quality Education:

The High Schools Polarize as They Lobby Board

The school board was scheduled to propose one of the high schools for closure on

October 19, the week following the superintendent's recommendation that either Armstrong or

Cooper should close. The board's time line called for two public hearings on its proposal,

shortly thereafter, to hear public input before the final vote would be taken. The public had not

waited, however, to express its divergent opinions to the board. Public lobbying of board

members had been ongoing over the eight previous months, starting soon after board action in

February to maintain the current grade pattern and to commit to the closure of one high school

building. Letters to the editor, letters to board members, the formation of parent lobbying

groups, presentations to the board, and public relations events had all turned into what reporters

described as a "civil war" (Peterson & Hoose, 1981, p. 1) within the district.

The first shot had been fired by Robbinsdale in February of 1981, while the school board

was in the process of closing Robbinsdale's Lee Elementary School. One Robbinsdale resident

wrote,

> As far as I'm concerned the handwriting is on the wall. Using Dr. Hood's logic in
> regards to closing Lee Elementary and to quote Dr. Hood from the Post article Jan. 22: "It
> is wise planning to close your oldest building," one doesn't have to know much about
> school closings to come up with which high school will close.
>   I'm not going to wait until they name the high school, I'm going to get involved
> now. What about the rest of you? (Freiderich, 1981)

By March, letters to the editor were already detailing differences among the three high

school buildings, especially costs of operation. The district had calculated annual electricity,

water, sewer, and repair costs to be $162,000 at AHS, $70,200 at CHS, and $60,200 at RHS.

"We hope the school board will use their best judgment and not be influenced by parental politics

in this all important decision" (Puzke & Monson, 1981), wrote two Cooper seniors, advocating

the closure of Armstrong.

Typical letters from the RHS community mentioned the prior school closings already

experienced by the Robbinsdale area and the low cost of operating RHS. They advocated the

closing of AHS.

> The Robbinsdale area has watched a number of schools close: Cavanagh, Fair, Robbinsdale Junior High…and now Lee....Close the high school which costs the most to operate....I believe that it is time that the residents of Robbinsdale...stand together against the closing of yet another school in our area. Let's evenly disperse the closing of schools throughout the district and not concentrate the closings in one area as has been the procedure of the School Board so far. (Zajicek, 1981)

Typical letters from the CHS area mentioned the school's connection to former

superintendent E. J. Cooper and the low cost of operating CHS. Like RHS, they advocated the

closure of AHS.

> The basic purpose of closing schools is to save money.... If they choose to close any school other than Armstrong, they'll have a lot of explaining to do....
> In thinking about the possibility of closing Cooper, my thoughts turn toward the namesake of this school, E. J. Cooper. This school is practically the man's life. He attends just about every athletic event, boys' and girls', and loves to come up to Cooper for pep fests and various other events. Every student here is "his child." I'm sure it would crush him if his school was closed. (Monson, 1981)

Armstrong letters minimized operating costs and stressed the quality of education at

AHS.

> Just the closing of a high school will save money, so expenses should be put low on the list....
> Extra cost may very well be necessary in order to provide a quality education. Isn't the cost worth it?
> The final school board decision shouldn't be made on the basis of home town

loyalties, but on the basis of what will provide the best education for the students who will attend the two high schools. ("Closing—not a matter of money," 1981)

An east-west split had developed with RHS on one side and AHS on the other, a "costs versus quality education" argument, with CHS siding with RHS. Even among the student body an east-west split was evident. In April, the student newspaper at AHS conducted a poll of 10th and 11th graders from AHS, CHS, and RHS, asking "Which school do you think will close?" Overall there was a slight tilt toward assuming an AHS closing, but the 11th graders at RHS and CHS strongly picked AHS, while the 11th graders at AHS strongly picked RHS (Kurtzahn, 1981).

Each school was quick to establish a parent lobbying group. CHS established the Cooper Parent's Organization with Liz Reid and Anne Marie Hennen, among others, as leaders. Hennen recalled,

> It was a terrible time. Feelings were huge. Within two weeks of starting this, I firmly believed we couldn't close a high school.... I had 62 messages on my phone one day…. I never took it personally. It was always about money. I never attached myself to a building. If it was about money, it should be the [less expensive school to stay open], and it ought to be in the middle—in the middle and financial. I stuck with that all the way through.

RHS established the Parent's Action Committee (PAC), with Joy Robb and Barb Southward, among others, emerging as leaders. "We met regularly. We had officers and by-laws. PAC existed for the promotion of RHS," recalled Robb. She had a second phone line installed in her home. PAC member Keith Moberg recalled the Armstrong parent lobbying group's claim of superior education at AHS. "AHS parents were brainwashed by the staff that the kids were getting something special. It was, 'Save AHS at any cost—not in my back yard!'"

AHS established the Friends of Armstrong (FOA), with principal George Scarbrough and parent Ann Rest, among others, emerging as leaders. Ann Rest recalled,

> FOA came about at the invitation of Scarbrough. Our mission was AHS should put its best face forward to say to the district, "It shouldn't be us." On the other hand, CHS and RHS were saying, "Close AHS." We felt we were the common enemy of those schools. Their goal wasn't to keep theirs open, it was to close AHS. We never felt that there was a preference on our side to close either of the other schools in particular.... The presentations were almost completely directed by George Scarbrough, but I orchestrated them. I didn't speak too much.... The biggest negative for AHS was the energy costs. It was not very efficiently designed with regard to its utility use.

"We couldn't defend ourselves financially, so we had to shift the argument," added AHS media specialist Barb Nemer.

Liz Olson, AHS student at the time, recalled her perception of the differences between the Armstrong and Robbinsdale lobbying groups.

> PAC [from RHS] was strident. "We're mad and we're not going to take it anymore"…. The people in FOA [from AHS] were advertising and PR executives, middle managers—it was slick marketing…. AHS was in a more affluent community, a more professional community. The presentations, the PR events, the whole defense of the school reflected that. If I'd been a CHS or RHS defender that would have pissed me off as patronizing. But it was born out of this real belief that AHS was a better education…. Somebody out in Plymouth in their shiny new house worried about sending their kid to RHS—it was old and tired…. There was a sincerity about it. There was something unique we wanted to preserve.

In July and August, each of the three schools was asked to make a presentation to the school board on the strengths of its high school, in somewhat the same fashion as they had already done for the superintendent and his cabinet. Former assistant superintendent Boynton later affirmed that it was the cabinet's idea to ask the schools to make presentations to the board, so the schools would get a chance to discuss their strengths. Boynton said,

> Allowing the schools to point out their strengths to the board took some of the heat off the administration. The board was getting it right from the principals and staff. If we hadn't let them do that they would have complained that they didn't get their two cents into the board.

Armstrong was first at bat on July 27. Armstrong reviewed for the board all the themes it had put forward in its previous presentation to the cabinet, in its letters to the editor, and in its

letters to board members. Armstrong was the newest and largest building located in a future

growth area. It had been designed by teachers and was built for modular scheduling with

resource centers, rooms for large groups, and a centrally located media center. The building was

wired and equipped for computers. It had only a four percent student drop-out rate, with 85

percent of graduates going on to post high school training. It also boasted strong test scores and

a remedial reading program. The building's floor plan had been designed so student activities

would not compete with each other. The gym, fine arts, industrial arts, cafeteria, and general

classrooms were all located in separate areas. The high building operating costs were deemed to

be inaccurate according to FOA's data, with costs actually improving. In fact, according to them,

the building was under budget for both electrical and heating (Chuba, 1981a).

Cooper was next, on July 28. "'Economics must be the main criteria.... The only reason

we're closing a school is that we're running in the red. If we had the money, we wouldn't have

to do this'" (Roth, 1981a), one of the parent presenters argued to the board. Cooper was located

in the heart of the district, saving on transportation costs. Its central location would also be an

advantage if the district eventually needed only one high school. Cooper could accommodate

either traditional or flex-mod programs. Repairs, electricity, heating, water, and sewer were all

more expensive at Armstrong. "'A lot of people here are going to feel [cheated] if a more

expensive school is kept open'" (Roth, 1981a), said one of Cooper's student presenters.

Robbinsdale took the stage a few weeks later on August 17. The building was the only

high school in the eastern part of the district and was used extensively by the east-side

community. If RHS closed, that would leave four secondary schools in the west, with only

Sandburg Junior High in the east. One of the strongest points of the building was that it was the

oldest, and thus had already been remodeled. It had a traditional education program, which had

proven to be superior to flex-mod.   Operational cost reports showed that closing Armstrong

would save an additional $171,036 a year, equal to seven teachers' salaries, which translated into

nine million dollars over 20 years.   "'The growth in the western district is not all it is cracked up

to be....   Only 16 percent of current high school students live west of County Road 18'" (Adair,

1981i), said one parent.

Superintendent Hood applauded the schools' efforts in their presentations. He later

wrote,

> We would have been truly disheartened if each of our senior high school communities
> could not generate thoughtful and factual justification as to why their building should
> continue to serve the students of 281. The students, staff, and (particularly) parent groups
> who have actively supported each school deserve the highest praise for their positive and
> thorough campaigns. (*More information,* 1981, p. 31)

Board chair Fred Webber had by that time received hundreds of letters on the high school closing

issue. In later reflection on the schools' presentations to the board, he commented, "All parent

groups took it seriously and did it well. They were rational, well thought out presentations—

admirable, really great presentations."

In early August, Friends of Armstrong sent out an information alert to Armstrong area

residents.

> Friends of Armstrong (FOA) will support referendum.... Armstrong lobbying effort
> going well.... Keeping Armstrong open depends upon two things a) demonstrating and
> informing the administration and board what a truly superior educational facility that
> Armstrong is, and b) showing overwhelming public support from the Armstrong service
> area....Armstrong is very slightly more expensive to run than the other 2 high schools.
> How much more? Just over 2/tenths of 1 percent of the annual District 281 budget.
> Hardly worth making an issue of. (Friends of Armstrong, personal communication,
> August 14, 1981)

With the school board vote only two months away, FOA began a flurry of activities to promote

the school.

On August 22, FOA launched a publicity event entitled, "Keep the Ball Rolling." A six-

foot diameter rubber and vinyl ball was rolled by volunteers continuously, 24 hours a day, around

the traffic circle in front of Armstrong High over seven days. A front-page photo of the event

was published in the community newspaper ("AHS gets a little help," 1981). By the end of the

week, the ball had been rolled 603 miles and FOA submitted the event to the Guinness Book of

World Records. At the conclusion of the ball rolling, FOA held a bake sale, a picnic lunch, a

school band concert, and a rally attended by over 1,000 residents of the Armstrong area. FOA

then began scheduling neighborhood coffee parties and distributing brochures to inform AHS

area residents about the school-closing issue and the referendum ("FOA stays on the ball," 1981).

FOA's Ann Rest recalled, "AHS was new, and district leaders thought we didn't have any

loyalty, history, or tradition—'They won't really care if you close AHS.' We decided, 'We have

to show the school board that if they close AHS there are people who will care.'"

> Ted Loken had the idea [to roll the ball]. He's an advertising-marketing type. We had
> mosquito netting out and we played a rock song, "Keep the Ball Rolling," while they
> rolled the ball around. The mayor of Plymouth came by and rolled the ball. There was
> TV coverage. Board members came by. After you rolled the ball, you'd sign your name
> in a book. It was a way of showing there was school spirit somewhere other than RHS—
> to draw attention to the strengths of AHS and the school spirit. We had a back-up ball
> because the [other] ball would get holes in it. I kept the back-up basketball for years.

Cooper Parent Organization's Anne Marie Hennen, commenting on the ball rolling, recalled, "It

diminished the rest of us. [I thought,] 'If Hood wants a three-ring circus, that's what he'll get.' I

was hoping it wouldn't turn into that.... [AHS was] making points by their PR work. They were

patronizing to us."

Friends of Armstrong compiled and distributed to Armstrong-area residents a series of

different colored brochures aimed at driving home the Armstrong message. Armstrong was the

newest and most modern building. It was the school for the future because of its flexible design,

flex-mod program, and improved technology. Costs should be viewed in terms of educational

value received. Efficiency and productivity should be viewed not in terms of cost but in terms of curricular delivery. For all these reasons, Armstrong represented superior, quality education.

In somewhat of a call to arms, the brochures were titled in question format, each emphasizing one point. One brochure, stressing Armstrong's advantageous location, asked the question,

> Would you close the only high school in the only area in District 281 that is still growing?... Simple mathematics translate into anywhere from 5,280 to 12,000 additional school age children by the year 2000.... Keep Armstrong Open! It just makes good sense. (Friends of Armstrong, personal communication, n.d.)

Another, reminding residents that AHS was the newest of the three high schools asked,

> Would you close a high school building in District 281 that was designed by teachers?... Armstrong is quite simply the most modern high school in the district, and students will miss educational opportunities without it. After all, you simply can't teach the most modern subjects—in the most modern ways—as efficiently, without the most modern building. (Friends of Armstrong, personal communication, n.d.)

Emphasizing the future and technology, a third brochure asked,

> Would you close the only high school building in District 281 that is readily adaptable to the future of education? What is the future of education?... Computers, micro-computers, and tele-communications will become more and more important.... [Armstrong has] a complete computer center as well as many computer terminals spread throughout the building. (Friends of Armstrong, personal communication, n.d.)

Tackling the cost issue, another asked,

> Would you close the best high school building in District 281 for less than 8 [cents] a day, per student?...
> In a matter as complex as this, there will never be agreement on the cost factors. One thing is certain....
> Based on exhaustive and objective study of all data available, it is almost inevitable that Armstrong will cost just slightly more than either of the other two schools.... Those costs differences [from Gada Report] amount to only 2/10ths of 1% of the District 281 annual budget....
> Estimates of the additional costs on a per students basis (from numerous sources) are....between 8 cents and 27 cents a day....
> Considering the complexity and relatively small difference in cost factors, it seems clear that other criteria should be more important in this decision. (Friends of Armstrong, personal communication, n.d.)

Summing up all the points and waxing poetic, one last brochure entitled, "Armstrong High

School offers real learning advantages to the students...real benefits to the district," stated,

> Overriding all other considerations is one fact. Armstrong High school offers demonstrably better educational opportunities....
>
> It becomes apparent as you drive up to Armstrong. A strong, modern, brick building framed by gracefully wooded hills that softly sweep down to the lake front. It seems removed from the fast tract, suburban world that sends children there to learn.
>
> That environment is more than just a pretty setting. It almost forces one into a contemplative mood. There are numerous studies indicating how, and why productivity is encouraged by a setting such as Armstrong's.... Walk inside a factory designed by teachers, a factory designed to build modern education—from the student up.... But, then the raw power of the building's design begins to arrest your attention.... Armstrong is the high school of the future.... Operational cost has been raised as an issue in the high school closing debate—but, educational value must be considered as part of that question.
>
> There can be no question that the Armstrong facility delivers more educational opportunity than the other high schools in the district. That is not a reflection on the other schools—it just happens that Armstrong is the newest school....
>
> To close Armstrong is to begin to compromise that standard of quality, that unrivalled tradition of educational excellence that District 281 has stood for all these years. The District has always provided the best and most modern educational alternatives for its students. It would be most regrettable if this school closing decision was characterized by the beginning of a change in that policy. (Friends of Armstrong, personal communication, n.d.)

Robbinsdale's PAC also sent information alerts to students and parents of RHS, urging

them to contact district leadership and relay the Robbinsdale message of cost savings, east-side

location, and traditional education.

> Factors to keep in mind as you contact the central administration and school board members:
> 1. Due to enrollment decline and a resulting lack of operation funds, it is essential to close a high school at the end of the coming school year.
> 2. We must respectfully insist that the administration use measurable, objective data in rating the schools.
>
> Some of that data follows:
> 1. There are significant differences in the operational costs of the three buildings.... The total cost differential nearly equals the saving derived from an elementary school closure.
> 2. The physical facilities of R.H.S. compare favorably with the other two buildings....
> 3. There are substantial data available showing traditional educational programs at R.H.S. are overwhelmingly preferred by parents, students and educators.

4. R.H.S. is the <u>only</u> high school in the Eastern half of the district.
(Parent's Action Committee, personal communication, n.d.)

At the last board meeting before the administration was scheduled to make its recommendation, all three parent lobbying groups made one last stand in front of the board's "open mike" session. Armstrong's FOA informed the board that it had held over 25 coffee parties in private homes where many questions had arisen, among these, "If District 281 were planning a high school facility rather than closing one, what features would the building most likely have" (Friends of Armstrong, personal communication, October 5, 1981)? Robbinsdale's PAC commended the board's effort at gathering objective data. "Only three issues were important in this closure. They were: 1. Geographic location of the school considering population patterns and trends, 2. Physical facilities & 3. Financial factors. All these areas can be approached and measured with the data you have gathered" (Parent's Action Committee, personal communication, October 5, 1981).

One last round of community newspaper letters to the editor was also in order before the superintendent's recommendation. RHS stressed its east-side location, cost savings, and sharing the pain. "Robbinsdale High school is the most economical.... The financial crisis this district faces demands fiscal responsibility.... One area should not economically or emotionally bear the burden of the problems of the whole district" (Robb, 1981), wrote Joy Robb. CHS stressed its central location and cost savings.

> The Cooper Community is tired of the arrogance shown by some of our neighbors thinking and saying that they are the best....
> Political power, ad campaigns, questionable literature, and juvenile pranks (ball rolling and painting buildings) should have little or no place in making the tough monetary decisions that will be made....
> Let's keep the more economical buildings so we can keep more of our great staff. (Reid, 1981)

AHS stressed quality education, best value per dollar, modernity, and its future growth

location. "Why not save the best in the best location? Why not pay a few cents a day per student for the best structure? Sometimes spending a little more gives a lot more" (Zitur, 1981). The three high school communities waited for the administration to make a recommendation and for the school board to propose the closure of one of the high schools. The community newspaper reporter, who had been following a half-year lobbying effort by the three high schools, predicted, "The sense of loyalty built up during the years in these high schools will not topple easily at the command of the administration and school board" (Adair, 1981e).

Operation Encircle:

Cadillac Education No!

The superintendent's partial recommendation on October 12, that either Armstrong or Cooper should close, drew predictable comments from the various camps. "'I'm glad Robbinsdale seems to be off the hook'" (Hoose, 1981a, p. 3), said PAC's Joy Robb. "'We have to convince the board [that] economics is still important'" (p. 3), stated Cooper Parent Organization's Liz Reid. "'I'm not surprised, but I am disappointed…. The School Board is going to have to indicate pretty quickly their views'" (p. 3), said FOA's Ann Rest. Student reactions mirrored the parents'. "'They'd save a lot of money [closing Armstrong]'" (p. 4), commented one Cooper student. "'Armstrong's got all the points.... It's just the money. You have to pay for quality'" (p. 4), an Armstrong student declared. Perhaps mirroring the feeling of all students, another said, "'I just don't want to switch'" (p. 4).

Hood's non-recommendation itself came under heavy criticism, with many sides doubting the wisdom of his failure to narrow the decision to just one school. One teacher wrote to the cabinet,

> I cannot believe that the leadership of this school district after seven months could not come up with a recommendation.... If the board of directors of a large company told its top people to close a plant and after seven months they could not, what would happen?... What, for instance, would happen if all teachers at the end of the year, would total up their grade books and say we can not decide who should pass and who should fail—let someone else make the decision.
>
> I feel the lack of decision was one of the poorest decisions I have seen in District 281. (D. Sohn, personal communication, October 15, 1981)

One student more directly asserted, "'I think it was a total cop-out by [Superintendent] Hood'" ("Cabinet recommends," 1981). The community newspaper declined to publish any letters on the school-closing issue during the week of Hood's recommendation, saying it might influence the board's decision on October 19. The community now awaited a definitive decision from the board.

On Monday, October 19, the six-member school board met at Sandburg Junior High to vote to propose one high school for closure. Fred Webber, recently-elected board chair, recalled his arrival at that evening's meeting.

> After meeting with the board members in the teachers' lounge, we opened the double doors to the auditorium, and I thought, "What am I going to do here?" There were over 1,200 people, divided into three groups, with cheerleaders off to the side of each group.

As the meeting progressed, a motion was made to propose to close Cooper High. Board members Olson, Webber, and Fuhrmann voted "no." Board members Marofsky and Bergquist voted "yes." Board member Joselyn, who intended to vote "yes," voted "no" in order to avoid a tied vote, to have the motion reconsidered, and to try to convince at least one of the three "no" votes to switch to "yes." The merits of Armstrong's facilities versus its cost were discussed for an hour. At 11:30 p.m. a second vote was called on the proposal to close Cooper High. Fred Webber switched his vote to "yes" and the motion carried four to two. "The contingent of Armstrong students in the bleachers whooped with joy" (Hoose, 1981b).

According to subsequent newspaper analysis of the board's vote, Robbinsdale was the

oldest, but also the cheapest, and the only one on the east side, with lots of tradition behind it. Armstrong was the most modern and innovative, but also the most expensive, with some fearing that losing the flex-mod alternative program might cause some parents to enroll their students in private schools. Cooper seemed to lose out because it fell in the middle in most categories. It was less expensive than Armstrong but more expensive than Robbinsdale, lacking Robbinsdale's tradition and Armstrong's flexibility. It was located in the geographic center of the district (Hoose, 1981b).

But board member Webber asserted that he had changed his vote because the board was facing a "'million dollar deadlock'" (Adair, 1981b, p. 2). The $100,000 extra cost to operate Armstrong over Cooper could have turned into a million-dollar loss per year if the board had not been able to break a tied vote and propose to close one high school. "'Cost is one of my great concerns.... Money is very, very important.... However, I also believe in the alternative program Armstrong offers'" (Newstrom, 1981b), said Webber.

Armstrong advocates Bergquist, Marofsky, and Joselyn, commenting on their votes, all mentioned Armstrong's alternative, flex-mod program, its varied media delivery system, and the building's flexibility as important considerations for them. Cooper advocates Olson and Fuhrmann, commenting on their votes, felt Armstrong's program was not worth the $100,000 in extra costs (Adair, 1981b, p. 1).

The next day, the local media descended on Cooper High, with television minivans, helicopters, and news reporters all anxious to record reaction to the board's vote. Students and staff wore buttons, "Cooper High School, Someplace Special," as principal Elmer Kemppainen addressed the student body concerning the board's action (*Talons*, 1982, p. 235). The board's vote had just been a proposal to close the high school. The board's final vote would be held in a

few weeks, after two public hearings. The *Minneapolis Star* published a front-page article,

describing District 281 as "engaged in a civil war over which of those big, beautiful high

schools—Cooper or Armstrong—is going to be shut down" (Peterson & Hoose, 1981, p. 1). In

the October 22 and 29 issues of the community newspaper, the board published the legally

required public notice of its intent to close Cooper High School. "The closing is necessitated by

declining enrollment and the resulting impact on school finances" ("Notice of public hearing,"

1981), stated the notice.

The week after the board's vote, Cooper's principal, parents, and hundreds of students all

locked hands, forming a human ring around the Cooper building, in a public relations effort

entitled "Operation Encircle." The campaign was captured in newspaper photographs taken from

land and helicopter ("Cooper students," 1981). Rumors began to circulate that a referendum

revocation petition was underway, to revoke the excess levy referendum which had been

approved the previous month.

In a newspaper interview, E. J. Cooper, former superintendent and namesake of Cooper

High, came to the school's defense. E. J. Cooper said that modular scheduling and alternative

programs, such as Armstrong's, were expensive and had gone out of style. In addition, "'No one

wants all the best teachers and equipment in one place.... And, I certainly don't like the rumors

that this district will have one old high school and one new elitist school'" (Chuba, 1981b, pp. 1,

3).

With a three-week lapse between the board's first vote and its first scheduled public

hearing, board members and the community newspaper were inundated with a new round of

letters from school supporters. The editor of the community newspaper declared, "We've had

more letters on this subject than anything, and that includes all those hot political issues of years

gone by" (Bork, 1981d). An editorial in the Cooper school newspaper raised socioeconomic

class issues. "Well, we are now the victims of the When Money Talks—People Listen

Syndrome. The Cooper parents can't get a school board member re-elected as easily as an

Armstrong parent, so why should they worry about us" ("Who needs media center," 1981)?

Another raised educational equality as an issue.

> The alternative program and media center is not available now to all students in the
> district. Only Armstrong students have access to them.
> This raises an interesting question: if what Armstrong has is needed and necessary
> to provide good education, does that mean that Cooper and Robbinsdale don't have good
> education now? (Newstrom, 1981c)

The Cooper Parent's Organization distributed more printed information to the

community. Headlined, "Are Your Tax Dollars Being Spent Wisely?" with the word "FACT"

preceding many sentences, the organization reminded residents again that Cooper was more

economical to operate than Armstrong.

> Our school board has tentatively voted to close a cost efficient high school—COOPER....
> Quality education does not have to be modular/alternative education—which is used at
> Armstrong. There is no conclusive evidence to prove that this type of education is
> developing a better student. This form of education costs you, as taxpayers, more
> money….75% of the schools that had modular scheduling in the state have returned to
> structured/traditional education. Few private and parochial schools have modular
> scheduling. (Cooper Parent's Organization, personal communication, n.d.)

All six board members' addresses and phone numbers were listed on the flyers, and residents

were urged to contact the board members.

The board held its first public hearing on the proposal to close Cooper on November 10 at

Sandburg Junior High, with over 1,000 people attending. Board members recognized former

superintendent E. J. Cooper, who had supervised the construction of Cooper High during the last

years of his tenure, seated in the front row of the crowd. Liz Reid, commenting on the "E. J.

factor" within the debate, later remarked, "E. J. was the heart of it all. There was something

about having him there [at CHS] with the kids, something special about him and the relationship

with the kids in the building. Even the jocks would be appreciative of his coming to school."

During the public hearing, 27 speakers spoke against closing Cooper, while six spoke in favor

(Adair, 1981d).

> Cooper teacher Don Blore, distributed a "True-False Quiz for Thoughtful Taxpayers."

> If the Board persists in the present institutionalization of "privilege-writ-large" by
> rewarding opulence & inefficiency (Armstrong) while punishing frugality & cost-
> effectiveness (Cooper) the School Board's "Save Our Referendum Committee" will find
> common citizens somewhat less gullible "the-second-time-around".... In 1970 there were
> 80 "Modular/Alternative" Secondary Schools in Minnesota. Today counting Armstrong,
> there are nine (9) left!... When 15 youngsters are meeting with a teacher in small group
> time the other 15 might choose to attend the Modern Media center and Retrieve
> Information. On the other hand they may choose to Retrieve a Hamburger at the Ole
> Piper Inn!... The effect of allowing adolescents these choices may be seen in the
> contracted repairs annual bill [of $26,000 at Armstrong]…. How long will the general
> public take it? (D. Blore, personal communication, November 10, 1981)

> Between the two public hearings, residents found time for more discussion and lobbying

through the community newspapers. Community newspaper editor, Bob Bork, wrote,

> Is there a chance Robbinsdale High will be closed? Certainly, but it appears very
> unlikely. It's the only senior high building on the east end of this vast district. Not only
> that, Robbinsdale is the flagship of the fleet. That's the name it carried when this area
> had its first high school in 1936. To lose that would be like eliminating the city in which
> it is located. (Bork, 1981c)

Bork thought the board would vote to close Armstrong in the end. Armstrong supporters fired

back.

> [The residents of Robbinsdale and Crystal] are the same folks who voted "no" on the
> referendum before the high school question was even decided.
>   They weren't willing to offer financial support to the district, yet now they want
> to dictate how the money will be spent. It was the voters in the western area who
> overwhelmingly offered their financial support. (Hamilton, 1981)

> The school board held the second public hearing on the evening of November 12 at

Hosterman Junior High. The Cooper Student Council organized a march for Cooper supporters

planning to attend the meeting. They met at Cooper High and then walked half a mile to the meeting at Hosterman. In the second public hearing the board's discussion centered on whether the alternative program and physical facilities at Armstrong were worth the added cost to the district.

All parent organizations were well represented. Joy Robb, from PAC, expressed disappointment at the illusion created during the closure process that RHS did not have much to offer. "'We hope you're (the board) ready to put as much money into Robbinsdale Senior High because our kids are just as energetic and vital as the kids at the other end of the district'" (Adair, 1981d, p. 2), said one resident. Ann Rest and others, from FOA, spoke about the flexibility of the physical plant at AHS, its media center, its curriculum and programs, and the expected future growth in the Plymouth area. They estimated it would cost $450,000 to remodel Cooper's media center to match Armstrong's. Anne Marie Hennen and others, of the Cooper Parent's Organization, spoke about the referendum, accountability, and other financial concerns. They claimed that since AHS cost $162,000 more to operate a year, this could become 2.7 million over 10 years, meaning cuts in teaching staff. Cooper was centrally located, meaning lower transportation costs. "'Don't spend thousands of dollars and tax me out of my home'" (p. 2), said one resident.

Cooper parents pointed out that of the 80 schools that had tried modular scheduling over the previous 15 years, only nine were still using the schedule. Nothing had shown that modular scheduling was better, and the system only worked for 20 percent of students. Cooper parents questioned the AHS claim that flex-mod would keep students from entering private schools. They contended that most private schools were extremely structured, and that this was part of their attraction. "'We can no longer subsidize a program that hasn't been proven superior.... You

are advocating superior quality education for some, rather than equal education for all; and making everyone flip the bill'" (Adair, 1981d, p. 2), said one resident. The hearing ended around 1:00 a.m.

A Million Dollar Deadlock:
Saving Jelly Beans or Saving Flexible House

On November 16, the six-member school board met to take final action on its proposal to close Cooper High School. An audience of 1,000 attended the meeting, held at Sandburg Junior High, many residents carrying signs and banners in support of Cooper and specifically against Armstrong. Signs read, "89.6," "Cadillac Education No!", "Save Cooper Save $$" (Adair, 1981a, p. 1). Another read, "Attention! Taxpayers do you wish to pay higher taxes? It's up to you. Stand up and fight for Cooper High School" (Newstrom, 1981a). Board chair Fred Webber informed the audience that there would be no opportunity for public discussion since two public hearings had already been held for that purpose. After some discussion, board member Bill Bergquist made the motion to definitively close Cooper High. Board members Marofsky, Joselyn, and Bergquist voted "yes," members Olson, Fuhrmann, and Webber voted "no." With Webber's swing vote switched back to "no," the six-member board was now deadlocked three to three.

Webber explained that, although at the previous meeting he had voted in favor of the proposal to close Cooper, he had now returned to his original position favoring Armstrong's closure, primarily because of costs. For him, the issue was not really one of alternative or quality education versus money, because he felt the district provided quality education in all three of its high schools. "'All three buildings are offering alternatives.... Some people say that you can't

have alternatives without the building, but I say you can't have alternatives without money'" (Adair, 1981a, p. 1), said Webber. Olson reiterated his position that buildings do not educate children. Quality education comes from more money for teachers, programs, and support staff.

Olson stated that Armstrong was only an asset to one third of the district, and the general public was not convinced that its program was that much better than the others to merit the extra costs. "'The decision must be made with the emphasis on finances'" (Adair, 1981a, p. 2), Olson said.

Fuhrmann pointed out that if Armstrong were closed and its staff divided evenly between Cooper and Robbinsdale, then any benefits of the flex-mod system could be brought to the rest of the district. The district should save the extra $200,000 annually by closing Armstrong rather than Cooper. "'What makes you think there will be a never ending flow of money through the horn of plenty'" (Adair, 1981a, p. 2)? Fuhrmann asked.

Speaking for the "yes" votes, Joselyn said that the public was convinced Armstrong's program was worth the extra costs. In a large school district, it was important to have a variety of educational programs. Because programs were staff driven, Joselyn contended that the Armstrong program would not live in another building. For Joselyn, although Armstrong cost more to operate, it was the superior building. "'The question on whether the extra cost is worth it is the point where a value judgment comes into play.... I believe that the costs are well worth it'" (Adair, 1981a, p. 1).

Marofsky remarked that the need for flexible education was more important than ever, given the increasing importance of technology and other future needs within education. For her, although the decision should be cost effective, it also should be educationally sound.

> "Nothing has been brought forward to the board, besides a higher operational cost, to change my mind to close Cooper.... Two-tenths of one percent of the annual budget is

worth the Armstrong program.... I resent the notion that education has been reduced to dollars and cents." (Adair, 1981a, p. 2)

At some point over the weeks of board discussion, one Armstrong proponent had even characterized the flexible-modular program at Armstrong as offering students the "excitement and joy of discovery" (no author, personal communication, n.d.). After further discussion, the board voted to meet again the following Monday, on November 23, to try to break the impasse. The meeting was adjourned shortly before midnight.

Commenting on the deadlock and on Fred Webber's switched vote, Liz Reid of the Cooper Parent's Organization, taking some credit, later recalled,

> We had worked to get Fred elected to the school board…. We put the screws to Fred. We spent a lot of time with Fred. We talked to him about what Cooper was really about…how Cooper staff met the needs of children, and the options they had for various things…. We wrote letters, called, and harassed board members.

Barry Noack, Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers (RFT) officer at the time, attested to the persistence of the Cooper parents in later recollection. "The three to four ladies leading the CHS parent group, they were tigers—terribly dedicated."

The morning following the board's deadlocked meeting, cabinet member Bob Cameron sent an urgent memo to the superintendent, outlining his thoughts on information that the cabinet must relay to the board before its next meeting.

> A decision must be reached tonight [November 23]
>   Options
>   1. Close Cooper
>   2. Vote to close Armstrong or Robbinsdale
>   3. Vote not to close a senior high until end of '82-'83 school year
>   Reasons:
>   1. Tension and disruption of schools, staff and community must end
>   2. Any delay (beyond an Armstrong High School closing final date of December 21) is
>   simply too late in the year to ever attempt to close down a senior high school
> (R. Cameron, personal communication, November 17, 1981)

The following day, Cameron sent another memo to the superintendent. Reacting to the

board's discussion of possibly reducing the operating budget rather than closing a high school,

Cameron wrote,

> The more I think about the Board discussing the possibility of reducing the 82-83 budget by a million dollars the more irritated and scared I become.... A million reduction would have to increase class size—amount doesn't really matter, but the idea would absolutely incense the...parents who supported the referendum. Staff morale would deteriorate further and no telling what action they (thru the RFT) would take....
>
> I think the community's reaction would be disastrous—their main argument would be—"just because the board can't make a decision why do they have to "punish" the entire school district…and on and on."
>
> Even a discussion of the possibility of such a reduction in "quality education" would create serious problems in the community and with the staff. Especially six weeks after the referendum!...Take the entire amount from the cash balance, and get on with other business. (R. Cameron, personal communication, November 18, 1981)

Still feeling somewhat vulnerable, Friends of Armstrong circulated another brochure to area residents. "Keep Armstrong Open! Keep Alternatives in District 281" (Friends of Armstrong, personal communication, n.d.). Listing all the names, phone numbers, and addresses of the six board members, the brochure urged residents to contact board members by phone, mail, mailgram, or telegram, and to attend the board meeting on November 23. Armstrong's yearbook staff, working on the 1982 yearbook, decided to dedicate one whole page to the description of the building and its connection to Neil Armstrong, with emphasis on its flex-mod program. "With everything in the outside world changing we have a place at Armstrong where we can adapt to these differences.... We learn to change through our freedom" (*Gyre*, 1982, p. 18), the students wrote.

The polarization that had developed on the school board should not have been an unanticipated event. School board elections in 1980 and 1981, which had enjoyed increasing voter participation, had served to compare and contrast the candidates' views on the high school closing issue. During elections, most school board candidates had agreed that the district's school-closing criteria were an asset to the process. Although the criteria were seen as just one

of many aids to help in school-closing decisions, they were basically acceptable, having been determined with input from all parts of the school community. They seemed to provide an objective method of making decisions in the view of most candidates. But the foundation for the divide over costs versus alternative or "quality" education was also evident early on.

Gary Joselyn, an Armstrong supporter, had moved to the district shortly after the new Robbinsdale High opened. He purchased a home across from the high school and worked as an RHS counselor for a few years before joining the faculty at the University of Minnesota and moving further west to Crystal. With 12 years on the board, Joselyn was the longest serving board member and was considered the most progressive. Joselyn recalled, "I had the reputation of being a liberal, a radical. 'We've got this radical on the board.' I tried to get corporal punishment banned. Later came open meeting laws. Sex education was a big issue when I ran." Before a shift in boundaries placed his home slightly within the Robbinsdale attendance area, Joselyn's three children had all graduated from Armstrong, and Joselyn had been a strong supporter of Armstrong's flex-mod program over many years. A 1979 Armstrong newspaper article reported, "[Joselyn] has favored modular scheduling since its beginning and feels his most significant stance affecting Armstrong students is helping to keep the mod system in existence" (J. Loechler, 1979).

Bill Bergquist, another Armstrong supporter, lived within the Armstrong attendance area. A financial investment officer by profession, Bergquist was serving his second year on the board. Having previously completed a term as Olson Elementary's PTA president, he had watched that alternative school close under pressure from Robbinsdale's East-side Coalition. During his campaign, when asked about the district's criteria for closing schools, Bergquist had called for a "greater emphasis on program value" ("District 281 candidates address," 1980, p. 6B). Olson

had two younger children enrolled in district schools.

Myrna Marofsky, an Armstrong supporter, lived just a few blocks from Armstrong. Serving her first year on the board, with two young children just starting elementary school, Marofsky had previously worked as a teacher in District 281, where over her eight-year tenure she had helped open Zachary Lane Elementary, a non-traditional, open, team-oriented school located in Plymouth. Marofsky had helped design and write the curriculum for Zachary Lane, which emphasized individual learning with less use of textbooks. Marofsky recalled, "I don't like things traditional.... Zachary was very cutting edge. We were leaders. People came to see us." She had lost the 1980 school board election to Bergquist on a recounted and tied vote, the tie being broken by a front-page, newspaper-photo toss of a coin, but she had gone on to win the 1981 election, evoking the Armstrong slogan of "quality education." "Quality education means more to life and goes beyond a high school closing. I feel quality education involves good teachers, good programs and good spirit" (Adair & Chuba, 1981, p. 13A), said Marofsky during the campaign.

Fred Webber, a swing Cooper supporter, lived within the Armstrong attendance area, but his oldest son had chosen to enroll at Robbinsdale High. An advertising executive, Webber was serving his fourth year on the board. When asked during the campaign about the criteria for closing a high school, Webber had pointed to financial considerations as foremost in importance, and geographical location of a school as second (Adair & Chuba, 1981, p. 13A). Webber also had two younger children enrolled in other district schools.

Bill Fuhrmann, a Cooper supporter, lived on the east side of the Robbinsdale attendance area. An accountant by profession, Fuhrmann was serving his fourth year on the board. Two of his children had graduated from Robbinsdale and one attended Noble Elementary school.

Fuhrmann had chaired the district committee which developed the criteria for closing schools five years earlier. In his 1980 re-election campaign Fuhrmann had raised some equity issues in regards to alternative education in the district. "The real challenge is to make those programs truly available to children throughout the district" ("District 281 candidates address," 1980, p. 6B).

David Olson lived within the Cooper attendance area and was the only board member in 10 years to live north of 42nd Avenue, the northern part of the district. As part of the clergy, he would later become a bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. During his election in 1979, Olson had stated, "I believe community relationships should…be weighted more heavily [in the school-closure criteria]" ("District 281 school board candidates," 1979, p. 8B). He agreed with board member Fuhrmann in "providing alternative educational styles for all students rather than just those in a given area" (p. 8B). Olson was serving his third year on the board.

No minds had been changed among the board members when the board met a week later on November 23. The board was still evenly split on the proposal to close Cooper High. No formal vote was taken at the meeting, but many recommendations were tossed around. Among the ideas suggested for breaking the deadlock were holding a special election to add another member to the board who would then cast the deciding vote, hiring a consultant or arbitrator, looking at Robbinsdale High for closure, or flipping a coin. "'It's very difficult to close a senior high.... I'm not 100 percent sure we can accomplish a senior high closing, so we must look into other things'" (Adair, 1981f, p. 2), said board member Bergquist.

One proposal was to drop the discussion and wait until next year, letting the voters make their views known next year through their election of candidates to the school board. Another

idea was to not close any high school and to move ninth grade into the three high schools for the

next year, eventually creating three 7-12 high schools and closing all three junior high schools.

"'We spent a lot of time studying reorganization, and now because of the difference of one vote,

we are dropping the study and going with a plan we never ever really considered'" (Adair, 1981f,

p. 2), complained Joselyn.

The superintendent restated that his recommendation to keep Robbinsdale open was valid

and his other two recommendations were sound. Although Armstrong cost more to operate, it

was the newest building and somewhat more flexible. But it could never be proven whether the

alternative flex-mod system of education was more effective than the traditional style. He

reminded the board that it had until January 18 to definitively vote to close a high school, in

order to comply with the teachers' contract. This meant if the board were to close a building

other than Cooper, it had four weeks left to propose that building for closure, in order to give the

legally required three-week public notice before the final vote.

Several board members urged the administration to recommend just one school. "'That's

what they're getting paid for'" (Hoose, 1981c, p. 3), said one. After 11:00 p.m., Superintendent

Hood finally answered. "'I have been called a coward several times because we failed to make a

recommendation…. If the cabinet is being requested to make a definite recommendation, it

might as well be right now'" (p. 3), said Hood somewhat angered. "'The cabinet would have to

recommend Armstrong closing, and Cooper remaining open'" (Adair, 1981f, p. 1). The board

decided to hold a workshop on December 1 to discuss the matter further and then adjourned the

meeting. After the meeting, Hood said that the cabinet had decided early on that Armstrong

should be closed, but it had preferred to give the board the option of also considering closing

Cooper (Hoose, 1981c).

The next day cabinet member Bob Cameron sent a three-page memo to the superintendent, recommending that the board hire an informal arbitrator or an educational consultant to help break the impasse. An arbitrator would communicate among and between board members, looking at areas of agreement and disagreement, presenting possible options, in order to seek consensus on the final action the board might take. A consultant would review data already presented and gather any additional data deemed relevant, submitting a final report and recommending a course of action to the board. Cameron saw the informal arbitrator as a sort of mediator, operating within a political framework. Cameron suggested that although the arbitrator should not arrange any secret meetings between board members, the very idea of using arbitration "should not be discussed publicly if it is to work properly" (R. Cameron, personal communication, November 24, 1981). The consultant, on the other hand, would in essence duplicate the job the superintendent's cabinet had already accomplished, reviewing data and making a recommendation.

At the December 1 school board work session, the three high school principals talked to board members about alternative programs at their schools. Each principal said his school could accommodate anything new—new students, new faculties, new programs (Adair, 1981m). AHS principal Scarbrough, addressing the quality of the current Armstrong alternative program, said "'the beauty of it all'" (p. 2) was in the media center. He stressed that at Armstrong there was a media specialist in every team planning session, and that Armstrong's facilities were the major factor in its success with this alternative mode of education.

RHS principal G. David Knutson had already delivered a memo to the superintendent specifically addressing the quality of the RHS program and its ability to handle alternative programming.

It is evident that we at Robbinsdale High School are very proud of our programs and product. We've been in business for almost 50 years.... Until the fall of 1964 when Cooper High School opened—we were 281!... On the basis of the high regard in which 281 and Robbinsdale High School are held, the fact that we have second and third generations of people attending Robbinsdale High School, the fact that people deliberately move into our attendance area—all these attest to the quality and acceptance of Robbinsdale High School as it <u>is</u>!... I am here to indicate that we <u>have</u> thought about alternatives. (G. Knutson, personal communication, December 1, 1981)

Knutson pointed out that RHS already had some resource rooms, an independent study proposal program, an early release for college program, and an honor pass system. He proposed creating a Fine Arts department with a three-hour block of time for students. Other items discussed at the work session included the possibility of moving to four-year high schools, hiring a consultant or mediator, and providing open enrollment for the high schools, but no decisions were forthcoming.

The board met again a week later on December 7, entertaining again the idea of moving to four-year high schools and closing a junior high school instead of a senior high school. Board member Olson said, "'It is a decision we dare not make because we weren't part of the grade reorganization study.... In two weeks we shouldn't make a decision that a committee spent a whole year on'" (Adair, 1981c, p. 2).

Finance director DeFrance reviewed how not closing a high school would affect the district's financial fund balance. Board members had received from DeFrance, earlier in the week, some projections to the fund balance under four different scenarios: (a) closing a senior high at the end of the current year, (b) closing a junior high at the end of the current year, (c) closing a senior high next year, and (d) the effect of a possible revocation of the levy referendum if a senior high were closed.

The projections included new reductions in state aid being proposed by the governor. The district's adjusted fund balance by the year 1984 was projected to be anywhere from 10

million to 22 million dollars in the red (G. DeFrance, personal communication, December 3, 1981). Following DeFrance's presentation, board member Olson remarked, "'This is part of the argument that we should be prudent with the taxpayer's money'" (Adair, 1981c, p. 1).

Concerning the idea of hiring a mediator to go between board members, Superintendent Hood said it would be a violation of the state's Open Meeting Law. Hood said the board should, however, consider hiring a consultant. "'It is of utmost importance that we close a senior high, and it's possible that an outsider may have more credibility than those of us here'" (Adair, 1981c, p. 2), said Hood. Board member Olson wondered why all three high schools hadn't been proposed for closure in order to keep all options open. The time element seemed to be narrowing down the choice to only Cooper.

Board member Fuhrmann made a motion to propose to close Armstrong. Webber, Olson, and Fuhrmann voted "yes," and Marofsky, Bergquist, and Joselyn voted "no." "'It is evident to me that there is no hope of budging the three to three tie'" (Adair, 1981c, p. 1), lamented Fuhrmann. The community newspaper reporter wrote, "The District 281 School Board members had their horns locked in a three to three high school closing standstill when they took their seats at Monday night's meeting.... When the dust had settled...the board remained facing each other, still deadlocked" (p. 1). The board decided to hold another work session later in the week.

At the December 11 board work session, board members heard reports on the worsening financial future of the district. Board member Marofsky felt that the three board members advocating the closure of Armstrong were ignoring residents who had worked hard for quality education.

> "We may get a reverse referendum from that group of people that have worked hard.... It would be fiscally irresponsible for us to close the school with an efficient delivery system.... I feel that the board has not gone anywhere, and that we should all decide what we are willing to negotiate.... If all Dave (Olson) and Bill (Fuhrmann) are willing to

negotiate is closing Armstrong, then we are deadlocked." (Adair, 1981g, pp. 1-2)

Board member Webber, bothered by Marofsky's remarks, responded, "'Whatever school we do close, we will still have quality education'" (Adair, 1981g, p. 2). Several board members discussed again the option of hiring a consultant or an arbitrator, including a gentleperson's agreement to abide by an arbitrator's decision. Then board member Bergquist submitted a new proposal.

> It is obvious that our School Board is at an impasse on making a rational decision on secondary school closings. My opinion is that a major factor in this problem relates to the improper decision of a previous board to close Robbinsdale Junior High School. I would offer the following proposal to the Board as a compromise and a meaningful long range plan for secondary school facilities in District 281. (B. Bergquist, personal communication, December 11, 1981)

Bergquist recommended closing Robbinsdale High but reopening Robbinsdale Junior High and closing either Plymouth Junior High or Hosterman Junior High all at the end of the current year. The board could then also close another junior high later on. Bergquist felt this would leave a fair distribution of secondary schools around the district. "'To even discuss this flies in the face of good sense'" (Adair, 1981g, p. 2), countered board member Olson.

The December 15 board meeting lasted until after midnight. Two representatives from the American Arbitration Association were present to discuss the role an arbitrator or mediator could play in resolving the deadlock. Superintendent Hood insisted that all three high schools be proposed for closure and on the table if arbitration were to be used. He thought the final decision could then be made by January 18 ("Special meeting," 1982). In order to have all three schools on the table, a motion was then made to propose both Armstrong and Robbinsdale for closure. The proposal failed three to three.

In later reflection on the deadlock, Bill Fuhrmann recalled,

Every time there was a vote on which school to close, all board members felt that they

needed to make a speech to try to change other board members to their way of thinking. You could have just played a tape recorder.... After the meeting was over, we sat around and chit-chatted about things. Marofsky said, "There's no way I can vote to close AHS. I'd have to move out of my neighborhood." Joselyn was very intelligent. He lived in Crystal, but his way of thinking and his professional style were more in the AHS way of thinking. Joselyn tried to lay down some arguments to see if I wouldn't change my mind—came over to my house…. We were trying to exhaust every conceivable possibility of breaking the log jam.

Reflecting on his position at the time, Gary Joselyn later recalled,

The west side of the district is where the population was growing. I wasn't going to close AHS. I wanted to keep the building because it was the best building in the west side of the district.... I went to all three CHS supporters to see if they would change their minds, but they didn't want to abandon their friends…. I was never going to change. But no school board member was attacked in any way. Amongst the six of us there was proper decorum.

In early December, Robbinsdale parents approached Cooper parents concerning the

formation of an alliance. "Robbinsdale came to the support of Cooper. They thought they were

safe, and they [disliked] Armstrong," said Cooper parent Liz Reid. On December 17, a letter to

the editor by Joy Robb and Anne Marie Hennen of the recently united Robbinsdale and Cooper

parent action groups was published in the community newspaper. Robb and Hennen urged the

school board to follow the superintendent's recommendation to close Armstrong. Stating that

there was no evidence that student achievement was greater in any one program, that the major

reason for closing a high school was to achieve savings, and that closing Armstrong would

undoubtedly achieve the most savings, Robb and Hennen wrote, "We join with thousands of

District 281 taxpayers in demanding a responsible action from board members Bergquist,

Joselyn, and Marofsky" (Robb & Hennen, 1981).

The same edition of the newspaper carried a full-page advertisement supporting the

closure of Armstrong. Signed by hundreds of district residents and paid for by the Robbinsdale-

Cooper Ad-hoc Committee, the advertisement stated, "We believe it is with money and teachers

that an appropriate educational system can be maintained for the entire student population. We

support the administration's recommendation that 'Armstrong High be closed'" ("Public notice,"

1981). Commenting on the Cooper-Robbinsdale alliance, Armstrong teacher Carol Peterson later

remarked, "It was two against one—dog pile on the rabbit. Everyone was working so hard to

close Armstrong."

Throughout October, November, and December, school board meetings were well

attended. Seating placement in the auditorium and personal appearance were important for the

parent action group members. Cooper Parent's Organization leader Anne Marie Hennen

recalled,

> We'd go over at three in the afternoon and put our coats on the seats so we'd be assured
> of a front row seat…but we'd find other peoples' coats there so we'd come earlier the
> next time. I couldn't look like, "Mrs. Housewife just got here," so I tried to look
> professional.

FOA's Ann Rest recalled, "I remember that we were always concerned about how Myrna

[Marofsky] looked. We told her to take off her slip because it was showing without the skirting

on the board table. I wore suits. We had pieces of paper we put down to save seats."

Teachers and administrators were also well represented. Armstrong teacher Barb Nemer

recalled,

> The meetings were very personal. The teachers glared at each other. We couldn't even
> speak to each other—just avoid. I always came dressed to speak—thinking what I should
> wear. I always made sure I sat back about 10 rows and on the aisle.

Armstrong teacher Carol Peterson recalled,

> The meetings were like a nice political convention. There were rows of seats,
> microphones. People would line up to speak. Don Blore [Cooper teacher] sat in the front
> row as kind of an intimidator. Neil Luebke [Robbinsdale teacher] sat about half way
> back with a clipboard. Kemppainen and Scarbrough [Cooper and Armstrong principals]
> sat physically together.

> "There was an intensity at the meetings—like before you have surgery. It became a dog-

eat-dog district," remarked Robbinsdale PAC leader Dave Southward who also recalled two physicians fighting in the locker room of the local hospital over disagreements on the school closure issue. "Emotions [were] off the chart," said PAC leader Joy Robb. "They made the meetings on sex education look like a picnic," district finance director Gary DeFrance later noted. The district was even worried that disgruntled residents might destroy board members' property. "They hired me to guard the school board members' cars [during the meetings]," recalled custodian Bruce Nolte. "We'd get there at five o'clock. We had to save [their] spots in the parking lot and then watch the cars until it was over." "The audience was packed in the school board meetings, overflowing into another room, sitting on the floor. You sat with your side.... You couldn't talk about it with your family and friends that lived out in Plymouth and New Hope," Robbinsdale parent Liz Miller remembered.

Students also represented an important constituency at board meetings. Armstrong student Liz Olson recalled,

> We learned enough about local politics that year to make our social studies teachers proud. We learned who was on the school board; we worked for the campaigns of "our" candidates; we knew when and where the next school board meeting was....The meetings would drag on and on until midnight and 1:00—we would arrive at school the morning following a meeting, bleary-eyed and full of gossip and response. (E. Olson, 2000)

Liz Olson later explained,

> Cheerleaders would speak. Jocks would get up to talk.... There was clapping in support of people, cat calls, competing pep rallies…, lots of school colors. The board members were so polite…. Teachers would tell us it was important to show up at the meetings. It wasn't to be seen as just a parent, teacher, administration thing.

"They involved the students, intensified the rivalry. Even years later it was tough to deal with kids at athletic events," remarked Cooper's assistant principal John Lloyd. Board member Fuhrmann remembered, "My daughter got a lot of heat at Sandburg Junior High from other kids. I was supporting the closing of Armstrong, and Sandburg was half [future] Armstrong students."

By all accounts, board members conducted the meetings in a professional manner, but not without effort. Board chair Fred Webber remembered,

> At the public hearing meetings, I had to remind the audience that there was a three-minute limit. One dedicated meeting attendee went on and on, and after reminding her several times that there was a three-minute limit, I finally asked the AV director to turn off the mike. She kept on talking into the silent mike.

Board member Myrna Marofsky recalled,

> As for the parent groups—you had mean, meaner, and meanest. Robbinsdale was meanest at first, then later the combination of Cooper and Robbinsdale…. There were nights that to me still are nightmares. The emotional sentiment, the stamping on bleachers if they didn't agree with what a board member was saying.

As the weeks turned into months, with no decision forthcoming, the district became more and more divided. "What once was a cohesive community, supportive of education, is being torn apart by the split on the board," wrote one of the community newspaper's editors, who also warned of the dangers of "private positions and political haggling" (Roth, 1981b). In a letter to the school board, one parent wrote,

> The Board is no closer to a decision today than it was two months ago. However, the people in the district are different than they were then; for a major consequence of these proceedings has been to totally polarize the various communities. Whatever the final outcome the wounds will be hard to heal and most certainly will affect our students. (C. Amata, personal communication, December 14, 1981)

Teacher Jon Rondestvedt in later reflection, remarked, "The school board getting further into the school-closing dilemma was like Napoleon going into Russia. The Russian winter is coming."

Playing Russian Roulette With Our Jobs:

Teachers React

At the December 21 board meeting, RFT teachers' union president Sandy Peterson took the floor, urging the board to take action on closing a senior high school. RFT officer Barry

Noack had earlier commented that the Governor's proposed cuts in education were "'way over anything we've ever seen in this district'" (Adair, 1981c, p. 1). With the Governor's cuts, declining enrollment, and the failure of the board to act on closing a high school, Noack had warned that the district could lose 25 percent of its staff. For the RFT, it was imperative that the board close a high school.

A motion to propose RHS for closure failed three to three. A motion to authorize the board to hire an arbitrator to assist in the decision failed three to three. A motion to table the high school closing until the next fall was ruled out of order by the chair. "'We are indeed deadlocked, and we should admit that.... We should now get on with the business of the school district and face up to the loss of the money. We have to begin deciding how we'll make up for the $1.1 million'" (Adair, 1981l), said board member Olson.

The RFT bannered the next board meeting held on January 4 with 15 banners and many marching RFT members, distributing a one-page flyer to meeting attendees which read,

> The Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers is bannering the entrance to the Board meeting tonight in an effort to bring further public pressure on the school board of Independent School District 281 to close a senior high school for 1982-83.... At stake are teacher jobs, student class sizes, extra-curricular activities, educational alternatives, and a host of other programs.... It asks that the School Board act tonight or early next week to add the names of Armstrong and Robbinsdale Senior High Schools to that of Cooper for tentative closing, and that it immediately set in motion a procedure which makes the closing of one high school a certainty for 1982-83. (Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers, personal communication, January 4, 1982)

RFT president Sandy Peterson again addressed the board. "'Because of your inaction, we are anticipating unnecessary reductions in staff, programs and alternatives'" (Adair, 1982e, p. 1). She recommended that AHS and RHS also be proposed for closure in order for all schools to be on the table, and that the board hire an arbitration panel from the American Arbitration Association, to include one educator, one economist, and one neutral member.

With the help of the arbitration panel, Peterson estimated that the final vote to close the selected high school could be accomplished by February 15, and that the staffing timeline for the next school year could then be compacted to meet staffing deadlines. Perhaps fearing the board might look at closing more elementary schools instead of a high school, one parent presented a letter to the board signed by the district's elementary PTA presidents stating that they also expected the board to close a senior high school at the end of the year. The board scheduled a special meeting for January 11.

The RFT then distributed a flyer to its membership, encouraging attendance at "a massive bannering project" for the January 11 board meeting. "The purpose of the bannering is to bring additional public attention to the Board's lack of action and the potential loss of $1.1 million dollars. We hope by this unified effort of the RFT to gather increased political support for a high school closing" (Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers, personal communication, January 7, 1982), the union informed its membership.

"I felt like I was going through a psychological war zone," recalled RFT officer Barry Noack, who visited every school building in the district explaining to teachers what would happen if the district did not close a high school, sometimes facing hostile teachers worried about being transferred if their building were closed. Noack remembered,

> The union had to appear to be neutral…. Our main theme was, "A school has got to be closed, and the board has to do it." My focus was very narrow. A building had to be closed—to see that we had enough money to pay good salaries. Keeping open buildings you don't need wastes money.... Some teachers didn't think we should be involved at all. I said, "We can't afford not to."

In later reflection, former teachers' union president Sandy Peterson concurred.

> We thought that education and teachers' jobs were more important than buildings. Union members agreed that it was more important to save jobs. We went on record saying we agreed with closing one high school. We never took a position on which school to close. We were looking at the finances of the district, we were reacting to each event as it

happened, and we were trying to stay whole, united, and alive. We had no vested interest in any one of the three schools.... They could have moved up ninth grade, but eventually they would have had to close one high school unless seventh and eighth [grades] moved up. The bigger schools filled to capacity are the most cost effective. The public isn't willing to pay for what might be the best for all kids.

Outside the January 11 board meeting, 500 teachers were on the march, chanting, "'We want action want action'" (*Robin*, 1982, p. 115). Inside, chairperson Webber gave notice to the audience that if its conduct became detrimental to the fair exchange of ideas, he would move the board, along with the administration, the press, and a small group of parents, to a smaller room to continue the meeting. RFT president Sandy Peterson addressed the board, contending that only a school-closing recommendation from an expert, neutral panel would bring a resolution. "'With neither faction on the board being willing to move, you are playing Russian roulette with our jobs and the programs of the district.... We urge you to be responsible and take action tonight, which will assure this district that a high school will be closed'" (Adair, 1982l, p. 3), said Peterson. She recommended again that the board also propose both RHS and AHS for closure, in order to meet the deadline for the final decision.

Peterson informed the board that the RFT had recently voted to begin "work-to-rule" on February 16 if the board could not reach a final decision by February 15. Absent any action from the board, the RFT recommended that all members of the school board resign and let a newly elected board choose the school to close (Newstrom, 1982a).

"'I am desperate enough to have a senior high closed to bring in an arbitrator'" (Newstrom, 1982a), Hood declared. Board member Joselyn argued, "'[I] would find it very difficult personally to be influenced by what an outside person had to say.... I'm sure that there will be a feeling among the people who lost that the decision was even less just than the one at this board table'" (Newstrom, 1982a). Board member Marofsky concurred.

A sequence of motions was then put forward, each failing on the same three to three tie. A motion to propose closing AHS and RHS failed. A motion requesting administrators to bring a list of possible arbitrators to the next board meeting failed. A motion to propose closing RHS failed. A motion to divide the motion to propose closing RHS and AHS into two separate votes failed. A motion to close CHS failed.

Then a motion was made to use a numbers method to decide which school should close. Board member Bergquist's proposal called for each board member to write down his or her first, second, and third choice of the school that should remain open. The school with most points would then be closed. Joselyn argued in favor of the numbers system. Olson and Webber argued against the idea, Olson commenting, "'You can do just about anything with numbers'" (Adair, 1982l, p. 1), and Webber pointing out, "'The only advantage to this is that it may provide a certain decision…. Flipping a coin is also a certain method, but that is also frivolous'" (p. 3). This proposal also failed three to three.

A frustrated Webber admonished the opposing side, "'If you're not willing to change your votes, stop beating everyone up, including yourselves'" (Newstrom, 1982a). The leading line from the community newspaper's report read, "The District 281 School Board Monday managed to pass one of seven motions that surfaced during the special meeting held to address the high school closing issue. That motion was to adjourn the meeting" (Adair, 1982l, p. 1).

Taking the numbers-system scheme to task, retired RHS teacher Irv Nerdahl wrote a letter to the editor. "When I was a young boy I once lost a penny to the 'heads I win, tails you lose' sham. Little did I suspect that a comparable ploy would be proposed to settle the most perplexing problem in the history of District 281" (Nerdahl, 1982). If the three Armstrong supporters all listed AHS as their number one choice, as one would expect, Nerdahl showed that

1) There are 20 ways the vote could end up a tie. 2) There are 22 ways Cooper could be closed. 3) There are 22 ways Robbinsdale could be closed. 4) There is no way Armstrong could be closed.... Hopefully no further, fair, logical and reasonable proposals comparable to Bergquist's model, and supported by the "other guys," will be submitted for future consideration. (Nerdahl, 1982)

A week earlier, in an attempt to measure varying levels of political awareness around the district, Assistant Superintendent Boynton had analyzed voter precinct data to try to estimate the number of voters within each high school's attendance area that had voted on school issues within the previous year. He estimated the number of voters from each attendance area during the May, 1981 board elections to be AHS—1,121, CHS—727, and RHS—1,217. He estimated the number of voters participating in the October, 1981 excess levy referendum to be AHS—3,688, CHS—3,762, and RHS—5,293 (W. Boynton, personal communication, January 6, 1982).

Boynton was not the only one aware of the district's political landscape. On January 13, the leaders of the Robbinsdale and Cooper parent action groups, now united under the Coalition for Fiscal Responsibility, sent a letter to the teachers' union. Perhaps fearing that a neutral arbitration panel might recommend either Cooper or Robbinsdale to close, the coalition leaders urged the RFT to tighten its belt for a year and wait for the combined voting power of the Cooper and Robbinsdale areas to elect new board members who would then vote to close AHS, the most expensive school, saving money for everyone in the long run.

> The closing of a high school is stalemated. Three of our school board members have violated our trust and confidence, by becoming entrenched in saving a building versus cost.... They have demonstrated they want to keep the Armstrong building open at <u>ANY</u> cost, whether it be teachers' jobs or our children's programs....
>   The 1.1 million lost by not closing the Cooper building this year will be regained in 5 years by closing the Armstrong building, next year, when a new school board takes office. The issue is truly one of maximum savings.... We cannot afford to close just <u>any</u> school....
>   1. Urge board members Marofsky, Bergquist and Joselyn...to allow the Armstrong building to be considered for closure this year. If they refuse
>   2. Hold fast until it is accomplished at election time.
>   3. Be creative in suggesting to your union various ways to cut back for a year in

order to save teachers' jobs....
    4. Referendum recalls, work slowdowns or any other acts of this nature only hurt
        the children.
Won't you join us in holding firm in our commitment to "quality" education for all the
children in District 281?! (J. Robb, L. Reid, & A. Hennen, personal communication,
January 13, 1982)

As the school board's deadlock entered its third month, the forecast remained uncertain. Would

the district's dilemma be resolved in the nearer term by definitive board action, perhaps assisted

by arbitration, or would resolution wait for a popular vote through new school board elections?

Critical Discussion

Superintendent Hood's resolution had offered no firm school-closure recommendation,

and the nucleus of power shifted from the administration to the board in deciding the fate of the

district's high schools. With the retirement of the two board members from the City of

Robbinsdale and the election of two west-side alternative-education advocates over the previous

two years, the power shift on the board was now complete to block any proposed closure of

Armstrong High.

Had Superintendent Hood made a firm recommendation to close Cooper High, rather

than leaving it up to the board to choose between Cooper and Armstrong, it seemed probable the

board would have voted for a Cooper closure. Absent such a recommendation, however, power

shifted back to the east with the swing vote of board member Webber, who had first voted "no"

on the proposal to close Cooper, then later in the evening voted "yes," but then switched back to

"no" on the final vote two weeks later. Somewhat caught between west and east, Webber lived

in the Armstrong attendance area, but his son was enrolled in the east side's Robbinsdale High.

The board was now deadlocked 3-3 between east and west, between the interests of the

old and new middle classes. "I could never understand why Fred Webber changed his vote. I

just don't understand why those other three people wanted to close Armstrong," stated former board member Joselyn in a later interview. In later reflection, Webber remarked, "I changed my vote as a result of the public hearings and listening to the public—what they said. I changed my mind. People calling me at home, meeting me—what they said about their school."

Power then shifted even further east when Robbinsdale High's parents allied with Cooper High. Some surmised later that Robbinsdale's defense of Cooper probably contributed to the reluctance of just one more board member to vote to close Cooper. "Had the Robbinsdale people just shut up, Cooper was history. But the Robbinsdale people think, 'This is not the way it should go…. Armstrong should be the one closing,'" reflected former Robbinsdale city council member Mike Holtz. Former assistant superintendent Boynton concurred,

> One thing that sticks out in my mind from the whole thing—some of the Robbinsdale people got up to defend Cooper at the hearings on the proposal to close Cooper, and E. J. was in the front row. If they hadn't done this, Cooper could have been closed at the outset.

The greatest threat the RHS-CHS alliance presented to AHS was the real possibility that the deadlock might extend into the May school board elections, when AHS defender Joselyn, who was up for re-election, would likely be unable to survive the voting power of the combined group.

As luck would have it in the shifting sands of power, the west side was thrown a lifeline when the district's teachers inserted their economic interests into the conflict through union power. Realizing that waiting for a political solution through new school board elections would delay the decision by a year, costing the district an extra million dollars, teachers threatened to work-to-rule if the board did not hire a neutral arbitration panel. "We thought that education and teachers' jobs were more important than buildings," recalled former union president Sandy Peterson.

The technical-rational model had seemed to work well for the west side during the elementary school closures, keeping most of the closures on the east side. Boyd (1979) found that, in school-closing decisions, white collar residents were actually more prone than blue collar residents to find meaning in extensive data collection and analysis, considerable use of expertise, and the development and application of criteria. During the high school closure decision, however, the tables had been turned, and the dominant financial discourse within the technical-rational model had become a menace to the west side. Armstrong High, with its spread-out architectural design, was demonstrably the more expensive school to operate. Therefore, a competing discourse was introduced by the west side.

For Armstrong advocates, students faced an "increasingly technological future," making it imperative to "look ahead" and resist being "anchored in the past." Armstrong was "the best high school building" and offered "the best and most modern educational alternatives," providing a "standard of quality" and an "unrivalled tradition of educational excellence." Armstrong would cost "just slightly more," but this extra cost was necessary "in order to provide a quality education." The pitch for "quality education" was not well received at Armstrong's presentation to the superintendent's cabinet. In administration's thinking, financial considerations were still paramount.

Armstrong's presentation enjoyed a more receptive audience, however, with the school board. Armstrong advocates succeeded in introducing a competing discourse and elevating their concerns to equal political status within the board, even in the face of Superintendent Hood's belated recommendation that Armstrong should close for financial reasons. Armstrong High School meant "quality education," which meant alternative, flex-mod, education for the future. As board members battled throughout their deadlock, the school-closing issue thus became

framed as cost of education versus quality of education, traditional education versus flexible alternative education, fiscal responsibility versus flexibility, money versus the future.

Considering the socioeconomic cleavage within the district, the positions that had come to frame the east and west sides were not out of the ordinary. Basic education and cost savings were often more meaningful to the old middle class, whereas paying more for alternative education was more likely to be favored by the new middle class. Schools within professional-class neighborhoods were often organized around flexibility, choice, and inquiry, while lower socioeconomic residents did not demand as complex or sophisticated an educational program, placing higher value on a basic-skills neighborhood school (Apple, 1990; Boyd, 1979). Robbinsdale, for example, had argued that a "traditional education" was preferential because it was "conducive to learning, and placed emphasis on teaching basic skills." A similar divergence could be seen even in early 20th-century rural areas, where wealthier small-town residents called for "'an education demanded by the times,'" and country-side farmers preferred a "'rightly disciplined education'" and "'a school with a reputation; not one that is filling the air with athletic skyrockets; but one that prudently keeps the education of the mind and character uppermost'" (Reynolds, 1999, p. 193).

A socioeconomic differential was also likely at play in the west side's ability to elevate the competing curricular-delivery discourse to equal status with the previously dominant financial discourse, even against administrative pressure to the contrary. Carspecken (1991) observed that middle- and upper-class families were often better able to pressure politicians over such things as school closures and budget allocations. This was partly due to their familiarity with the culture of politicians, who were often their class peers or subordinates, making it easier to approach and influence such individuals. They were also simply more familiar with the

informal rules determining effective use of formal channels.

Given a certain level of citizen participation throughout the process, it might appear at first glance that administration was trying to embrace a more participative decision-making model, one that could function as a forum for consensus and compromise. However, on closer examination, it was evident that the citizen participation orchestrated by administration was really merely an extension of the technical-rational model already under the rather solid control of administration.

Citizen inclusion in both the Long-range Planning and Facilities Use Committee of 1977 and the 1979 Grade Reorganization Committee amounted to more of a vicarious or delegated participation. Professional literature advocated such citizen advisory committees (see Eisenberger & Keough, 1974). However, the request that committees from each school make formal presentations to the administration as to why their respective schools should not close was not supported by the professional literature. These presentations became another example of controlled citizen participation within the technical-rational model.

In what would become its most controversial decision, however, the cabinet requested that a committee from each building make a formal and public presentation to the school board about why its high school should remain open. Again, the intent was to further the technical-rational model, leaving no stone unturned in ensuring that the board would hear any facts that the administration may have missed. Superintendent Hood later praised the committees for the "factual justification" they had provided the board, with board member Webber calling them "rational" and "well thought out."

This parental involvement in a more public setting, however, did not benefit the technical-rational model, nor did it resemble anything close to the kind of participatory

democracy within the public sphere that was envisioned by Habermas (Brookfield, 2005). Rather, the model produced participatory competition, dissonance, and division, polarizing the various communities and solidifying the existing latent cleavages within the district. "They gave us a chore to do, a job to do, and that was to try and save your building," recalled Robbinsdale resident Gary Laurant. "They pitted us against ourselves. They separated the community. They set up three distinct groups and said, 'Alright, you guys fight it out.'"

As the public became more and more involved, and as decision making moved from the administrative to the legislative arena, with each board meeting resembling "a political convention" complete with cheerleaders, competing pep rallies, and school colors, the political nature of the problem could no longer be disguised. The technical-rational model was unable to contain these latent socioeconomic divisions from rupturing as the schools became symbols of the differing place-based and class-based interests of low costs, quality education, and location.

Cooper High was the caring, working-class school, where every student was "E. J.'s child." It represented lower costs, keeping taxes affordable. "Cadillac Education No!" In the minds of Cooper advocates, the only reason the board was even considering closing Cooper rather than Armstrong was that "When Money Talks—People Listen." The status-quo of "superior quality education for some, rather than equal education for all" needed to be addressed by the board in its decision.

Armstrong High was the "quality" school of the new middle and upper middle classes. In the minds of Armstrong advocates, alternative, "quality" education for the future could not be achieved in another building. "Keep alternatives in District 281!" It was worth the extra expense. "You have to pay for quality." "Isn't the cost worth it?" The decision should not be made on "hometown loyalties."

Robbinsdale High, in addition to being the most economical, was the old middle-class hometown school. It was the only school on the east side, a part of the district which had already seen its share of school closures. "We have taken our lumps." "Residents of Robbinsdale...stand together against the closing of yet another school in our area." "Our kids are just as energetic and vital as the kids at the other end of the district."

Concerning the alliance between Robbinsdale and Cooper against Armstrong, former board member Webber later commented, "RHS resented AHS tremendously. That's why they came to CHS' aid early on." Former board member Joselyn added, "Goes back to this elitism."

The school board's inability to break the deadlock, resorting to ideas such as flipping a coin, using a numbers scheme of first, second, and third choices, or not closing a high school and moving to a middle school pattern after all, pushed the district into the second phase of a rationality crisis, now one within the legislative arena of the school board. In the board's defense, however, researchers such as Boyd (1979) noted a certain level of ambiguity often existed on both sides of the "costs versus quality education" debate during school-closure decisions.

> Although the cost or budgetary side of the equation, while quite complex, seems to be more tangible than the "educational program" side, both factors have ambiguous qualities (for example, estimates often vary substantially as to how much will be saved by closing a school) and a school board's interpretation of these factors usually is heavily conditioned by the information presented and opinions ventured by their professional staff and, most especially, by their superintendent. Thus the ambiguity surrounding these two basic factors in retrenchment policy making—educational considerations and cost-budgetary considerations—interacts and should tend to increase the importance in decision making of both symbols which embody key community values regarding education and government and attitudes toward the expertise and leadership of the district's professional staff. (pp. 363-364)

From the public's point of view, however, as the months wore on with the board dead-locked, the various segments of the district in a fist fight, and other districts moving ahead with

their own high school closures, the rationality crisis had begun to turn into a legitimation crisis in both the executive-administrative and legislative-politico spheres. "If government crisis management fails,....the penalty for this failure is withdrawal of legitimation" (p. 69), stated Habermas (1975), and the public would no longer have confidence in the political-administrative apparatus. In District 281, some now called for a neutral panel to reconsider the evidence and make the school-closing decision in place of the board.

**DATA PART 6
CLOSING A HIGH SCHOOL:
A PANEL OF EXPERTS INTERCEDES**

Like Pilate, they wash their hands.
Robbinsdale resident

An Opportunity to Compromise:

Board Defers to Outside Panel

By the middle of January of 1982, the school board was under increasing pressure to

break its two-month deadlock. On January 15, Cooper teacher, and dedicated meeting-attendee,

Don Blore, sent a memo to board members, entitled, "An opportunity to compromise in the

present crisis." Blore wrote,

> It is my impression that: (1) the 3-3 "deadlock" between Cooper and Armstrong is
> extremely unlikely to be "broken" prior to the School Board Election of May 1982, and:
> (2) Every individual directly involved at policy-making level is avid to find a graceful
> way to save teacher-jobs and educational programs. (D. Blore, personal communication,
> January 15, 1982)

Blore suggested that the administration begin staffing for two high schools, (without knowing

which two buildings would house the schools), by suspending the technical requirements of the

teachers' contract for the current year only. Normally, teachers displaced from a closed building

would go into a transfer pool, competing for available jobs in other district buildings. Blore

suggested that the administration simply assign all current high school teachers to two

hypothetical high schools. Then, after the May school board elections, the new board, when

seated in July, would definitively close one high school building, and the administration would

send notice to staff and students of their new building assignments.

The advantages to this proposal, according to Blore, were that no member on the present

school board would have to admit error or change his or her vote, tax dollars could be saved and

used elsewhere, teachers would not be laid off, and programs would not be cut. It required

senior ranking teachers to make some accommodations on job placement, however. Blore

recommended that the school board pass a formal resolution endorsing the proposal at its next

meeting on January 18. The RFT would then endorse the proposal shortly thereafter.

The RFT bannered the next board meeting on January 18, carrying signs which read,

"Teachers teach...Not buildings" (E. Olson, 1982b). The board conducted a lengthy discussion

on the senior high closing issue, including the possibility of using a fact-finding or arbitration

panel to aid the board in arriving at a decision. Superintendent Hood said he had spoken with a

district resident who was recognized as one of the finest arbitrators in the country. This resident

felt that a fact-finding or arbitration panel could help break the impasse, but that all three senior

high schools would have to be proposed for closure.

A motion was then made by Gary Joselyn and seconded by Bill Fuhrmann,

> to propose to close Armstrong Senior High School and Robbinsdale Senior High School
> at the end of the current school year, and that for the 1982-83 school year to have two
> senior high schools open with two different programs—one, a flexible program with
> George Scarbrough as principal, the other, a traditional program with Elmer Kemppainen
> as principal—and that the superintendent engage a fact-finding panel, with Board input
> and approval, to advise the Board as to which two buildings should remain open. (G.
> Joselyn, personal communication, n.d.)

The motion passed unanimously. The traditional program would be housed in either RHS or

CHS, and the flexible program would be housed in either CHS or AHS.

Contrary to Blore's proposal, however, the board decided that all current high school

teachers should be placed in the "voluntary" transfer pool, where the staff would interview and

compete for jobs in the two hypothetical schools. Board member Bergquist, supporting this staff

selection process, commented, "'It gets the right staff working collectively, and gives the best to

the youngsters'" (Adair, 1982h). Board member Olson questioned its legality in respect to

teacher seniority under the teachers' contract, but board member Joselyn replied that although

some staff might be disappointed, "'I would be surprised if there were a great deal of

challenges'" (Adair, 1982h). The board scheduled another work session and adjourned the

meeting shortly before midnight.

Hiring a fact-finding panel to help break the impasse represented a change in position for

the three Armstrong supporters on the board, who had previously rejected the idea of arbitration.

Board member Marofsky later commented on her change of position. "We weren't dealing with

rational people [during the debate]. It was an emotional thing. Passions were very strong. The

only resolution was to bring in an outside panel." Custodian Bruce Nolte later reflected,

> The school board was caught between a rock and a hard place. RHS had the tradition
> plus the history, AHS had the money and the power, and E. J. Cooper was still alive and
> respected, even in Robbinsdale.   "We can't close AHS, the rich school, we can't close
> RHS because it's politically wrong…." The school district knew it was politically wrong
> to close RHS because of Lee Elementary and Robbinsdale Junior.

Former RFT president Sandy Peterson, in later recollection of the union's support for arbitration,

commented,

> Getting the right process in place and keeping everyone together in the union was
> paramount…. "What can we do about this?" we asked at a union breakfast meeting. We
> suggested some sort of non-binding arbitration.... We'll look at this objectively. We
> thought that was the answer. It was such a political hot bed.

RFT officer Barry Noack was familiar with arbitration, both binding and non-binding, in

which disputing parties turn an issue over to a third party. "Nobody wanted to make the

decision. That's why I introduced the panel. It's the last resort you go to in labor relations….

'If the board can't do it, let's get an arbitrator,'" Noack remembered. According to Noack, board

members did not completely understand arbitration at first, so an arbitrator had voluntarily

offered further explanation to the board. This had been helpful in the board's eventual approval

of an arbitrators' fact-finding panel. However, Noack recalled that the idea to formally close all

three schools before beginning arbitration was a request of the fact-finding panel. "The panel said the only way do to it is to close all three schools first. The [debris] hit the fan." RHS defender Bill Fuhrmann commented in later reflection, "It was so ludicrous and out of the question that RHS should be closed that, I thought, 'Sure, put it in the hat.'"

On January 21, notice was published on the proposed closure of Robbinsdale and Armstrong high schools, including the dates for public hearings. "The closing is necessitated by declining enrollment and the resulting impact on school finances" ("Notice of public hearing," 1982), read the notice. Perhaps as an omen of the stormy path the board had embarked upon, or perhaps as a signal that Napoleon's Russian winter was indeed looming, that same day, a snow storm of 17.4 inches crossed the district, breaking all existing snow fall records, followed the next day by a second record snow storm of 19.2 inches which interrupted the school board's work session.

At the February 1 board meeting, a petition was submitted requesting that the board act on adding a seventh member to the board. The vote to allow a seventh member could be held in March and the seventh member could be elected in regular board elections in May. Superintendent Hood also provided the board with the names of 30 individuals recommended by the American Arbitration Association and others for the fact-finding panel. The administration showed the results of its latest elementary school-closure tally: Northport 49.5, Lincoln 50.9, and Crystal Heights 52.1.

The superintendent recommended Crystal Heights for closure, with Assistant Superintendent Forsberg adding, "'Location now becomes paramount, and that's one area that wasn't given the weight it should have'" (Adair, 1982i, p. 2). The board formed a transition committee to facilitate the merger of three high schools to two, scheduled a special meeting for

February 4 to further discuss the high school closing, and adjourned the meeting at midnight.

At its February 4 meeting, the board narrowed its list of 30 candidates down to eight for the fact-finding panel. It asked Superintendent Hood to contact these eight in order to engage three members. With the help of arbitrator Dick Miller, the board developed the guidelines and methods the fact-finding panel would use in reaching its decision.

Each of the three panel members would receive "the blue book" of information, which the cabinet had already compiled, containing extensive data on the school-closing issue. Each member would receive the board's official charge to the panel, "to recommend which two senior high schools in District 281 will best serve the needs of the district in the foreseeable future and well into the future" (Adair, 1982b, p. 1).

The panel would receive a concise and objective historical background on the school-closing issue to be written by board chair Webber. The panel would only be allowed to question members of the administration concerning the written data, and such contact would have to be made through the American Arbitration Association.

The panel would personally tour each of the senior high school buildings for two to three hours, not necessarily on the same day, but the surrounding conditions would have to be similar. The principal would be in charge of the tour, with perhaps the assistant principal, the head custodian, and a staff member rounding out the group of tour hosts.

The panel would then hold a public hearing in which each high school would be apportioned two and one-half hours to present its case and rebut others' information. The school principals would select the representatives for the presentations. Lots would be drawn to determine the order of the presentations. Each case would consist of an opening statement on reasons why the building should remain open or why another should close, an introduction of

evidence, and a summarizing brief of information. After deliberation, the panel would then mail its recommendation to board members, and a final assembly would be held to notify the public of the panel's recommendation.

Board member Bergquist asserted, "'The visits to the school buildings prior to the public hearing are essential so that the panel can visualize what people are referring to…. The panel should also be able to revisit the buildings in order to clarify evidence after the formal discussions'" (Adair, 1982b, p. 1). Board member Joselyn recommended that one representative from each of the other two high schools be allowed to witness the building tour. These observers would make sure that all evidence was presented accurately and fairly. They would not talk during the tour, but they would be able to talk at the hearing. "'Observance of the process by the parent groups would add credibility to the process'" (p. 1), Joselyn added.

At the February 8 public hearing on the proposed closure of Armstrong, Armstrong supporters brought up familiar themes. Growth was in the west, the building provided an efficient way of delivering education, operating costs were inconsequential, and the program could not be packaged in a box and moved to another building (Adair, 1982p).

Previous themes were also heard at the February 10 public hearing on the proposed closing of Robbinsdale. Financial savings should be the overriding factor, Robbinsdale taxpayers had paid for the westward expansion, most students did not live in the west, and many students in Robbinsdale had a history of being displaced by the previous junior high closing (Adair, 1982p).

Cooper High had already been awarded a public hearing on its proposed closure in November. Not to be forgotten, however, after the Armstrong and Robbinsdale hearings, on February 12, Cooper High honored former superintendent E. J. Cooper at an all-school pep fest

to celebrate his 85th birthday. The whole student body was present in the gym to serenade E. J.

and present him with gifts, including a basketball autographed by the basketball team, and a

hockey sweatshirt from the hockey team. "Though Mr. Cooper is no longer active in the district,

he is still very much a part of Cooper's activities. He regularly attends all extra-curricular

activities.... Mr. Cooper is truly Cooper's grandfather" (*Talons*, 1982, p. 105), wrote the school's

yearbook staff. The school newspaper ran a front-page article, with a photo of E. J. and his wife,

headlined, "E. J. Celebrates His 85th Birthday" ("Students, faculty give," 1982).

In one last-ditch effort to resolve the board's impasse without an arbitrator, according to

later filed court documents (Creighton, 1982), board member Olson secretly advanced a proposal

to board member Fuhrmann that was never made public.

> This is a proposal to break a dead lock on the board.... In doing so this year, one million dollars or more will be saved for all students....
> The plan is that a Cooper board member who has previously voted against closing Cooper would vote to close it for the 1982-83 school year on the condition that the remaining building have both structured and mod-flex program, and that the 1982-83 board could move the entire student body, faculty, and program to the Cooper building for 1983-84 if it so decided by next year's school board.... Armstrong supporters have a year to prove their cause.... But in the next school year they must bear the scrutiny and evaluation of energy efficiency and effectiveness of the mod-flex program. (no author, personal communication, n.d.)

Olson proposed renaming the school "Cooper-Armstrong Senior High School" and

drawing boundary lines that would easily facilitate the school's moving back to the Cooper

building, if so ordered by the next board. He worried whether the North and East Coalition, (the

CHS and RHS areas), would still support the excess levy referendum. He hoped they would see

this proposal as a vehicle for saving one million dollars next year but allowing the school to

move back into the cheaper building, Cooper, the year after, by electing sympathetic board

members in the spring elections. "This is power to the people but constructively" (no author,

personal communication, n.d.), he wrote. The proposal went nowhere.

On February 16, 1982, the deadline for the teachers' work-to-rule threat, board member Joselyn, representing Armstrong supporters, board member Webber, representing Cooper supporters, and Superintendent Hood all met with the American Arbitration Association. In the presence of the Association's Regional Director and the Senior Tribunal Administrator, they presented a three-member fact-finding panel its charge, as defined by the District 281 board of education: "Recommend which two senior high school buildings will best serve the interests of School District 281 for the foreseeable future" (Sheran et. al., 1982, p. 1). The next week, after months of division, the school board was ready for a slate of unanimous decisions.

At the board's February 22 meeting, the superintendent informed the board that all steps necessary by law had been taken to close all three high schools. The board voted unanimously to close all three high schools. The board then unanimously approved the charge of the fact-finding panel, the procedure it would use, and its composition. The panel would be comprised of three members—a former chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, a vice president of First National Bank, and a former Roseville school district assistant superintendent. Each arbitrator would be paid $400 a day, with an estimated total cost of between $8,400 and $12,000 to the district. On March 12, the principals of the three high schools would draw lots to determine the order of the fact-finding panel's tour of the buildings. On March 13, the panel would tour all three buildings. On March 26, representatives from each school would present data and give testimonials to the panel during a public hearing to be held in the board room. Two and one-half hours would be allowed for each school's case and rebuttal. Lots would be drawn for order. On April 19, the panel would submit a written report on its recommendation.

In other business, the board unanimously approved a resolution to submit the question of adding a seventh board member to the electors on March 16, unanimously proposed the closure

of Crystal Heights Elementary at the end of the school year, approved budget reductions of over

one million dollars for the next school year, and placed 66 teachers on unrequested leave for the

next school year (Adair, 1982f).

A one-month period of relative calm ensued while district residents waited for the fact-

finding panel's hearings to begin. Summarizing the district's school-closing dilemma from an

east-side point of view, a district resident circulated a tongue-in-cheek fairy tale entitled

"Flexible House and the Jelly Beans."

> Once upon a time in the land of District 281 there arose a problem so vexing that all of the people were astir with talk of possible solutions. It seemed there were not enough children in the land to fill all of the houses which had been built. The jelly beans which were necessary to keep all of the houses running were in short supply, and the keepers of the houses were being sent out of the land to help conserve jelly beans. One by one unneeded houses were closed. Sometimes it was necessary to close newer, shinier houses because of other important considerations such as placement in the land or jelly bean factors. Older houses were preserved and plans made for improvement because sometimes, "We have to spend jelly beans to save jelly beans." This seemed to make sense.
>
> Then came the day that one of the biggest houses would have to be closed. The land was a flutter of activity. All of the people scurried about to get their own house in order. The leaders agreed they would use the same process to decide on the big house that had been used to close the small houses.
>
> At last the day arrived when the people in the land would be told which house was no longer needed. They gathered together and respectfully waited and waited and waited....
>
> But alas, no decision was forth coming. It seemed, it first had to be decided which was more important, saving jelly beans or saving Flexible House, the largest and most costly house in the land. The people were beset with disbelief. They remembered going to the polls only a week before and voting to share more of their jelly beans to maintain good times in the land for all of the children.
>
> Could it be true that the people were being asked to keep a house which would use 150,000 more jelly beans every year forever? The people were dismayed when their leaders were heard to say the "excitement and joy of discovery" was worth the extra jelly beans. But, even more upsetting was the leaders' suggestion that some of the children were in houses where there was a lack of joy, discovery and many other good things. The people began to wonder, if this be true, whether the jelly beans were being equally distributed.
>
> The leaders now said that the people should spend the extra jelly beans to keep Flexible House because when times got worse and the keepers of the house had to be fired, it would be wise to have kept Flexible House open. The people were beset with

questions as to how this could help solve their problem of a decreasing supply of jelly beans. The people were now speaking of taking back the jelly beans which they had been willing to share a short time ago. If everyone could not have the "excitement and joy of discovery", no one would, seemed to be the sentiment.

So, the vexing problem was causing some to say there would never again be happiness in the land of District 281.

Question: Can jelly beans and the "excitement and joy of discovery" be saved or will Flexible House be saved, even though the Land of District 281 is going to run out of jelly beans??

Prepared and paid for by people concerned about the Land of District 281. (no author, personal communication, n.d.)

A Judge, a Banker, and an Educator:

Three Scapegoats or an Impartial Review?

The three-member arbitration panel approved by the school board had come to be called the "fact-finding panel," and its chair was Judge Robert Sheran, former chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. The judge, a practicing lawyer, was a member of the American Arbitration Association and held considerable experience in arbitration cases. The second member of the panel was Dr. James Hetland, senior vice president of the First National Bank of Minneapolis. Dr. Hetland, also a professor, taught at the School of Public Affairs and Business at the University of Minnesota and had participated in numerous arbitration cases. The third panel member was Dr. John Maas, former assistant superintendent of the Roseville School District, former deputy commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Education, and then executive secretary of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators. Dr. Maas was employed at a law firm (Adair, 1982b). Given that its composition included two doctorate degrees and a chief justice, the fact-finding panel would also come to be referred to as the "panel of experts."

It was not by chance that one panel member was a prominent member of the business world. He would represent the "financial savings" side of the deadlock. It was not by chance

that one panel member was a person of distinction within education circles. He would represent the "quality education" side of the deadlock. It seemed appropriate that the panel then be completed by a neutral party, a highly reputable judge.

The panel had been given the 30-page report prepared by Superintendent Hood for his October 12 recommendation to the school board. In addition, the panel had been furnished with a voluminous, three-ringed, blue binder, called "the blue book," containing exhaustively detailed information on the school-closing issue. The panel had been informed that the board had mandated that one of the buildings would house a flexible-modular program and the other a traditional program.

As the panel worked on its background reading in preparation for the late March school-presentation hearings, two nearby suburban school districts closed senior high schools without the need for arbitration. In the Bloomington district, Lincoln High, one of three district high schools was closed. In the neighboring Hopkins district, Eisenhower High, one of two district high schools was closed, and the remaining school, Lindbergh High, was renamed Hopkins High. In the nearby Minneapolis district, the school board voted to close eighteen schools, a quarter of the city's total schools, and more than half the district's students would be attending different schools the following year (Boyd, 1982a).

District 281 residents went to the polls on March 16, voting on whether or not to add a seventh member to the school board in the May elections. The proposal was approved by a final count of 2,113 to 1,267 votes, passing in 14 of 16 precincts. Support was weakest in the Armstrong attendance area, where, in the precinct closest to Armstrong High, the measure actually failed 81 to 341. Perhaps fearing the combined voting power of the RHS and CHS areas, the west was not as enamored with a seven-member board as was the rest of the district.

Commenting on her support for the additional board member, Cooper's Anne Marie Hennen said, "'Hiring arbitrators is a costly way to reach a decision.... It would be better in the future to have a seventh school board member because that person would know the area and problems'" (Andersen, 1982d, p. 1). Cooper's Liz Reid, in concurrence, felt the cost of adding a seventh board member would be much less than what the board was spending trying to reach a decision.

The previous week, board member Olson had responded to some residents' complaints that Judge Sheran was employed in the same law firm as the mayor of Plymouth. At the March 8 board meeting, Olson had acknowledged that the two did work in the same law firm, but he had explained that it was his understanding they worked in different buildings, hardly ever had contact, and had not spoken in five years. "'To question Chief Justice Sheran's ethics is not worth considering. Our confidence is in them as professionals'" (Nygaard, 1982), Olson had asserted.

Tours, Easter Eggs, and Jelly Beans

On Saturday, March 13, the three-member fact-finding panel toured each of the high school buildings in an order determined by lot. Each tour lasted for two hours (Sheran et al., 1982, p. 7). "We cleaned up nicely for the judges' tour. The janitors cleaned the pump room. We spit, shined, and polished," recalled Cooper's Anne Marie Hennen. The panel noted the age of each building: AHS—12 years old, CHS—18 years old, and RHS—26 years old. The panel noted that "each building appeared to be soundly constructed and in excellent repair as well as extremely clean and neat" (p. 8). The panel noted that Armstrong possessed markedly newer equipment and was more flexibly designed than the other two buildings. It noted that Cooper was most easily accessible for students to walk to school. It noted that Robbinsdale had a

remodeled science area, an additional, newer gymnasium, and the only night-time athletic field.

On March 26, the panel of experts arrived at the board room in the district's central office at 8:00 a.m. to listen to each of the high schools present its case as to why it should be one of the two buildings to remain open (or as it were, to be reopened, because the board had now officially closed all three buildings for the next school year). Neil Luebke, teacher and chair of the Robbinsdale presentation committee, had spent the month of March working with parents on Robbinsdale's presentation. He later recalled, "It was a dog-and-pony show when you went to do a presentation—bells and whistles.... All the buildings were up to their eyeballs in feeling, 'Will this never end?'"

The administration distributed a program for the proceedings to the audience. "Welcome to the High School Presentations.... School staff, parents and students are making these presentations so that the fact-finding panel will have as much information as they need to make their recommendation to the school board" (Superintendent's cabinet, personal communication, March 26, 1982). The audience was informed that each of the three presentations would be limited to two and one-half hours, and that all three would be completed that day. The principal would be in charge of the presentation, and the format might possibly include an opening statement, a closing statement, and a rebuttal. The panel would be allowed to ask questions, but time for questions would not count against the presenters' allotted two and one-half hours. A brief would be submitted from each school.

The panel members had already received background information and data on the high school closing issue and had toured each of the senior high buildings. The administration made the following request.

> Please refrain from applause or making comments during the presentations. The important thing today is what happens between the presenters and the panel....

> The school board made this assignment to the three-member, fact-finding panel:
> To recommend which two senior high buildings will best serve the interests of
> School District 281 for the foreseeable future....

After the panel hears all the presentations today, they will deliberate and then write their recommendations.... [The board] directed the central office administration, staff, public, and school board members, themselves, not to lobby or contact the panel members in any way. (Superintendent's cabinet, personal communication, March 26, 1982)

In the spirit of the season, a basket containing three hollow, plastic Easter eggs was then placed in front of the schools' presenters, and each school picked one egg. Cooper picked the egg with one jelly bean inside. The others had two and three jelly beans, so Cooper would be the first school to present.

Presenters for Cooper High included principal Elmer Kemppainen, Cooper Parent's Organization leaders Anne Marie Hennen and Liz Reid, teacher Don Blore, the custodian, and others. Cooper focused on its ability to house either a flexible or a traditional program. The presenters walked the panel through the building via overhead projector, pointing out large-group and small-group rooms and labs ("High school supporters," 1982). Building location was also important. Cooper's location in the center of the district, where most of the secondary students resided, many within the two-mile walking distance, would reduce transportation costs. Cooper's custodian pointed out that the building was energy efficient, costing less overall than Armstrong (Sheran et al., 1982, p. 11). The presenters concluded that Cooper enjoyed strong community support.

Robbinsdale was next. Presenting for Robbinsdale were principal G. David Knutson, Parent's Action Committee leaders Joy Robb, Barb Southward, and Dave Southward, teacher Neil Luebke, and others. Robbinsdale High had been the only high school in the district for 30 years. It currently was the building with additional indoor athletic facilities and the site of Mielke Field, where all the district's high school football games were played. Although built for

a traditional program, flexibility was possible. However, student achievement was similar in traditional and flexible programs (Sheran et al., 1982, p. 13). The building was the most economical and efficient in terms of energy use and maintenance. Closing Robbinsdale would be the most expensive closure considering transportation costs, since all the east-side students would have to be transported some distance to CHS and AHS.

The east side's Robbinsdale area had already experienced many school closings, and there were fears that homeowners' properties could be adversely affected. Growth in Plymouth had not kept up with projections. The decline in elementary students had actually been greatest in the Armstrong area. Closing Robbinsdale would require attendance areas for CHS and AHS to be drawn in such a fashion that most of the AHS attendance area would be comprised of the two wealthiest suburbs, Plymouth and Golden Valley. This would lead to a socioeconomic imbalance in the district's attendance areas. The presenters concluded that the superintendent had already recommended keeping Robbinsdale open. He had also later recommended closing Armstrong. The citizens from RHS and CHS had formed a coalition in support of the superintendent's recommendation, and 2,400 supporters of his recommendation had taken out a full-page newspaper advertisement in December to close Armstrong. "'This is how deeply we feel'" ("High school supporters," 1982, p. 2), concluded Dave Southward.

Presenting for Armstrong were principal George Scarbrough, media center specialist Barb Nemer, and others. "'The board has shown a commitment toward the flexible system, and has mandated me to be principal of that school.... Our focus should now be which two schools will best serve the flexible and traditional programs'" ("High school supporters," 1982, p. 2), said Scarbrough. The success of the mod-flex program at Armstrong had rested on the flexibility of its facility. Armstrong had been built for a flexible program, and specific building features were

needed for a successful flexible program. The auditorium could be divided into three separate spaces for large groups, unlike the other schools' auditoriums. The building possessed independent study areas, a large centrally located media center, and resource centers close to the media center (Sheran et al., 1982, pp. 11-12). To prepare for a changing society, students needed to learn to search for information. The flex-mod program with the media center facilitated this goal.

The savings in plant operation and maintenance were only $9,687 per year between AHS and CHS, and only $51,303 between AHS and RHS. "'The magnitude of savings riding on this cost difference is only .00018 and .00098 of District 281's budget'" ("High school supporters," 1982, p. 2), said one presenter. Although the housing market was in decline, future growth would occur in the Plymouth area, while the east side of the district had experienced a decline in overall population over the years. Results from the fall levy referendum showed that Armstrong residents were financially supportive of the school district. They had not supported the addition of a seventh board member because they supported the board in its current form.

By afternoon, the presenters were ready for rebuttals and closing statements. These were presented in reverse order. Under questioning from the panel about the design of the flex-mod system, Scarbrough described flexible programming as "'an arrangement of time and space, adapted to personnel, and providing efficient use of the facilities'" (Roth, 1982, p. 2). One panelist asked, "'Is it dependent on the media center?'… 'Very much so'" (p. 2), responded Scarbrough. Armstrong presenters explained that flex-mod had not worked well at Cooper High because the building had not been built specifically for the program.

As for the value of alternative education in the district, Friends of Armstrong's Ann Rest stated, "'When we have choices, our lives are enriched'" (Roth, 1982, p. 2). Scarbrough

summarized. Future development would be in Plymouth. The board had mandated flexible

programming, and Armstrong had been built for a flex-mod system. "'Which school looks to the

future'" (p. 1)? Scarbrough asked. The presentation concluded with a slide show, set to music,

without dialogue, including photographs of the school and students during all seasons of the year.

A final slide showed red, white, and blue balloons, the Armstrong colors, soaring upwards at the

graduation ceremony on the school's back lawn.

In closing for Robbinsdale, principal Knutson said he had been the principal at various

schools with different programs, including flex-mod, and he doubted the product was

significantly different. Of 170 Minnesota school districts once on flex-mod, only nine were

currently still using it. As for the claim of "quality education" at Armstrong, one presenter

remarked, "'No plant can claim superiority.... To do so is to ask the rest of the district to

subsidize a plant that is turning out the same product'" (Roth, 1982, p. 2). Joy Robb reiterated

that many students at RHS had previously been displaced during elementary and junior high

closures on the east side. Displacement of students was a serious issue. The east side's lack of

support for the fall levy referendum had been a backlash for earlier school closings in the east.

Principal Kemppainen, introducing Don Blore to summarize for Cooper High, joked,

"'We're putting most of our eggs in one basket'" (Roth, 1982, p. 1). Blore said that Cooper's

support for adding a seventh board member was not a lack of support for the current board,

rather it provided a mechanism to prevent a deadlock from occurring again. The board's

mandate of a flexible program for the next school year was more a reflection of political

compromise than of unwavering support for flex-mod. He said that the three Armstrong board

supporters had insisted on including the flexible programming mandate in the motion to hire an

arbitration panel. The three Cooper board supporters had only agreed to their insistence in order

to move the process along. Armstrong had been built in 1970, the peak year, the Camelot of the

school district, when enrollment was around 28,000. "'We made a mistake in 1970.... Our

futuring was bad then'" (p. 2), Blore concluded.

Panel member John Maas, in later recollection of the parent-staff presentations, stated, "It

was clear how committed each faculty was to its view that its program and building was the best

education for its students…. Everyone was totally committed…. We understood why there was

a controversy" (personal communication, March 23, 2013). Community newspaper reporters,

covering an entire day of hearings, concluded, "Flexible programming and whether it is possible

in a school other than Armstrong remained the issue that divided the groups at the close of the

hearing" (Roth, 1982, p. 2).

The next week, looking for some humor in the then year-long conflict, Armstrong's

school newspaper reporters published April Fool's Day articles, reporting horrible fighting in the

district over the school-closing deadlock. "Battle cries of 'Flexible!' and 'Fiscal responsibility!'

are heard in city streets at all hours of the night" (Hedley, 1982), wrote one reporter. Another

reported,

> School board member William Fuhrperson proposed that no high schools be closed.
> Instead, each school would be removed from its foundation and rotated on a 6-day cycle.
> Needless to say, the crowd went wild....
> Fuhrperson went on to explain that although the proposed rotation of schools
> would accomplish little or nothing as far as education goes, "at least it doesn't cost
> much".... "Sounds liberal—I'd vote for it," commented Gary Jostling....Board member
> Bill Bergtwist seemed to be in a trance-like state. With glazed over eyes, he repeatedly
> stated, "Alternatives, media center, alternatives, quality, cost, flexibility." (E. Olson,
> 1982a)

As the panel deliberated and the public awaited the panel's end-of-April decision, the

school board and administration continued to conduct the serious business of the district,

including a unanimous vote to close Crystal Heights Elementary. District administration

continued preparations for the eminent high school closing, addressing the question of new attendance-area boundaries for high school students. The administration proposed three scenarios for new attendance-area boundaries, one scenario accounting for the possible closure of RHS, another for the closure of CHS, and a third for AHS. "It would seem best that we (the administration and school board) have a pretty firm agreement as to the boundaries before the decision on the 27th of April" (R. Cameron, personal communication, March 30, 1982), wrote cabinet member Bob Cameron. Closing either AHS or CHS would divide the district in an east-west fashion, mostly along Winnetka Avenue. Closing RHS would divide the district in a north-south fashion, mostly along 36th Avenue.

The school board also approved a student transfer policy for those students wanting to attend the high school outside their attendance area, once a high school was closed. Twelfth graders from the closed school would receive first priority to transfer. Accommodations would also be made to transfer a student's close friend when possible. Transfers would be allowed only to each building's capacity of 2,200. "'The most important thing is that people perceive this system as fair'" (Adair, 1982j, p. 3), said board member Joselyn.

District administration also commenced the staffing process for the two hypothetical high schools—high school "S" for the flexible program under principal George Scarbrough, and high school "K" for the traditional program under principal Elmer Kemppainen. All high school teachers were involuntarily placed in the "voluntary pool" and the two principals held interviews to select staff. In the voluntary pool, district teachers not working in high school at the time were also allowed to interview for high school positions. As a result, teachers with top seniority in the three high schools were not all offered jobs in the two new hypothetical high schools. Some teachers would have to move to junior high or elementary schools, and some would be teaching

outside their primary areas (*Anderson & Blore v. Independent School District #281*, 1982).

"Some teachers didn't talk with each other for the whole year…. The pain teachers went through having to sell themselves at interviews. They'd given their blood, sweat, and tears for years, and now they had to run through this hoop.... That was a long year," recalled former Cooper teacher Gretchen Heath. "We were ripping away at brothers and sisters…making life very difficult," recalled former Armstrong teacher Carol Peterson. "It was hard for teachers to concentrate on their jobs. It was disruptive to the whole psychological function of the teachers," recalled former union official Barry Noack.

At its April 5 meeting, the board received a grievance filed by two staff members concerning the high school staff-selection process. The board scheduled a hearing for April 29, two days after it was to vote on the panel's high school closing recommendation. The grievants, teachers Robert Anderson of RHS and Don Blore of CHS, also filed a motion in district court, arguing that the district's interview process constituted a violation of the teachers' contract, and that if a seniority-based process were used instead, the buildings could be staffed fairly in a matter of hours. As a result of their assignments through the current interview process, both teachers would now have to prepare for and be trained in areas they had not previously taught. Anderson had been awarded a 15-minute interview and had not been offered a position initially. Teachers with less seniority had been selected over him. Blore would be teaching in "K" school, but would not be teaching his same classes. Both teachers contended that they had suffered "irreparable damage to their professional careers and personal lives" (Adair, 1982n). On April 19, the Fourth Judicial District Court issued a temporary restraining order on the district's staffing process, putting a halt to the interviews that had been ongoing since March 29. A hearing on the restraining order was set for April 27.

Beauty, More Than Brick Deep?

The Panel's Recommendation

The three members of the fact-finding panel had not discussed their thoughts with each other at any length during their background reading, their tours of the three buildings, and their attendance at the parent-staff presentations. According to panel member John Maas, "Each of us wanted to collect our individual perceptions" (personal communication, March 23, 2013). After the presentations, they spent a few days individually thinking things over. Then all three panel members got to together to discuss their views. Judge Sheran asked what they had concluded. "It was a unanimous decision," Maas recalled. "The Chief Justice asked what we had concluded. We all said the same thing" (personal communication, March 23, 2013). They spent about three hours outlining the decision, and Judge Sheran wrote the final report.

The fact-finding panel had originally intended to deliver its high school closing recommendation to district officials on April 19, but for unknown reasons it did not issue its opinion until April 26, just one day before the board was slated to vote on the recommendation. On April 26, a copy of the panel's 22-page *Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations* (Sheran et al., 1982) was delivered to each board member at home. "Based upon the written documents, tours, hearings and proceedings herein, the following findings of fact, conclusion and recommendation are submitted to the school board of Independent School District No. 281" (p. 2), the panel wrote. In considering its charge, to recommend which two senior high school buildings would best serve the interests of the district in the foreseeable future, the panel wrote that the district had given them "one overriding mandate. One building was to house a 'flexible' program and the other building a 'traditional program'" (p. 1).

Common Findings of Fact

The panel summarized the history of the high school closing dilemma. The district was experiencing declining enrollment. A grade-reorganization committee had reviewed the district's grade configuration and had recommended keeping the current system. The school board had then slated a senior high for closure in order to save $1,100,000 annually. In analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the three buildings, the primary resource used by district leadership had been the "criteria" for closing schools, established by a long-range planning committee in 1977, with subsequent modifications in 1978, 1979, and 1980. District leadership had concluded that "the criteria do adequately cover all essential factors which must be evaluated in making the decision as to which senior high should be closed" (Sheran et al., 1982, p. 2).

According to district evaluation, each of the three school buildings had shown strengths and weaknesses in different components of the criteria. The current school population was centered around Cooper High School, but closing Cooper would eliminate the "ripple" effect in student reassignment and would advantageously give the district one school building on each side of the district. Armstrong had a unique set of facilities, including a media center that could not be matched by the other buildings. It was best equipped for the flexible program, and it could operate under a traditional program as well. But Armstrong was the least energy efficient, costing $20.00 more to operate per pupil per year than Cooper and $30.00 more than Robbinsdale. There was also no definite time line for when the expected growth in Plymouth would occur.

The City of Robbinsdale had been losing its identifiable school centers with the closure of a junior high and an elementary school in the last three years. Keeping Robbinsdale open would save the most in transportation costs. But Robbinsdale had the least amount of bonded

debt remaining to be paid. "The intent of closing a building is to save approximately $1,100,000 per year" (Sheran et al., 1982, p. 5), the panel reiterated. The final rating of each building, as calculated by district administration, had been Armstrong High School 89.3, Cooper High School 89.6, and Robbinsdale High School 89.8. Citing the superintendent's report, the panel noted that district leadership had concluded that "'when the positives and negatives are balanced out' there is no one school which stands out as a prime candidate for closing" (p. 7).

Discussion

The panel, in order to resolve the issue, had reviewed the written information provided by the district. It had also reviewed the information gathered from its tours of the buildings and the information from the hearings. As part of its task, the panel reiterated that it had looked closely at which buildings would best accommodate a flexible or a traditional program. The panel expressed strong reservations with approaching the problem from an historical, social, or cultural standpoint.

> The panel recognizes that there are many other factors which one might consider in arriving at a recommendation such as the past history of the school district, municipal boundary lines, community loyalties, citizen identification with particular schools and communities as well as current traditions and competitions. However, emphasis of such factors tends to obscure this fundamental question: Which two facilities will best serve students of District 281 in the pursuit of their education in the foreseeable future? Considering such factors shifts the focus of decision away from the interests of students and to some extent, at least, interferes with discharge of the primary charge given to the panel....To rely on historical development as a major factor is to distract attention from the current challenges facing the school district. (Sheran et al., 1982, p. 15)

With its perspective centered on the curricular and the pedagogical within education, the panel then focused its attention on actual physical plant as it supported these educational considerations.

In considering the facts before it, the panel recognized that physical plant does not of

itself control the education that the student receives. However, the panel believes that the physical plant creates an important environment for learning. Consequently, the panel considered it important that the schools selected be able to accommodate possible long-term as well as short-term changes in public education programs and practices.

In contemplating such change, the panel thinks that basic service areas...should reflect the most up to date design and equipment possible....

As the school district has developed, the school board...carefully designed each new senior high school facility to meet changes that were emerging in educational practice and to anticipate the broad range of new programs considered important.... In each case, the school board, administration, teachers and community chose to depart from the design of the previous building to better serve the present and future needs of students.... At no time in this process did the many advisors and decision makers simply seek to reproduce one or another of the existing physical plants. (Sheran et al., 1982, pp. 15-17)

The panel also minimized costs as a factor in its decision.

Other arguments advanced suggested that overall operational costs were higher in one facility than another. These are important considerations but do not represent a significant part of the total operating costs of the school district.... A more pertinent consideration is the relationship of cost and student benefit. This physical environment will be the last major contact with a formal, long term educational environment for 50% or more of the students. (Sheran et al., 1982, pp. 17-18)

The panel estimated that the annual energy savings at issue represented less than one half of one percent of the school district's total annual budget. The panel also concluded that travel distance from one end of the district to the other was not great enough to make transportation a factor, either in terms of time or cost. Also, through its efficient transportation system, the district could address the question of student body balance and the issue of student choice of flexible or traditional programming.

Conclusion

After thorough review of all information, the panel summarized its findings and presented its conclusions.

The panel concludes:

1. The criteria utilized by the school board...represents a reasonable guideline

from which to begin a decision.

   2. The primary consideration with the criteria is usefulness as an educational facility.

   3. The decision to be made must be made in terms of the school district as an entity looking to the future educational needs of the school district.

   4. The schools retained must be flexible in terms of use of facility and use for changing programs and technology....

   8. Historic community patterns and ties, social and economic data, family and social patterns should not be a primary basis for decision.

   9. Transportation, socio-economic status and attendance areas are factors which are within the control of the school district once a decision is reached on the use of senior high facilities.

   10. In consideration of the facility, the basic learning stations for all subject areas now and their adaptability in the foreseeable future are an important consideration. (Sheran et al., 1982, pp. 19-20)

Recommendation

The panel ended the report with a one-page recommendation, naming the two buildings

that should be reopened and providing justification.

   The panel unanimously and unequivocally recommends that the Cooper and Armstrong facilities will best serve the interests of School District 281 for the foreseeable future.

   Each building represents careful and improved design of senior high school facilities.

   Each building provides a broad degree of flexibility in its current use and has the potential to accommodate future changes in technology as well as changes in flexible or traditional programs.

   Each building has a significant amount of bonded debt remaining which the citizens will continue to pay for through 1994....

   The Robbinsdale High School has rendered outstanding and substantial service to the district and has the least debt remaining to be paid, has been well maintained but is unquestionably a less attractive, functional or flexible building than the other two schools....

   Each of the two remaining buildings has more modern equipment and basic learning stations that are and will continue to be useful in the short-term future. (Sheran et al., 1982, pp. 21-22)

The document was signed by the Honorable Robert J. Sheran, James B. Hetland, Jr., and John M.

Maas, dated April 26, 1982.

   After reading a copy of the panel's recommendation at his home, board member Gary

Joselyn went over to the district's central office. Joselyn recalled, "Leroy Hood looked like he'd been hit. 'This is the worst thing that's happened to the Robbinsdale District,' he said."

Critical Discussion

The AHS bloc on the school board realized that time was on its side. These three board members waited for just one of the other three board members to fold under the immense pressure and to vote to close CHS. The pressure increased by the day as the teachers' union threatened to begin work-to-rule if the board could not make a decision. The window of time was rapidly closing in order to meet the technical requirements of the teachers' contract on new teaching-position assignments. CHS was the only high school to have already been proposed for closure on a passing board vote, and the required public meetings had already been held. A proposal to close either of the other two high schools at that point would have set the process back by a number of weeks.

The AHS bloc continued to hold firm against any proposal that included the closure of AHS. A motion to propose to close both RHS and AHS and to consider a list of arbitrators to help decide the matter had failed 3-3 on January 11, with the AHS bloc voting "no." In the minds of AHS advocates, holding out just a little longer would make CHS the only option for a high school closure and a million-dollar savings for the next school year. Power shifted back to the east side on January 15, however, when teacher Don Blore proposed suspending the technical requirements of the contract, staffing two hypothetical high schools for the next school year, and letting the newly elected July school board decide which two buildings would house these high schools. The district would then inform the teachers by letter to report to these respective buildings in August.

Under Blore's proposal, the time-pressure bubble had burst, and, with the CHS and RHS public alliance firmly in place, AHS supporters could not afford a public political solution by popular vote to extricate the district from the quagmire. However, if the AHS bloc of board members did oppose the proposal, they would be blamed for the million-dollar loss, and the new east-side board would likely close AHS within a year anyway. If they agreed to the proposal, however, although a million dollars would be saved, AHS would likely be closed that same year by the new east-side board. Although the west side possessed economic power and enjoyed sufficient political power on the then current school board, it could not have survived a popular-justice decision at the polls during the May school board elections. It needed a legitimate apparatus to skirt this proposed political solution and regain the upper hand. The AHS bloc then revisited the prospect of a neutral panel, seeing it as a better option than disaster at the polls.

The board, including the AHS bloc, finally agreed that the technical requirements of the teachers' contract could be modified and the hypothetical schools' staffs assembled—but with one change. Rather than a popular vote and a new board determining which two buildings would house the high schools, the board would ask a neutral panel to offer a recommendation, allowing the then current board to make the final decision. All three schools would be officially closed so they could all be considered on equal footing, with the intent of officially reopening the two buildings recommended by the panel. A process of officially closing all buildings, hiring an outside panel to make the definitive decision, and then reopening the buildings chosen by the panel was not evident in the review of professional-advice literature. According to some research (Berger 1982b, 1983b) the use of consultants was actually associated with greater community opposition.

In finally agreeing to the neutral panel, however, the AHS bloc skillfully negotiated the

insertion of the curricular-delivery interests of the west side into the panel's charge. One high school would operate under flexible-modular programming, the other under traditional programming. In its final written recommendation, the panel recognized that the district had given it "one overriding mandate," that one building house "a 'flexible' program" and the other "a 'traditional' program." The school board thus secured the west side's interest in alternative education for the future by including the AHS bloc's insistence that the panel recommend which two buildings would "best serve the interests of School District 281 for the foreseeable future" with one building operating under a "flexible program" and the other under a "traditional program." Other community and administrative interests of operating costs and building location were notably excluded in this overarching directive.

Although it went unmentioned in the written documentation, the AHS bloc's insistence that one school operate with flexible programming placed AHS in a strong position from an additional perspective. Analyzing administration's tentative attendance-area boundaries, if AHS were closed, about 50 percent of students on the high school level would encounter a mid-stream shift in educational programming (from traditional to flexible or flexible to traditional), whereas less than 20 percent would encounter such a change by closing CHS or RHS. Also, closing AHS would require the reassignment of both remaining principals to a new building, whereas only one principal would move under a CHS closure and none under an RHS closure.

Power shifted somewhat back to the east with the decision to elect a seventh member to the board in the May elections. In case the controversy could not be solved in the end by the neutral panel and the current board, it was even more likely that the new school board, with seven members rather than six, would be weighted with east-side advocates. The proposition to add the new board member was overwhelmingly supported in the RHS and CHS attendance

areas, but not favored in the AHS attendance area. Again, a popular political solution was a threat to the new middle class through the numeric power advantage of the old middle class. However, power then shifted notably back to the west with the panel's final recommendation to close Robbinsdale High. The panel had sided with the curricular-delivery argument of the west side, downplaying costs, location, and history as important considerations.

In accepting the idea of a neutral panel, the board attempted to move the decision-making process back into an extension of the technical-rational model, shifting away from a political solution. Rather than calling the panel "arbitrators," the board employed a "fact-finding panel" of experts, "neutral" and unbiased professionals, not stained by district politics. The board essentially asked the panel to repeat the previous technical-rational process in a condensed time period, listening to the schools' parent-teacher presentations and taking a second look at all the data assembled by administration. The outside panel of experts, with doctorates in law, education, and business, represented the restoration of technical-rational expertise and an emphasis on getting back to the facts.

This time, however, technical-rational decision making would take place within a sort of symbolic judicial framework. For example, the chair of the panel would be a former justice of the state's Supreme Court. After studying an "objective" background of the issue, the panel would conduct "hearings" of public "testimonial." Each side in the argument would present its "case" with an "opening statement," then introduce "evidence" in the form of a summarizing "brief," followed by time for a "rebuttal." The panel itself would be allowed time to "clarify evidence," after which it would "deliberate" and offer its decision.

As a way to legitimate a decision other than by a popular-justice vote, AHS decided to back this symbolic court apparatus. Foucault (1980) noted that in Western societies, the court's

historical function had been to control popular justice, with the neutral institution of the court really becoming an instrument of class power. "Each time that the bourgeoisie has wished to subject a popular uprising to the constraint of a state apparatus a court has been set up" (p. 7). For Foucault, "The organization of courts, at least in the West, is necessarily alien to the practice of popular justice" (p. 9). When faced with popular justice or the court, AHS chose the court.

Although the teachers' union recognized the school-closure dilemma as a "political hot bed" requiring "arbitration," the board preferred a technical-rational framework to disguise the political nature of the problem. Rather than going head to head in a continuing political battle, the board asked for a "fact-finding panel" to "advise" it. The board did not desire an arbitrator because of the political nature of such a position. They wanted to restore the scientific way within a judicial framework. The parties would thus go through a symbolic court chaired by a neutral judge who would serve as a detached expert in the realm of ideas. The symbolic court would also include expert, professional representatives of the district's political factions. The vice-president of the bank would represent the "costs" argument and the former assistant superintendent would represent the "flexible quality education" side.

However, the district's school-closure impasse was clearly not a judicial problem to be solved by weighing the facts under deliberation. It was a political problem. One concern in handing over an essentially political problem to such a panel was that it would have no real accountability within the district. An administrator could be terminated for making an improper decision, and a board member could be voted out of office for doing the same. The outside judicial panel of experts had no lived experience in the district. The panel would arrive, deliberate, render what would essentially be a political decision, and then vanish.

Furthermore, the extent of the deliberation the panel of experts was about to undertake

would likely be quite minimal given the narrow parameters within which the panel perceived it

was working. Apple (1990) noted this frequent concern with using expert opinion in educational

issues.

> One of the tasks of the expert is to furnish to the administrative leadership of an institution the special knowledge these persons require before decisions are made. The bureaucratic institution furnishes the problems to be investigated, not the expert. Hence, the type of knowledge that the expert is to supply is *determined in advance*.... The fact that the expert is expected to work on the practical problems as defined by the institution and not offer advice outside of these boundaries is of considerable moment.... The expert is expected to provide technical advice and services to help solve the institution's needs; however, the range of issues and the types of answers which are actually acceptable are ideologically limited by what the administrative apparatus has previously defined as "the problem." In this way the circle of inconsequential results is continued. (pp. 147-148)

Former finance director Gary DeFrance in later reflection concurred with this insight.

> When [the board] named the panel and gave it its charge, [RHS] was the oldest school. The politics, closing Robbinsdale Junior High—the panel wasn't looking at any of that. The logic is going to bear on the question you ask. It was an obvious answer.

Although the school board's charge seemed open-ended enough, "Recommend which two senior

high school buildings will best serve the interests of School District 281 for the foreseeable

future," for some, including the panel of experts, the problem had essentially been boiled down

to identifying the best building to accommodate flexible programming and the best building to

accommodate traditional programming. Panel member John Maas recalled,

> Going through the classrooms, seeing the facilities as they were to function for the students in the future—the political considerations were out for the panel. The charge was to look at this as an educational-facility issue. What was the best educational facility?—Chief Justice Sheran framed the thinking of the group in that manner. We were not competent to judge the political situation in the community. (J. Maas, personal communication, March 23, 2013)

Thus, within the panel's final judgment, the discourse turned towards characteristics of physical

facility.

> The dominant discourse had started out as financial and had later been somewhat

displaced by a competing discourse of curricular delivery and educational programming. The panel's written decision now directed the discussion in a focused manner toward physical facility, but tied into curricular delivery. The panel emphasized "physical plant," "basic service areas," "equipment," building "design," and how these met "changes" and "future needs" of students. The buildings should be "flexible" for "changing programs and technology" and "future educational needs." "The primary consideration...is usefulness as an educational facility," the panel stated. AHS and CHS represented improved design, the panel explained, and were more flexible both at the time and for the future. RHS was less flexible, functional, and less attractive.

The panel focused on the age of the buildings, recommending closure of the oldest building. It refuted arguments made by administration regarding location (the need for a school on the east side) and attendance boundaries (the assertion that an RHS closure would be undesirable from a socioeconomic standpoint). The panel contended the district could use its transportation system and redraw boundaries in any fashion to accommodate these concerns. In moving the discourse toward physical facility, the panel expressed strong reservations with approaching the problem from an historical, social, or cultural standpoint, arguing that past history, municipalities, community loyalties, citizen identification with schools, tradition, historic community patterns and ties, social and economic data, family and social patterns, location, and cost differences were not important in this decision. They "distracted" from focusing on the best education for "the foreseeable future."

According to the panel, the district's social, economic, cultural, historical, geographical, (and probably political-power) issues obscured the real "educational" issues of identifying the two buildings that would best serve future educational needs and that would specifically be best-

suited for flexible and traditional programming. A critical perspective would indicate, however, that it is often the reverse—it is often such "educational" issues that are false fronts used to obscure other very important socioeconomic issues of fairness and justice. Boyd (1983) remarked, "If age and condition of the school buildings are the main criteria, minority groups in cities may bear the brunt of school closings because they often live in the older neighborhoods with aging school facilities" (p. 258).

Questioning the educational pretenses behind school consolidation in general, Sher and Tompkins (1977) asserted,

> [Better life chances for children] are more surely affected by the education and income of parents, the social and economic character of the community, the investment of time, energy, and love by many adults, and plain luck, than they ever are (or were) by the size, newness, or variety of the local school. (p. 77)

Commenting on school district physical plant, former District 281 superintendent Tom Bollin later stated, "Any new building is not as good as an old building." According to evaluations, Robbinsdale High was in no need of major repair at the time.

The age of the Robbinsdale High facility would not seem to have been reason enough to recommend it for closure over the others. Society often places a higher value on older homes, for example, which are often priced higher than their newer counterparts, depending on their location. Zerchykov's (1982) study of school closures indicated the key factor in final closure decisions seemed to mirror the real estate business—location, location, location. Updating older facilities, due to their geographic location or their potential for creating a greater degree of political and social harmony within a district, should be considered as an important and necessary financial cost of running school districts.

If physical plant was, quite likely then, really not the most important underlying consideration for the panel of experts, what might this have been? Zerchykov's (1982) study

found that decision makers in school districts seemed to be "consistently making trade-offs between political and technical considerations in school closure decisions" (p. 163). In the case of the panel of experts' decision, it seemed doubtful that detailed, technical factors were at play. An April 1, 1982 letter from panel member John Maas (personal communication) asked for answers to a list of questions regarding the school-closing issue, however, most of the information requested was already contained in the "blue book" of information previously given to the panel members. The panel's final written recommendation contained misspellings of important names, and one complete section pertaining to financial factors was "inadvertently omitted" (Regular meeting, 1982).

This inattention to detail pointed away from a careful and deliberative weighing of facts on the panel's part. Rather, the panel was likely more interested in political considerations, specifically narrowing these to the current make-up of the school board. The panel was in search of a compromise that the board would accept. Since the school board had spent the better part of half a year arguing over whether to close Cooper High or Armstrong High, the panel's recommendation to instead close Robbinsdale High had a high probability of insuring political resolution, with no board member then having to accept defeat, given the additional consideration that Robbinsdale High was also the oldest building.

The district's cascading series of crises had begun with an economic crisis followed by a rationality crisis in both administrative leadership and in political-representative leadership on the school board. With no decision at hand as to which high school to close in order to ensure a million-dollar annual savings, the unsuccessful attempt at crisis management by the political-administrative apparatus over a number of months had then triggered a legitimation crisis. At the current juncture, by agreeing to suspend the technical requirements of the teachers' contract and

to staff two hypothetical high schools, district leadership was making an attempt to regain legitimation, or re-legitimation as it were, through two possible avenues: (a) a political avenue through popular justice at the polls; or (b) a technical-rational avenue through quasi-judicial justice at the hands of a neutral, fact-finding panel of experts.

Berger (1982b, 1983b) found that the use of outside consultants was associated with greater community opposition in the end. The technical-rational model had failed on two previous occasions to bring resolution to the district's quandary. The board's resolve to plough ahead anyway with another attempt using the technical-rational model is further evidence of the legitimatory sway held by neutrality, objectivity, and the scientific way. Administration (with public input) had deferred to the board. The board (with public input) had deferred to the panel. The panel (with public input) had then made the final ruling. District leadership kept passing on the dilemma until a vanishing, fact-finding panel would make the decision. Although there was widespread belief in objectivity, neutrality, and fact-finding, the inability to hold the decision makers accountable in such a model would almost guarantee that the losers could not view this as a legitimate decision in the end, causing a continuing or worsening legitimation crisis in the district. The kind of problem facing the district at this point would have been better addressed through the public political solution of a popular vote in the May school board elections.

DATA PART 7
CLOSING A HIGH SCHOOL:
A DECISION AND A DISTRICT IN TURMOIL

Robbinsdale High a Surprise Sacrifice
Newspaper reporter

Robin: Endangered Species

The school board had originally planned to reveal the panel's recommendation to the public at its regularly-scheduled Monday-evening meeting on April 26, but the board had re-scheduled the board meeting for Tuesday evening instead, citing that Monday evening was the "all-district after high school alternatives night" ("High school decision due," 1982), where students would be exploring options for life after graduation, including career opportunities. It was anticipated that many students would want to attend both events. Perhaps coincidentally, filings for candidates for the school board election were scheduled to close on Tuesday afternoon. The public would not know the panel's recommendation until three hours after the filing deadline.

The school board met on Tuesday evening, April 27, each member having privately received the panel's recommendation the previous day. A crowd of over 1,300 was in attendance anxiously awaiting revelation of the panel's recommendation as the meeting was called to order at 8:05 p.m. in the Sandburg Junior High gymnasium. In previous months, all board members had at some point stated their support for the panel's recommendation, whatever it might be, and had stated their opposition to reversing the school-closing decision once it had been made. "I just hated to go to the meeting that night, because I knew what was going to happen," recalled the district's finance director Gary DeFrance. PAC leader Joy Robb recalled getting ready for the meeting. "Joann Lange [the mayor's wife] called and said, 'Why don't I pick you up?' On

the way over she told me. I told Barb [Southward] before the meeting. We were shocked."

RHS principal Knutson, who was sitting next to RHS teacher Neil Luebke, whispered in his ear,

"'RHS will be closed.'"

Board chair Webber asked Superintendent Hood to read aloud the panel's

recommendation on the senior high school-closure issue. According to reporters "not a peep

could be heard from the crowd as Hood's comments neared the final recommendation of the

three member fact-finding panel" (Adair, 1982m, p. 1). Hood read that the panel unanimously

and unequivocally recommended that Cooper Senior High and Armstrong Senior High would

best serve the interests of school District 281 for the foreseeable future. "The recommendation,

announced by Superintendent Leroy Hood, was met first by stunned silence and quickly

followed by screams of disbelief and sobs of dismay from a large RHS contingent of faculty and

students. Armstrong and Cooper supporters erupted into cheers and applause" (S. Loechler,

1982). Board member Bergquist made the motion at 8:35 p.m.:

> -The School Board has unanimously approved the closing of a senior high school at the end of this School Year 1981-82 to realize a net savings in excess of $1,000,000 per year to the General Operating Fund.

> -The School Board has unanimously approved the staffing of a "flexible" senior high program and a "traditional" senior high program.

> -The School Board unanimously agreed to contract with a Fact Finding Panel of three under the auspices of the American Arbitration Association to recommend which two senior high school buildings will best serve the interests of School District #281 for the foreseeable future.

> -The Fact Finding Panel (Honorable Robert J. Sheran, Professor James L. Hetland Jr., Dr. John M. Maas) after thorough and extensive study has recommended that the Armstrong Senior High and Cooper Senior High buildings will best serve the interests of School District #281.

> -The Administration presented attendance area boundaries that give good balance between the two buildings without ripple effect and consistent with natural boundaries.

-The School Board has unanimously approved a senior high transfer policy allowing open enrollments to the building capacity of 2,200.

-The School Board has unanimously approved the closing of all three high schools at the end of School Year 1981-82.

I propose the following Motions:

Motion: I move, for the School Year 1982-83 and foreseeable future, that the Armstrong Senior High building reopen to house a "flexible" program headed by George Scarborough [*sic*] as principal, that the Cooper Senior High building reopen to house a "traditional" program headed by Elmer Kemppainen as principal, and that the Robbinsdale Senior High building remain closed at the end of School Year 1981-82.

Motion: I move that School District #281 adopt the attendance areas as presented by the Administration for the School Year 1982-83.
(no author, personal communication, April, 1982)

The motion carried 5-1, with board member Fuhrmann casting the only dissenting vote. "After a second of silence, students in one corner of the room erupted into applause, cheering, hugging and kissing, while across the room a cluster of students shuddered and wept" ("Board votes to close Robbinsdale," 1982, p. 1A). The new boundary lines split the Robbinsdale High attendance area in two (see Appendix K), sending half its students to Cooper and half to Armstrong.

Armstrong student Liz Olson recalled that evening as "an overwhelming sense of relief. But it was a bit of a stunner…. We knew RHS was back on the table, but we never thought that they would have chosen RHS. It all depended on what criteria you used. I remember being pleased, happy—a celebratory sense." Robbinsdale student Chuck Webber recalled,

There was stunned silence from the RHS throng. It was the first time that they thought [RHS] could be closed. It just started sinking in that it was going to close…. Photographers went rushing over to take pictures…. Adding insult to injury, some photographer from AHS took a photo of a crying RHS student and he won a state photo award—somebody from AHS wins an award for a crying RHS student.

Robbinsdale student Heather Robb McCollor remembered, "I shook uncontrollably. It was

absolutely shocking that they even considered Robbinsdale—the economics of it. It was Cooper versus Armstrong! The location of Robbinsdale—it didn't make any sense. They specifically said they would not shut down the senior high." That evening after the board meeting, Joy Robb, comforting her sobbing daughter, told a reporter. "'I just can't believe it.... I had no idea they could do this. They're going to run into more problems down the line than they'll ever know how to deal with. I don't think they'll pass a referendum (for higher taxes) for a long, long time'" ("Board votes to close Robbinsdale," 1982, p. 1A). Liz Miller lived just blocks from RHS, where her children attended school and where her husband was a teacher and coach. She later recalled, "I can remember crying. Our plan for our family just went down the drain."

Robbinsdale student Chuck Webber commented further on the complete surprise of the decision. "We were going [to the meeting] more out of curiosity. We were spectators—and then the rug was pulled out from under us. A lot of [RHS] people walked into the meeting thinking there was no way the school could close, and they walked out with a closed school." With the board's action closing Robbinsdale High, it had effectively closed three of the City of Robbinsdale's four schools within a three-year time span: Robbinsdale Junior High in 1979, (the original high school building), Lee Elementary in 1981, (six of the eight closed elementary buildings were located on the east side in and around Robbinsdale), and now in 1982, Robbinsdale Senior High.

Hell No, We Won't Go:

Why Are They Taking the Robbinsdale Out of District 281?

The next day's *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* newspaper published a front-page headline, "Board votes to close Robbinsdale High" (1982, p. 1), including a photo of a sobbing

Robbinsdale student and another photo of rejoicing Armstrong students. The story shared the front page with the other headline of the day, "War in Falkland appears imminent." Reporters descended on Robbinsdale High, eager to record students' reactions. Some students were still unaware of the closing decision as they arrived at school. The school held a morning assembly, and principal Knutson addressed the students. "'I was absolutely and totally stunned—I did not expect it at all....No one has a corner on grief this morning, but I want us to go out in style, commensurate with the tradition we have known for 25 years'" (S. Loechler, 1982), said Knutson.

Student Alisa Lange later recalled the assembly. "I looked across the auditorium at the junior hockey players crying—that's the image I have." Student Chuck Webber recalled, "If people went to classes, classes weren't being held…. I was called down to the principal's office for a phone call from WCCO radio." Board chair Fred Webber, Chuck's father, had just voted to close Robbinsdale High at the end of his son's junior year. WCCO radio was interested in knowing how the two were getting along. "'[My dad] did what he had to do, he did what he thought was right, and he and I are doing just fine,'" responded Webber, who then joined a flock of 700 other Robins and walked out of school in protest. Meeting on adjacent Mielke Field, the students formed a giant letter "R," linking arms and chanting, "'Robins, Robins, Robins,' and 'Hell no, we won't go'" ("Emotions explode," 1982, p. 1).

Some students then proceeded to the Armstrong High parking lot to throw eggs at students' cars ("Emotions explode," 1982). About 100 RHS students showed up at the district's central office. Inside, Assistant Superintendent Willis Boynton recalled receiving a phone call from the receptionist, "'I have a lobby full of kids here. What do I do?'" Boynton asked the students to come up to the board room where he talked with them about change. According to

Robbinsdale's principal, about half of RHS students left the building before the end of the school day ("Emotions explode," 1982). The school's flag was flown at half-mast.

In the following days, lawn signs began sprouting up in front of houses around the Robbinsdale community. One sign read, "R.I.P. / Robbinsdale High Killed in action April 27, 1982 / May the memories live forever" ("Editors give opinions," 1982). Another sign, showing a painted robin, was labeled, "Endangered Species!" (Hoose, 1982a, p. 3). Given that the district's official title was "Robbinsdale Area Schools," another sign asked, "Why are they taking the 'Robbinsdale' out of District 281" (*Robbinsdale, Minnesota,* 1993, n.p.)? Reporters continued covering the story, publishing headlines reading, "Emotions explode in walk-out at Robbinsdale" ("Emotions explode," 1982, p. 1), and "Robbinsdale burns over school closing" (Hoose, 1982a, p. 3). A photo of an RHS marching band drummer, dressed in full school regalia, was captioned, "Bang the drum no more" (Pedersen, 1982). One cartoon showed a menacing falcon and hawk sharing a tree branch with an innocent-looking robin. The robin was being blindsided by a wood plank engraved with the words, "281 School Board" ("Editors give opinions," 1982).

In public comments, school board members mostly concurred with board member Olson's explanation of his vote to close RHS. "'The closing of the oldest building is what many people will call common sense'" (Gonzalez Ettel, 1982, p. 3), said Olson, while underscoring, "'Robbinsdale was my third choice as the school to close, but my last choice was to close no school at all'" (Newstrom, 1982b). Board member Fuhrmann, the sole detractor, remarked, "'We should spend the extra money on educating kids instead of keeping open an extravagant building'" (Newstrom, 1982b). Fuhrmann explained that he had rejected the panel's recommendation, voting "no," because Robbinsdale High was the only secondary school in the

eastern half of the district, it was cheaper to run, it was flexible enough for future needs, and many students there had already been displaced once with the RJHS closing (Gonzalez Ettel, 1982). Fuhrmann stated, "'A lot of folks think that human feelings and emotions aren't important. But I do'" (p. 4). "'It's like losing a close relative through death. The emotions are running high'" (p. 8). In later reflection on the panel's report, he explained,

> There was no mention made about cost savings—and that was a major reason we were closing a building.... RHS was the only building in the east side of the district, it was the most efficient to operate, Lee and RJHS had already been closed, and it cost more to bus the kids.

Board members overall did express some reservations with their approval of the new attendance-area boundary line, fearing that it did not provide an ideal socioeconomic balance between the two remaining high schools. They contended, however, that it was the only feasible boundary configuration given Robbinsdale High's closure.

The board's decision provoked strong reactions from the Robbinsdale community. "'How can they do this to us again?'" (Hoose, 1982a, p. 3) was a refrain heard around the city. Residents talked about withholding taxes owed to the district, suing the school board, transferring their children to other school districts, and reversing the levy referendum. "'I can't conceive of a more devastating blow to a community of our size and stature than to have that senior high close.... It gives the impression of a dying community'" (p. 8), said the Robbinsdale city manager. Robbinsdale's mayor, Ray Mattson, remarked,

> "Most asinine, irresponsible move on the part of elected public officials I've ever seen in my life.... I've received dozens of calls by people who are upset and say they will do anything physically, financially and emotionally to help elect three new school board members who are pro Robbinsdale and Cooper." (Chuba, 1982i)

He added, "'We're not going to take this lying down'" (Gonzalez Ettel, 1982, p. 4). Walter "Red" Sochacki, former Robbinsdale mayor, former school board member from 1975 to 1981,

former teacher and coach in the district, and 45-year resident of Robbinsdale, declared, "'The City of Robbinsdale was tattooed and raped.... The school district has used us to keep things going and now, because there's no use for us, they just dropped us. They raped us'" (Andersen, 1982b). He more thoughtfully added,

> "Out of the seven communities in our school district, Robbinsdale is the only one in my mind that presents itself as a city, meaning a downtown area, a main drag with banks, businesses, two shopping centers, a hospital, theatre, two lakes and a population of about 16,000. And we have no schools. That's not a viable community. Without schools, you don't have anything." (Andersen, 1982b)

Milo Mielke, former long-time RHS principal, said,

> "I just don't know what will become of our city. I'm stunned. Robbinsdale will lose all its identity with the closure of all its secondary schools....It was the mother school of the entire district. Oh, what will they call the school district now with all but one of Robbinsdale's schools gone?" (Chuba, 1982d)

The community newspaper was inundated with a month's worth of letters to the editor, 90 percent against the closure. Residents called district leaders incompetent, weak, fiscally irresponsible, and unfair. There were calls for a new school board to be voted in. "Do you call this equal opportunity education in District 281? No gentlemen, I call it discrimination against the eastern section of District 281" (Dinius, 1982a). "Thank you for making the citizens of Robbinsdale sacrificial lambs again" (Smaciarz, 1982). "How insidous [*sic*] of the board to drag out their brand of community genocide over such a long period of time. No one was told that the long-term price tag of our district's westward expansion would be the eventual removal of 'Robbinsdale' from District 281" (Schwartz, 1982).

> Along with the many long-time residents of Robbinsdale we have been heavily taxed throughout the years for the construction of the numerous new schools and the renovation of many existing schools in the district. Now the "unbiased" panel recommends that the newcomers living on the west side reap the benefits of the school district we have supported so long and developed into one of the better districts in the state. (Richey, 1982)

"You'll have to block out the word 'Robbinsdale' on the school busses because now it stands for nothing" (Smaciarz, 1982). Even the managing editor of the *Post* community newspaper, Bob Bork, entered his opinion.

> The flagship of the fleet is dead in the water after a direct torpedo hit in the engine room....
>> And talk about losing identity! Since 1936 there has been a Robbinsdale High School. Change the charts for this fall however. The identity is gone....
>> Through it all, you just have to have some sympathy for Robbinsdale. The first elementary building ever erected in the district was Lee School. It's closed. The first high school ever built was closed. Same for the second high school now. ("Editors give opinions," 1982)

But others, mostly from the Armstrong area, wrote letters defending the panel's recommendation and the board's action. Ann Andersen, the editor of the New Hope-Plymouth edition of the *Post* newspaper, wrote,

> The fact-finding panel was able to do what neither the board nor the superintendent's cabinet could do. The panel said, "Historic community patterns and ties, social and economic data, family and social patterns should not be a primary basis for decision." The panel thus moved beyond emotion to common sense....The panel brought the raging discussion into focus....Everyone can settle down to the primary mission: the education of students of the challenging world of today and tomorrow. ("Editors give opinions," 1982)

An editorial by Armstrong students read,

> The process of closing a school is tearing and traumatic....
>> The decision of the school board to maintain both mod-flex and traditional education into buildings best suited for them reflects a district that puts education first and one that will remain a pace-setter in this state. ("Lengthy ordeal," 1982)

Ann Rest from Friends of Armstrong called the panel's recommendation "'an impartial decision made by people who were studying the criteria all of us agreed were important'" (Gonzalez Ettel, 1982, p. 8).

The thought of changing schools brought some apprehension to RHS students. They worried about having to compete for roles, such as cheerleaders, newspaper editors, and captains, in their new schools. They worried about having current friendships split up, and some of those

slated to attend Armstrong, rather than Cooper, worried about fitting in. "'It'll be harder for me to fit in at Armstrong than it would be for me to go to Cooper. I hope to apply for a transfer to Cooper'" ("Emotions explode," 1982, p. 15), said one RHS student. According to another student, her first thought upon hearing the news of the RHS closure was, "'Oh no, I don't have enough clothes to go [to Armstrong].... People at Cooper…will be more accepting'" (Hoose, 1982b, p. 3). She also hoped to transfer. "'They're just completely different [at Armstrong]— the way they dress, the way they act.... They've got a lot more money...the Gloria Vanderbilts and Calvin Kleins, a lot ritzier things'" (p. 4), said yet another.

Many RHS students blamed their demise on the socioeconomic power of the west side. One student commented, "'I think because a lot of people were in the higher tax brackets in the Plymouth area, they had more clout'" ("Emotions explode," 1982, p. 15). "'They're all a bunch of cake-eaters'" (Hoose, 1982b, p. 4), said yet another. But many students turned their sorrow into action. "'I was out Saturday putting yellow ribbons around the neighborhood and help [*sic*] campaign for the new school board members who could turn the decision around'" (Pedersen, 1982), said one student. RHS student Chuck Webber recalled the sentiment of RHS students. "'We're gonna get rid of the bums on the school board—it's not over'.... A lot of people were in denial. It's the first stage of grief."

Robbinsdale supporters packed the May 3 school board meeting, ready to speak their minds during the open mike session. Joy Robb accused the board of "'creating a monster of a school district'" (Adair, 1982o, p. 1).

> "You have insulted the intelligence of the majority of the citizens living in the district.... The Robbinsdale area has been victimized, and you have pillaged our property values.... With so many school closings in this area and us having the same approximate enrollment as the west, I call that discrimination.... Don't give us that song and dance about let's get on with the district, because a philosophical battle was won over the will of the majority." (p. 1)

She scolded the board for spending four months deadlocked on the closure of Armstrong or Cooper, and then giving Robbinsdale only 24 hours of thought before deciding to close it. Gerald Miller, RHS teacher, stated that political power was the only thing heard in this country. "'We have to beat them at the polls and don't forget that.... Time will not heal this decision because we have both Robbinsdale junior and senior highs to remind us of it'" (Adair, 1982o, p. 1). John Grygelko, another RHS teacher, told the board to use the referendum money wisely, because there wouldn't be another one that would pass. "'You took the advice of a banker, a judge and a beloved educator over the cabinet's because it (the cabinet) said things that some board members didn't want to hear'" (p. 1).

On the day the board had voted to close RHS, testimony had also begun in the teachers' lawsuit concerning the district's reassignment of teachers to two hypothetical high schools. By Friday the district court had ruled that putting staff from all three schools into a voluntary pool and selecting the staff for two hypothetical schools from that pool constituted a violation of the teachers' contract. The judge wrote,

> Application of the voluntary pool procedure to all three schools...had the effect of circumventing the Collective Bargaining Agreement, and with respect to the staffs of Cooper and Armstrong, was contrary to the terms of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.... Independent School District #281 is restrained and enjoined from reassigning the teaching staffs of Armstrong or Cooper High Schools on the premise that those schools had been closed. (*Anderson & Blore v. I.S.D. 281*, 1982, p. 5)

The district would have to begin the staffing process all over again, and this time, only staff from RHS would be reassigned.

Save the Robins' Nest:

This Is War!

On May 4 the Robbinsdale city council voted to put an indefinite hold on its approval of

the school district's sale of the former Robbinsdale Junior High building. The school district had been attempting to sell the building to the Northwest College of Chiropractic over a two-year period. Later that week over 1,000 people gathered at a rally in the gym of the former junior high to save RHS from closure. Half of the attendees were from outside Robbinsdale. Joy Robb took the stage, asserting that the school board had discriminated against the east side. Showing the crowd much of the information used at the March presentation to the panel of experts, Robb contended that half the district was without a high school, yet had more students than the other half, and that closing RHS was the least cost-effective decision. She said that the mood was not sadness, but anger. "'The school board decided outsiders were more qualified than they were to make a school closing decision.... We need a united effort to get this ridiculous decision overturned and one way to do this is in the upcoming election'" (Chuba, 1982l, p. 1).

Robb urged the audience to vote for those school board candidates approved by a new organization, the Coalition for Accountability and Positive Education (CAPE). The coalition, comprised mostly of Cooper and Robbinsdale supporters, believed the school board was not spending tax dollars prudently. It supported Dave Southward, from Robbinsdale, as well as Pat Norby and John Schaefer from the Cooper attendance area. Other members of the audience also spoke. "'So here we are, robbed of one more school.... You know...I wouldn't be surprised if this community wanted to secede from District 281'" (Chuba, 1982l, p. 3), said one parent who was applauded enthusiastically. Teachers also spoke, one declaring,

> "I never saw the media center at Armstrong but if it was so great, how come Robbinsdale didn't get one.... You can't forget this community has been gored and I expect to see blue and gold [the school colors] on every pole in Robbinsdale…. I say the wounds won't heal until we get our school back." (p. 3)

A plea was made to raise money for possible legal action against the school board. Many students signed up to work at car washes, an owner of a popcorn wagon offered its use, and

many parents wrote checks on the spot. One anonymous donor gave 500 dollars, indicating that "there was more where that came from" (Chuba, 1982l, p. 3). Even RHS principal Knutson gave a check. The rally raised several thousand dollars that evening. On May 17, another rally to save RHS was held in the parking lot outside the district's central office. Over 600 people attended, carrying signs reading, "We're People," "Fight on for RHS," and "Robins Forever!!" Other signs supported school board candidates Southward, Norby, and Schaefer for school board (*Robbinsdale, Minnesota,* 1993, n.p.). Elections for the new board were scheduled for the next day.

A total of six candidates were running for three seats on the school board. Gary Joselyn was running for re-election, David Olson had decided not to run again, and the third seat had been created by the March vote to add a seventh seat to the board. During the campaign, when asked whether they would be willing to reconsider the high school closing decision, four candidates emphatically said "no." Pat Norby said, "'I have never said or indicated in any way that if elected my priority would be to vote for reversal'" (Andersen, 1982a, p. 1). David Southward, from Robbinsdale, said, "'I am not prepared to say yes or no'" (p. 1).

In spite of such pronouncements, many RHS supporters seemed persuaded that three of the candidates were solidly on their side. Barb Southward, an RHS supporter whose husband was running for election, recalled the campaign. "We had meetings with Cooper parents and got members to run from both areas. We were in place to have a seven-member board to close AHS. All the literature was together for CAPE endorsed candidates, Schaefer, Norby, and Southward." In fact, CAPE had spent the months of March and April, before the panel's decision, interviewing prospective candidates and endorsing these three because they were committed to CAPE's goals of fiscal responsibility and equal educational choices for all students, two themes

that the RHS-CHS alliance had been espousing throughout the school-closing process ("Search

committee," 1982). Community newspaper editor Bob Bork wrote,

> Counting people going to the polls [in school board elections] has often been compared to watching grass grow or watching paint dry.
> I don't think you could keep voters away next Tuesday with a tornado warning.... Those opposed to closing Robbinsdale figure the school can be kept open if the "right" candidates are elected. The same people say Norby, Schaefer and Southward are the "right" people….
> What hasn't surfaced to any great degree is the fact Norby, Schaefer and Southward have not committed themselves to reversing the RHS closing decision. (Bork, 1982)

In contrast to the previous year's board elections, which saw voter turnout of slightly

over 6,000, the 1982 elections brought record voter turnout of over 25,000. CAPE-endorsed

candidates swept the elections with Southward receiving 11,647 votes, Norby, 11,574, and

Schaefer, 11,401. The losing candidates received less than 7,500 each, including 12-year board-

veteran Gary Joselyn, who had recently received an award from the Minnesota School Boards

Association ("State recognition," 1982). Joselyn actually received twice as many votes as he'd

ever tallied in previous elections, but his opponents had almost doubled that number (Rosengren,

2002).

On May 27, another large rally to save RHS drew 500 people, this time to the high school

auditorium, to hear progress on keeping the school open. A "Save the Robins Nest" sign was

paraded in front of the crowd (Chuba, 1982k), and the crowd sang "Where Have All the Robins

Gone?", recently-composed lyrics to the tune of the 1960s anti-war song "Where Have All the

Flowers Gone?" Keith Moberg, PAC liaison for legal action, reported on progress in working

toward a lawsuit. "'The ammunition we will use to fight this school closing will not be with

blanks'" (p. 1), he said. Newly-elected, but not yet seated, board member Southward was also

present. "'The reason I am here is because the decision was wrong.... Don't get discouraged. I,

too, want a just decision'" (p. 1), he told the crowd. Joy Robb urged the crowd to write letters to

newly-elected board members Norby and Schaefer, as well as board members Webber and

Fuhrmann.

Saturday, June 5 was declared by Robbinsdale mayor Mattson to be "Save Robbinsdale

High School Day." A garage sale, bake sale, and tee-shirt sale were held in the former junior

high. Students decorated the downtown along West Broadway and Robin Center with blue and

gold streamers, signs, and balloons. They also held two car washes, tying blue and gold ribbons

to car antennas. Area residents displayed blue and gold colors on their houses ("Saturday sales,"

1982). Over $4,500 was raised to help defray costs for legal fees to be used to try to reopen

RHS. In later recollection of the spring and summer rallies, Liz Miller remembered, "I marched

in the Whiz Bang parade with my face painted blue and gold."

Keith Moberg recalled a three feet by 15 feet banner touting, "It's not nice to fool with

Mother Robin," which was displayed during outside rallies. "I got referred to as Mother Robin,"

recalled Joy Robb. Heather Robb McCollor remembered, "You'd tie a ribbon around any tree—

it didn't matter. It symbolized unity and hope." In that spirit, another song sung at the rallies

was "Tie the Robin Colors Round the Old Elm Tree." The song ended with, "Now the whole

darn place is cheering, and the Board will surely see a hundred Robin colors round the old elm

tree" (no author, personal communication, n.d.).

The last issue of the RHS school newspaper, *The Robin's Tale*, was published in early

June, providing a forum for reflection on the part of students.

> Now left with only one elementary school, Robbinsdale and its residents stand to face a
> severe identity crunch. Part of this concept emanates from the fact that Robbinsdale is
> not just another suburb. It was, and still is, a city created in its own right. And as a rather
> humble city its main source of pride and statewide recognition has come from its high
> school....
>
> Many of the Robbinsdale residents and most of their children graduated from

RHS. At one time Robbinsdale was the largest high school in Minnesota. Its academics and sports were often unsurpassed....

Then came the betrayal.... The same school district the Robbinsdale citizenry helped to build had turned around and sunk its mother ship. They completely disregarded the promises that had been made when the junior high school was closed. They had seemingly gone against all economic logic. They had rewarded years of high taxes that went to build Armstrong and Cooper with a move that would effectively lower the value of property in Robbinsdale. But most of all, they had closed the hometown school, an institution that had grown synergistically with its community. They had closed Robbinsdale High School. ("Robbinsdale: A betrayed community," 1982)

Student editorial opinions included phrases such as, "Old Robins never die...they just feather new nests" (C. Webber, 1982b), "Beauty is more than brick deep" (C. Johnson, 1982, p. 8), and "There's lots of schools with nicknames of Hawks, Falcons, Warriors, Trojans, Tigers and the like, but there's only one Robins" (Miller, 1982)! On June 10, Robbinsdale High's last graduating class held outdoor graduation ceremonies across the street from the school at Mielke Field. Former student Heather Robb McCollor recalled, "There was still hope that it would be reopened. Almost everybody said, 'See you at RHS next year!'"

Don't Fool With Mother Robin:

A Legal Challenge

Robbinsdale High's Parents Action Committee, PAC, like CAPE, had supported the election of Norby and Schaefer from the Cooper area, as well as the election of Southward from Robbinsdale. PAC hoped the new board composed of these new members would reopen Robbinsdale. But according to Keith Moberg in later recollection, the day after the election, Norby and Schaefer told him, "'We don't think we can support reopening.'" Due to information from board member Bill Fuhrmann, an RHS supporter, as well as from some parents, PAC believed there was evidence that the present school board had violated the state of Minnesota's Open Meeting Law during the school-closure process, so PAC embarked on its own separate

legal strategy. "We went to court. We either wanted to get some teeth in the law or get it thrown off the books," Moberg recalled.

Suit was filed in district court by Keith Moberg and Joy Robb alleging that the District 281 board had repeatedly violated the Open Meeting Law by holding private meetings and phone conversations during the school-closing process. The suit cited a private meeting at Cooper High with its principal and four board members, a private breakfast meeting, a downtown coffee meeting, phone conversations, and letters, including one letter from board member Marofsky to other board members in which she wrote, "'There are several matters which I have been reluctant to explain fully and to pursue fully in the public arena'" (Chuba, 1982b, p. 3). Moberg and Robb were asking that (a) the April 27 board action closing RHS be declared invalid, (b) the board members individually be fined $100 per violation of the Minnesota Open Meeting Law, and (c) the board members individually be removed from office for the remaining portion of their term.

On June 4 Judge Robert Schiefelbein granted a restraining order causing a temporary halt to RHS' closure. Robbinsdale High was in its last week of school when news of the restraining order was announced over the school's public address system. A cheer went up from the students and was heard throughout the building. The community newspaper ran a front-page article with a photo of Keith Moberg holding a brief case. The brief case touted the words, "It's not nice to fool with mother Robin" (Chuba, 1982b, p. 1). Four days later, in reaction to the restraining order, a newly formed group, Concerned Citizens for 281, met at Armstrong High. The group was an outgrowth of Friends of Armstrong but included some Cooper residents. The group planned to examine the adverse effects that PAC's legal action would have on students, examine the financial impact it would have on tax payers, and hire an attorney to file a "friend of the court" brief to support the school board's attorney.

The trial began on Monday, June 21 in Hennepin County District Court in a small court room with only 24 seats. Some people waited two and one-half hours to be sure they would be allowed into the room to hear the proceedings. Nine more seats were eventually added. If the court were to rescind the closure of RHS, the district would have little time to prepare for students returning in September. Thus, the judge declared the trial would conclude within the week, even if night sessions were required, an unusual occurrence for a court of law (Chuba, 1982f).

Tom Creighton, attorney for plaintiffs Joy Robb and Keith Moberg, asked the court for a permanent injunction on closing RHS because of violations of procedures required for closing a school and because of violations of the Open Meeting Law, citing numerous private meetings between board members. Creighton requested that school board members be fined and removed from office. In later court filings, Creighton (1982) further specified that public hearings on closing Robbinsdale had been held in February while the final closing decision had been made "'long after the public hearings and based in substantial part on a report and recommendation not even in existence when the public hearings and purported closings took place'" (p. 4). He also maintained that early on in the process "the School Board was advised by its attorney that any dialogue concerning School Board business that involved two or more Board members constituted a meeting and must be publicly noticed" (p. 3). He argued that the fact-finding panel in itself was a violation of the Open Meeting Law because it served as an "adhoc committee for the expressed purpose of having them privately deliberate upon, decide, and recommend action regarding a matter which the Board was specifically required by law to decide" (p. 4).

Bernard Zimpfer, attorney for the school board said the school board had followed correct procedures for closing a school and had solicited more public input that normal. He said

that the private meetings between board members had not changed anyone's vote and did not constitute violations of the Open Meeting Law. Bruce Willis, attorney for Concerned Citizens for District 281, was an intervener in the proceedings, siding with the school district (Chuba, 1982a). All school board members testified, remembering their private meetings both on district property and in surrounding homes. They remembered luncheon gatherings, rides together, letters to each other, and calling each other by phone on the day of their vote to close RHS after they had received the panel's report.

Superintendent Hood testified that the top priority of the board was to retain one flexible school and one traditional school. Cabinet member Adele Hellweg testified that because of the teachers' contract, if RHS reopened, the district would not be able to begin school for any student until October 13, over a month late. Also testifying were Joy Robb and Cooper teacher Don Blore (Chuba, 1982a). After the trial, which included four days of testimony, the court reporter said that in his 22 years on the job, he had never worked with a judge who began trial at 8:00 a.m. and ended the day after 6:00 p.m. The reporter estimated it would take him 60 days to record all the testimony and, when finished, it would total over 1,000 pages.

The next week the judge delivered his ruling. The judge found all board members guilty of breaking the Open Meeting Law on multiple occasions, however he only fined them once, 100 dollars each, since the infractions were all tied to one topic. Plaintiff Moberg later complained, "It's like breaking the speeding law 20 times in one day and only getting fined once." Furthermore, the judge would not issue a permanent injunction on the closure of RHS because board members had taken no action at any of the improper meetings. RHS had been lawfully closed. It was a landmark decision because neither the legislature nor any Minnesota court had previously defined the word "meeting" for the Open Meeting Law. According to the judge,

"'School board members were participating in a meeting whenever they intentionally engaged in deliberation on matters presently pending before the board or matters that foreseeably would result in the taking of official action'" (Chuba, 1982c).

District resident and former state legislator Skip Humphrey, son of former United States vice-president Hubert Humphrey, had sponsored the Open Meeting Law in the state legislature. Commenting on the judge's decision, he said, "'The Open Meeting Law was passed because elected officials should do their business in the open at organized meetings with notices'" (Chuba, 1982j, p. 2). After a few weeks of consideration, Robb and Moberg decided to request an amendment to the judge's ruling and to appeal the ruling to the Minnesota Supreme Court. The Blore-Anderson suit had cost the district $6,500. The Moberg-Robb suit had cost the district $17,500 up to that point.

The new board would be seated on July 12. Would it vote to reopen Robbinsdale High? In urging Robbinsdale residents to vote for Norby, Schaefer, and Southward during the school board elections, Joy Robb had acknowledged that there was no guarantee the three new members would reverse the decision, but, Robb had said, "'It's the best we've got going'" (Chuba, 1982l, p. 1). Shortly after the May elections, the winning candidates had been invited to a meeting by district administration to explain the district's operating procedures. The question of whether it would be operationally feasible to reverse the RHS closing decision had been discussed at that time. Administrators had explained that in order to comply with the teachers' contract it could take until October 13 to begin school for all students, and teachers would have to be paid from the beginning of September. Then, in order to receive state aid, the district would have to extend the school year into next summer, and teachers would have to be paid for the additional time as well (Andersen, 1982c).

At the July 12 board meeting, the oath of office was administered to the three new board members, and the board re-elected Fred Webber as chair. Then a petition was presented, signed by 12,000 district residents.

> "We, concerned members of the District 281 community, urge the 1982-83 school board:
> To uphold the high-school closing decision and put it behind us;
> To help the entire district heal from the pain felt by so many throughout the past years; and
> To focus its leadership and energies on the educational needs of all our students, kindergarten through high school." (Moravec, 1982)

Superintendent Hood informed the board he had received a request from board member Fuhrmann to place an item on the agenda: "Review Questions and Answers Relating to the High School Closing Issue." A motion carried to place the item on the agenda. Discussion on the possibility of reopening Robbinsdale High ensued.

Board member Southward said, "'It seems like all the letters I've been receiving say let's heal our wounds.... We must look at the issue again, and it might just be the best way to heal our wounds'" (Adair, 1982d, p. 1). Bergquist responded, "'If we re-open Robbinsdale, we are going backwards at least two years to square one'" (p. 1). Norby added, "'There comes a time when we have to admit that a decision has been made'" (p. 3). Marofsky concurred, "'I feel we have ignored the students all year'" (p. 3).

A motion was made and seconded that Robbinsdale Senior High be reopened for the 1982-83 school year. The motion failed 6-1 with only Southward voting in the affirmative. Robbinsdale councilman Bill Blonigan later remembered his community's disappointment.

> Twenty thousand some people go to the polls…and it's a huge victory for CAPE, consisting of Schaefer, Norby, and Southward…. So now clearly the mandate is, "This was wrong—this should be overturned…." Two of them don't want to overturn it, Schaefer and Norby. They're from the Cooper attendance area…. Now we've got a three way irritation—at the Armstrong people for doing this and at the Cooper people. "We saved your school when the recommendation was to close Cooper. We got on board and said, 'That's not right,' and now when the tables are turned, you sold us down the river."

Former RHS student Heather Robb McCollor recalled, "One thing I remember—Pat Norby said

[during the elections] how unjust it was [to close RHS]. I bought it hook, line, and sinker. I

passed literature for her. I totally distrusted politicians from that day on."

In early July, cabinet member Bob Cameron sent a memo to Superintendent Hood.

> Last week, Maureen McCarthy, Editor of the Community Section of the Star-Tribune, called and said they were interested in taking a poll of District 281 residents to find out what they really thought about the senior high closing issue. She indicated that they would run the poll, 281 could cooperate or not. It seemed to me that, for many reasons, it was better that we keep our good relations with the press and I agreed that we would make this a cooperative effort. She agreed that we could OK the questions to be asked.... This will be the very first time the paper has conducted a poll in a local area, all others have been state-wide....They plan a "big story." (R. Cameron, personal communication, July 8, 1982)

The district furnished the newspaper with over 30,000 names from the district's mailing

list. Telephone survey interviews were conducted with 625 residents between July 12 and 14.

Of those residents contacted, 98 percent were aware of the closing, 82 percent had an opinion

about it, and over 90 percent agreed to be interviewed, rare for a telephone survey. On July 22

the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* published its findings. "The decision to close Robbinsdale

High School...has broken the district in three. Like a compound fracture, the three pieces are

obvious in an x-ray of public opinion completed last week" ("School controversy," 1982, p. 1),

the newspaper reported.

With a split of 48 to 34 percent, residents said the school board had made a poor decision

in closing RHS. With a split of 41 to 28 percent, residents thought the board had not acted

appropriately in the process. Splitting 46 to 33 percent, residents felt the board should have

closed a different school, with 56 percent choosing Armstrong. Criticism of the board's actions

was two to three times stronger in the Robbinsdale attendance area than in the Armstrong area

with the Cooper area providing "a kind of buffer" ("School controversy," 1982, p. 16). However,

in a 52 to 40 percent split, residents thought the board should move on and not reconsider its

decision. The Armstrong attendance area was over two times as likely to favor moving on.

Among those disapproving of the board's actions, many mentioned Robbinsdale High's

importance to the community, and others mentioned costs and potentially higher tax bills because

of Armstrong's greater expense. Among those favoring the board's decision, the most common

opinion centered on the age of Robbinsdale. "'The old school should be put out to pasture,'" and

"'Robbinsdale has served its time'" (p. 17).

The poll mirrored the results of the 1980 census data concerning the district's

demographic profile. Forty-five percent of Robbinsdale attendance-area adults had lived in the

area for over 20 years, and more than one half were over the age of 50. In the Armstrong area

only 19 percent of adults had lived in the area over 20 years and two thirds were in their 30s or

40s. Residents in the Armstrong area had also completed more years of education and were

more likely to have children in school.

At the July 26 board meeting Robbinsdale citizens spoke to the board about programming

at Armstrong. A majority of district parents, they asserted, would prefer to have their children in

a "structured" setting rather than a "flexible" one. Citing statistics which showed very few

schools still using the flex-mod system, parents said that flex-mod had generally been considered

a failure, and they asked that Armstrong's educational program be changed.

> "Parents are concerned because of the unscheduled free time, and they have a fear of
> diminished academic achievement.... Psychologists will tell you, as they have told me,
> that peer pressure is extremely great at this stage. Socializing with friends is more
> acceptable to many children than independent study.... It's an ideal that cannot conform
> to reality." (Adair, 1982a, p. 1)

If the board would not change Armstrong's system, the parents recommended two other

alternatives. Either open all three high schools in a 7-12 or 9-12 format, or ask the public's

opinion by questionnaire or on the next election ballot. Which two schools should remain open?

Would a 7-12 or 9-12 format be a good idea? Would traditional or flexible be preferred?

At the August 16 board meeting, Gerald Miller, Robbinsdale resident and RHS teacher,

formally proposed the Miller Plan. The plan, worked on by Miller and a group of parents,

proposed reopening RHS for the 1983-84 school year, closing all junior highs by the 1986-87

school year and moving to three high schools of grades 7-12. "'I just want the school

(Robbinsdale Senior High) to re-open'" (Adair, 1982g, p. 1), said Miller. "It would have really

been an amiable solution," Miller's wife later commented.

After the board's vote in July not to reopen Robbinsdale High, talk of a drive to repeal the

previous fall's approved tax levy referendum began to pick up steam. Robbinsdale mayor

Mattson, some city council members, and even former RHS principal Milo Mielke were all

working on the repeal. Board member Fuhrmann, commenting on the possibility of the

Robbinsdale repeal effort, said, "'I think it's terrible.... They're not going to hurt the school

board. They're going to hurt the school children in this district'" (Hoose, 1982c). Mayor

Mattson responded,

> "You've got to learn how to adjust your budget accordingly...quit spending money like a
> drunken sailor, that's the way they're doing.
>   I don't feel one bit sorry for them.... If everything on this end of the district is
> being cut off, well then too bad for the other side. If we have to suffer, then they'll have
> to suffer." (Hoose, 1982c)

One letter to the editor stated,

> If the school board would act more responsibly there wouldn't be any need for a
> referendum recall but until that day this district will be in agitation....
>   What do you suggest we do...? Turn the other cheek and "get on with it?" Some
> of us have run out of cheeks to turn. (Friederich, 1982)

Critical Discussion

In the face an economic crisis, the school board had hired a panel of experts to save it from its inability to make a school-closure decision and to help it recover from its legitimation deficit. The board's deadlock was on the verge of costing the district over one million dollars. The board's attempt at relegitimation through the panel, however, had produced a contradictory effect, and the district now faced an even greater legitimation crisis, in spite of the apparent and yet belated economic crisis-management success in downsizing from three to two high schools. On a macro level, Habermas (1975) contended that even if the political-administrative apparatus were able to bring some resolution to an economic crisis, a legitimation crisis would still often be the end result, since re-steering the economic system would likely be achieved in accordance with the priorities of the dominant class, and would thus be considered inequitable. "The patterns of priorities...result from a class structure that is, as usual, kept latent. In the final analysis, *this class structure* is the source of the legitimation deficit" (Habermas, 1975, p. 73). On the micro level of District 281, both the final decision-making process as well as the perceived injustice of the final decision (both tinged with socioeconomic overtones) accentuated the legitimation crisis.

The *Star-Tribune* poll results showed that the public believed the board had not acted properly in its decision-making process. Public recorded response, especially from Robbinsdale residents, indicated that the use of an outside panel, in particular, was not accepted as legitimate. "Three outsiders quickly come in and quickly leave and the school board...eagerly 'rubber stamps' them as a compromise! Like Pilate they wash their hands" (Smaciarz, 1982), wrote one RHS advocate. Another stated,

> An independent panel made the recommendation for closure of Robbinsdale Senior
> High—not the district residents, not the administration, not the school board, but an

independent panel of (unaffected) individuals.... It removed the burden of proof and responsibility OFF the school board, the administration and effectively took it away from the people! (Szymik, 1982)

Later reflection by RHS interview participants described similar feelings, referring to the use of a third-party panel as a "cop-out" and a lack of leadership on the part of the school board. The board was lazy and didn't "do its job" in hiring the panel to do their dirty work.

Former Robbinsdale city council member Bill Blonigan explained, "When you're elected, your responsibility is to make the decision, not to pass it off and pretend that somebody else is making it." Board member Fuhrmann, commenting later on his lone dissenting vote, agreed. "I was ignoring my responsibility as a school board member. A vote that I was taking at the board table should not be decided by someone outside the district." In addition to their outsider status, the expertise of the panel members, or the "three wise men," was also viewed as a deficiency. "It was very irritating that the three wise men were all doctors. Three doctors do not represent the greater community—we've got three advanced degree doctors," noted Bill Blonigan.

The *Star-Tribune* poll results also showed that the wider public believed the board should not have carried through on the panel's recommendation to close RHS. Former RHS teacher Neil Luebke later explained,

The board had enough information to do its job—the board's unwillingness to say, "This is just another evaluation. It may not be in the best interest of the district to abide by this decision." They didn't have to take the panel's recommendation.

A dominant discourse of injustice now replaced the previous financial, educational programming, and physical facility discussions. The words "injustice" and "unfairness" were prevalent in the public written record as well as in interview participants' comments. "What drove us was the injustice of it," asserted Robbinsdale resident Liz Miller in later recollection. The Robbinsdale city council called the decision "an unfair and misguided one....Elected

officials must...serve their electorate with fair and equal treatment.... We have been

disenfranchised from the district.... How can you possibly justify this as being equitable to all

you supposedly represent" (Blonigan, Gisslen, Holtz, Karki, & Mattson, 1982)? It was this sense

of injustice viewed from a number of angles that seemed to be the major underpinning of the

legitimation crisis.

The sense of injustice partly stemmed from a feeling that Robbinsdale residents had

founded the district, built the schools in the east, then even supported the construction of schools

further west, but were now being pushed aside. This viewpoint was noted in the bakery clerk's

remark, "'It's just not right…. We're the original 281…. Now, it's like we're nobody'" (Hoose,

1982a, p. 4), as well as in the former mayor of Robbinsdale's pointedly crass comment that the

district had enjoyed Robbinsdale's support during growth, but then during decline, "because

there's no use for us, they just dropped us. They raped us." In later reflection, former RJHS

teacher Jon Rondestvedt explained,

> There was a loss of concrete, tangible assets which had been wrought with hard-earned
> tax dollars. This is a difficult concept for those outside the issue. Many Robbinsdale
> residents had sent their children to these schools, had stepped into the voting booth and
> had checked "yes" in school bond referenda, had pledged their tax dollars to create these
> brick and mortar structures of which they were rightfully proud. Then came school
> closings. These educational assets, visible and altogether tangible to the senses were
> suddenly declared of little or no value. "You mean that something I've faithfully invested
> in all these years now has no real value? You've got to be kidding! We built this! Get
> your hands off!!"

Also fueling the sense of injustice was a feeling of betrayal and of empty promises.

Letters to the editor in the weeks following the school's closure read, "We were firmly assured

by the board that having closed the junior high, Robbinsdale High School would not close. And

yet, here they are closing that very school" (Laurel, 1982). "Bill Fuhrmann is the only one who

seems to remember the commitment the school board made three years ago when the junior high

was closed" (Scollard, 1982).

Even years later, interview participants still perceived this sense of betrayal. "Lee was closed, RJHS was closed, and they said they wouldn't close [the high school].... The other two schools were preparing for a face-off.... We felt offended, betrayed—angry. We felt we were treated unjustly," explained Liz Miller. Joy Robb concurred, "'We would never close Robbinsdale Senior,' the board members had said." Former mayor of Robbinsdale, Harvey Lange, who had regularly interacted with school district leadership, remembered, "RJHS would be a sacrifice, but that would be the end of it.... It was a general impression created on an informal basis….a gentlemen's agreement." Custodian Paul Genadek commented, "The closing [of RHS] was thrown in their face at the last minute. It was a slap in the face to people on the east side. Until they're dead, they won't forget it." Custodian Bruce Nolte remarked, "Robbinsdale felt like they were betrayed. They thought [RHS] wasn't even to be considered. All along they felt that [another school] would be closed. It was the shoddy way they went about closing the school."

Perhaps the most important factor feeding the sense of injustice, however, was the feeling that the pain of school closures had not been equally shared. Robbinsdale mayor Mike Holtz remarked,

> Three times in a row—three times.... When I...bought my first home in Robbinsdale, one of the things the realtor said, "Your kids will never have to hop on a bus." We were two blocks from Lee, we were two blocks from the junior high, and about three and a half blocks from the senior high.

Former longtime RHS teacher and football coach Irv Nerdahl even measured distances from his home, recording in his personal autobiography, "Within .7 mile of 3939 can be found four closed schools—Fair Grade School, Robbinsdale Junior High, Lee Grade School and Robbinsdale Senior High" (personal autobiography, 1988, p. 49). Robbinsdale activist Barb Southward

commented, "The RHS closing was a culmination of three school closings. People were willing

to rise up in righteous indignation…. They systematically closed down all the buildings in our

side of the district." Former teacher Jon Rondestvedt clarified,

> There was an unexpected speed which characterized the succession of closings. There was little or no time to fully absorb the blow of one closing before the next closing became a reality. Here the timetable is crucial. Had the east experienced one blow and seven to 10 years later another, then perhaps the magnitude, depth, level of their animosity would be less than it was or even is today for some. These repeated blows to the body politic were seen as knockout punches by a sizeable portion of voters in the east.

Public recorded response from the weeks following the board's action showed that

residents felt the board was "taking the 'Robbinsdale' out of District 281," making Robbinsdale

residents "sacrificial lambs again," and that their mascot, the robin, was now an "endangered

species." One RHS advocate wrote,

> If the school board closed Armstrong, Plymouth Junior High and Pilgrim Lane schools in the next four years..., the students, parents and taxpayers would be reacting in exactly the same way that the eastern half of the district is reacting right now. And they would be justified in doing so because it would not be a fair thing for a school board to do....
>   The east half has given more than their share in the last few years. (Anderson, 1982)

Liz Olson, a student at Armstrong at the time, commented in later reflection, "It was a sense of

complete disenfranchisement having all your schools closed—the implication being your

community is not important."

The issue of "community" was fundamental to the intense reaction at this point in the

story. Although the dominant discourse had become one of injustice, parallel discourses of

community history, tradition, and identity were also evident. The panel of experts had argued

that tradition, history, community loyalties, and community ties or identification with schools

were not important in this decision. They were mistaken. As Apple (1990) contended, a critical

viewpoint sees a subject matter relationally. "Anything being examined is defined not only by its

obvious characteristics, but by its less overt ties to other factors. It *is* these ties or relationships that make the subject what it is and give it its primary meanings" (p. 132).

Boyd (1982b) maintained that blue collar suburbs (such as Robbinsdale) may have stronger feelings of "neighborhood" than wealthier suburbs (such as Plymouth), due to the hypothesis that "relatively wealthy, cosmopolitan and highly mobile residents...perhaps have less need to invest in interpersonal relations with their neighbors than do the blue-collar and service workers...who are, as a whole, less prone to residential mobility during their child-rearing years" (p. 92). However, understanding the City of Robbinsdale as more of "a small town that happened to be in suburbia," rather than as a suburb, was perhaps even more important in appreciating the role that community played in the resistance to the school board's decision.

The small-town feeling of Robbinsdale could be seen in the annual Robbinsdale Whiz Bang Days of July, 1981, which, similar to small-town celebrations, included a parade with the Robbinsdale city band, a grand marshal, and various royalties. Over 20 years later, an inspection of downtown Robbinsdale revealed a photo of the old RHS and an old photo of main-street Robbinsdale hanging on the walls of Broadway Pizza on the north side of Robin Center, the local strip mall. On the other side of Robin Center, the remnants of the old soda fountain were still visible in the former Merwin Drug. At the west end sat the Robbinsdale City Hall. From this nucleus, the Robbinsdale water tower was commandingly visible to the east, proudly bearing a brightly painted, puffed-chested Robin, the now dormant high school's mascot.

Based on their own and others' research, Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) found a number of qualities to be characteristic of rural, small-town communities. Many of these qualities seemed to conform to depictions of Robbinsdale, among these—an attachment to place, a person's word considered as a binding agreement, a preference for traditional values, discipline,

and hard work, and the importance of family. In the aftermath of the school board's decision,

one resident wrote,

> Robbinsdale is a good clean town, close to everything, yet "a little bit country" too. Just what families like and need....
> So let's keep Robbinsdale, its schools, businesses, churches and future going ahead, let's look to the near future. Crystal, New Hope and Plymouth offer nothing, compared to the homey and comfortable atmosphere of "good old Robbinsdale." (Breen, 1982)

Interview participants confirmed this small-town physical and social structure of

Robbinsdale. "Now the newer suburbs are trying to create an identifiable downtown. We have

an old established city with an identity. We're an old-fashioned town around here," commented

former Robbinsdale mayor and PAC leader Joy Robb. Liz Reid, former leader of the Cooper

Parent's Organization, concurred, "Robbinsdale is a smaller community, more tightly knit, more

history, small-town. The elderly people are all graduates of Robbinsdale High." Barb Nemer of

Friends of Armstrong noted in later reflection, "Our school district is not one community. It's

difficult to understand the complexity of the school district because of geography. Suburbs are

suburbs, but Robbinsdale is not a suburb. Robbinsdale was a small town with a distinct

community." Sandy Peterson, former teachers' union president, added, "Robbinsdale had a

social structure, a community structure. The rest were bedroom communities…. It was similar

to small towns." Over 20 years following RHS' closure, Superintendent Mack, a newcomer to

the district, received a welcome tour from Robbinsdale community representatives. He later

commented,

> [They knew] who lived in this house, next door—can reconstruct the entire two to three block area. I think I'm back in Chisholm. They can tell you who lived there growing up…. It was great orientation to being sensitive to the community.

As more of a small town, Robbinsdale also exhibited the small-town community

attachment to school often found in rural communities. Again, Kannapel and DeYoung (1999)

noted a number of qualities of rural, small-town schools which also seemed characteristic of

Robbinsdale High. Such schools served as the cultural and social center of town, extracurricular

activities were often valued as highly as academics, and strong links were evident among school,

community, and place. Similar portraits of Robbinsdale High in 1982 included the bakery clerk

in her 70s, who, when her husband was alive, never missed any football games, and yet still

attended school plays (Hoose, 1982a). Further evidence included reports in the written record on

the importance of the football program, the popularity of the musicals, and even the fact that

residents made much more use of the RHS building during after-school hours than either CHS or

AHS. As one letter to the editor stated it, "Armstrong is not Plymouth High School and even

Cooper is not New Hope High School but Robbinsdale is Robbinsdale High School" (Smaciarz,

1982). Robbinsdale High was indeed "the hometown school."

Interview participants confirmed this school-community attachment. Ann Rest

explained,

> [Robbinsdale] was the only community that could claim the community-school tie—the
> uniqueness of the personality of that city and how closely it was connected to that
> school—the other schools didn't define the community nearly as much as RHS did. That
> is unusual in suburban school districts.

Other interview participants described this attachment in almost human terms. Superintendent

Mack reflected, "There was a strong tie to the high school being the center of the community.

Closing RHS was, for those close to it, on a micro level, similar to JFK being shot."

Robbinsdale mayor Mike Holtz explained,

> [The closure of RHS] kind of ripped out the heart of the community. The people in
> Robbinsdale had that senior high for many years. They didn't at Cooper and they didn't
> at Armstrong. I think there was just more of a community tie to that than there was in the
> others.

Local culture was obviously, then, an important component of the intense reaction. The

panel of experts had erred in not taking into account the culture of Robbinsdale and its school-community attachment. Ward and Rink's (1992) case study of opposition to rural school district consolidation led them to the following conclusion. "Policy making does not occur in a cultural vacuum and knowledge of local culture is...critical.... Local community bonds are important.... Change may be more possible by finding common bonds rather than by opposing or denigrating local cultural norms" (p. 18). Spender's distinction between "culture" and "civilization" provided an additional perspective.

> Culture is local: the relationship of people living in a given place, to the religion they believe in, to the objects that surround them and to one another. Civilization is urban, central and centralizing, and much human history consists of the urban centralizing forces imposing themselves on the local ones and overwhelming them. (Spender cited in Peshkin, 1982, p. 165)

In some ways, Robbinsdale residents likely viewed the closure and consolidation of Robbinsdale High and the other east-side schools as an urban (or suburban, in this case) attack on their small-town culture, a culture which they more highly valued than the alternative of moving their students away to some supposedly "superior" educational physical facility in a neighboring community. Former Friends of Armstrong advocate Barb Nemer summed it up. "The whole thing was the culture of a small town, and betrayal. It had nothing to do with buildings and education."

It was likely that the lengthy history and rich traditions of the Robbinsdale locale and its school also added to the depth of this cultural component and to the community-school attachment. Again, as Apple (1990) maintained, in a critical viewpoint, "any subject matter under investigation must be seen in relation to its historical roots—how it evolved, from what conditions it arose, etc." (p. 132). Ward and Rink (1992) validated history as "a powerful force" in understanding intense opposition to school closures in their case study. "The history of a

policy issue is important.... Therefore, to know well the history of a policy issue is critical" (p.

18). Again, the panel of experts had erred in not taking history and tradition into account.

Commentary both from the written record and from interview participants referred to the

City of Robbinsdale as "the birthplace of the district," "the original 281," whose "parents and

grandparents had built these schools," with Robbinsdale High being "the flagship of the fleet," or

the "mother ship." "We were the Robbinsdale Area School district, and we closed their school,"

former finance director Gary DeFrance reflected. Former teacher Jon Rondestvedt expounded,

> Unless one first knows history, one cannot either fully appreciate or understand history's
> ramifications.... The bearers of the namesake were being decommissioned. Namesakes
> have enormous potency. District 281 was the ROBBINSDALE Area Schools. Which
> schools were slated for closure? Those most directly associated with Robbinsdale—Lee,
> RJHS, and RHS. The pride of the fleet were the first removed from active service. Think
> of the U.S.S. Missouri, mothballed, at anchor in some backwater dockage, no longer
> throwing itself against the elements and the enemies.

Superintendents even 20 years later were aware of Robbinsdale High's historical

standing. Former superintendent Bollin commented, "RHS had a rich heritage—presidential

scholars, academic reputation, solid intellectual base to the faculty. The reputation of the school

district largely came from RHS." Superintendent Mack added, "The east side was the heart and

roots of the district.... There was a respect and value for education in communities that were a

generation away from parents who had only an eighth grade education. Education was their way

out of poverty."

One letter to the editor in the aftermath of the board's decision was particularly poignant

in highlighting the importance that history and tradition had played in building the community's

attachment to Robbinsdale High.

> Join in the effort to keep our school alive!...Robbinsdale High is "a cut above" the rest.
> There's something "more" about a school that retains a long tradition of
> excellence.... [In 1964] Robbinsdale High then had the largest number of students of any
> school in the state! Additionally during my high school years, coach Irv Nerdahl had a

winning football team and the drama and music departments excelled in their productions. I'll never forget the pride I felt when as a part of "My Fair Lady" in 1966, the seemingly endless curtain calls once again stirred up those same "I'm so lucky to be a student of RHS" feelings.... We "Robins" had "our" town to parade in....

　　　We "Robins" have many things "over" the newer schools in the district. Most importantly, we didn't have to begin the task of "building" a tradition—we were already part of it.

　　　This glowing tradition should not be discounted!...

　　　That proud tradition must remain. (Weingartner, 1982)

Again, invoking history and tradition, former teacher Jon Rondestvedt put the intense reaction from the Robbinsdale community into perspective.

The closing of RJHS was the first of the one-two punch. RJHS was in the heart of Robbinsdale at 4139 Regent Avenue North. It was the site of 281's first grade school, first grade/junior high combination, and first grade/junior high/senior high combination. It was the educational center of the district up until the closing of RJHS in 1979.... The closing of RHS was the final straw. "The bastards are burning Atlanta." Think of the Confederacy and Sherman's scorched earth policy on his march to the sea. The South had witnessed the loss of a number of their key cities, and now, deep in the deep South, its pearl was being desecrated by unclean hands. RHS was a lustrous pearl. For much of its history, its football team had been state ranked. At the first football game I attended, traffic was dead stopped on highway 100 from Mielke Field back to Byerly's. A Friday night game between RHS and Edina would easily draw between 10,000 and 15,000 spectators, and you'd have to get there at 5:30 to find a seat. The musicals were repeatedly S.R.O. and were nationally recognized for their excellence. The declamation and one-act participants often were among the state's best and often produced state champions. It all polished the luster on this pearl which was RHS. "Is not this pearl too lustrous, of such great value, that closing is not a possibility?" They simply could not imagine how anyone could seriously offer up RHS for closing. It was inconceivable.

The loss of local culture, history, and tradition through the closure of Robbinsdale's schools all translated into a larger feeling of a loss of identity, on the personal level for certain, but more especially on the community level, which further amplified the intensity of the resistance. Peshkin's (1982) case-study analysis had led him to conclude that community identity was a very important component to understanding resistance to school closures in neighborhoods or towns that possessed high degrees of "integrity."

In more homogeneous neighborhoods, where it was easier to form "integrity" (or feelings

of community completeness, wholeness, or unity), such as in rural towns or, at times, in stable urban neighborhoods such as Robbinsdale, the school, in addition to performing an educative function, became a structure of meaning, entering the lives of residents and of the community on a number of levels, one of the more important being the symbolic level. On the symbolic level, Peshkin (1982) maintained, the school represented community autonomy, community vitality, community integration, and community tradition. For all these reasons, the school became part of community identity. Schools that had developed this structure of symbolic meaning were the ones that were hardest to close. Consolidation's promise of better education could not compare to the loss of control, autonomy, and pride experienced by such a community.

The function of the school as a reservoir of symbolic meaning and community identity in many neighborhoods had been highlighted even three years prior to Peshkin's study, at Minnesota's state-sponsored workshop to help Twin City metro-area school officials plan for enrollment decline.

> Schools hold symbolic meaning to the people they serve. Quality programs and well designed buildings are a symbol of affluence and a high quality of life. For years, the community has been encouraged to "do the right thing" for its children and the future generations by voting taxes for quality programs and bond issues for fine structures. In some cases, communities may still be paying for the surplus structures and are proud of their investment.
>
> Part of the community's identity, the identity of the children, and the community spirit is tied to the elementary school, where the nostalgia of childhood bliss blends with neighborhood identity to make the school a symbol of unity and friendliness. It becomes, in effect, the "social cement" of the community. *The high school is even more a community symbol* [emphasis added]. *(School building utilization*, 1979, p. VI-4)

B. Williams (1998), who studied "the genius of place," dispiritedly contended that the meaning of community was gradually becoming separated from geographic location, and that modern education was no longer a celebration of rootedness. Although this was perhaps true for the Armstrong and Cooper attendance areas, and could likewise be seen in the panel of experts'

viewpoint, it was not true for the Robbinsdale locality, where, when it came to Robbinsdale

High, there seemed to exist an almost sacredness of place directly tied to community identity.

West-side board member Marofsky in later reflection acknowledged, "The high school was a

strong symbol of the community. The school was a shrine." Following the board's decision, in a

letter to the editor, the pastor of the local Lutheran church wrote,

> To me at least, the "community" as we think of it is made up of home, church and
> school—at least it used to be.... We do love our homes, our families, our churches and
> our schools. They are important to us. They help shape and give direction and joy to life.
> So I guess if one of these is taken away, we do hurt a bit....without that undefinable
> feeling and spirit that goes with having a high school within the community. (Nerothin,
> 1982)

Recalling some of the wider changes in the community during the time period,

Robbinsdale resident Joann Lange later noted, "Robbinsdale lost the Red Owl [supermarket], the

drug store, the Presbyterian Church. It seemed like everything was changing." But the closure

of the high school proved to be the most traumatic change, as public recorded response and later

interview participants confirmed. The school board was conducting "community genocide,"

leaving in its wake "a dying community." Loosing RHS was "like eliminating the city in which

it is located." "Without schools, you don't have anything." Heather Robb McCollor, a 10th

grader at RHS during the year it closed, later asserted, "They ripped part of Robbinsdale's

identity away from it." Reflecting on the intense reaction to Robbinsdale High's closure, Ann

Rest, proponent of Armstrong's winning "quality education for the future" theme, concluded,

> It was perceived as an assault on a community's identity. It also takes away from [a]
> sense of individual identity, not just with the school, but with the community. It robbed
> them of their past. I might say if you take away Armstrong you take away the future, but
> not my identity.

In the face of tumultuous opposition to district leaders' attempt to bring some resolution

to the crisis, the nucleus of decision making migrated from venue to venue as power shifted back

and forth between east and west. In its political and legislative capacity, the school board had rubber stamped the symbolic judicial model's technical-rational findings, and power then shifted from east to west as board member Olson, from the CHS attendance area, and board member Webber, from the eastern edges of the AHS attendance area, both joined the AHS bloc in voting to close Robbinsdale High, leaving Bill Fuhrmann as the lone dissenter.

Decision making next moved to a popular-justice political model at the polls as the popular vote swept in old middle-class interests with CAPE-endorsed candidates and as AHS advocate and long-time board member Gary Joselyn was defeated. Thus, power shifted back from west to east, but perhaps only half-way. Due to the school board delaying the revelation of the panel's recommendation until a few hours after the filing deadline for school board candidates, along with the expectation that RHS was still off-limits for closure, only one candidate from Robbinsdale had filed for the election. School board composition would now include three candidates from the AHS area, two candidates from the CHS area, and only two candidates from the RHS area.

Decision making moved on to the judicial arena as the district court was asked to rule on the legality of the closure with respect to the Open Meeting Law. Power shifted back from east to west as the judicial appeal was denied and the court ruled that Robbinsdale High had been lawfully closed. This power shift was confirmed by the political-legislative decision making of the new school board in its refusal to reopen Robbinsdale High. The two new Cooper area board members, as well as fellow Robbinsdale area board member Bill Fuhrmann, declined to support newly-elected Robbinsdale board member Southward in a bid to rescind Robbinsdale High's closure. The Robbinsdale community had made no long-term friends by siding with Cooper High earlier in the dispute.

DATA PART 8
CONSOLIDATING HIGH SCHOOLS:
A RELUCTANT PUBLIC

A part of me died when they closed Robbinsdale.
Robbinsdale resident

Birds of a Feather Flock Together:

We Can Learn to Live in Peace

In the fall of 1982, the school board approved a theme for the year, "District 281 Reaching Out—Working Together," and in early September, 800 former RHS students along with 45 former RHS staff started school at Cooper, now renamed Robbinsdale-Cooper Senior High (RCHS). Six hundred former RHS students and 33 former RHS staff started school at Armstrong, renamed Robbinsdale-Armstrong Senior High (RAHS). Among RHS students, 169 slated for Armstrong had requested transfers to Cooper, including Chuck Webber, son of board member Fred Webber. Only 99 RHS students slated for Cooper had requested transfers to Armstrong. Adults called for unity in the student body. "Don't let bitterness come between you and your fellow students.... What it all boils down to is acceptance" (Corbett, 1982).

Homecoming week at Robbinsdale-Armstrong took place under the theme, "United—the only way to fly" ("Armstrong celebrates," 1982). The homecoming king was from Robbinsdale, and a New Hope resident was chosen as queen. Robbinsdale-Cooper kicked off homecoming with, "Birds of a feather flock together" ("Cooper has spirited," 1982). Former RHS principal Milo Mielke as well as former superintendent E. J. Cooper participated in Robbinsdale-Cooper's homecoming events. The Robbinsdale-Cooper Hawks were scheduled to play football against the Bloomington Jaguars. Chuck Webber recalled the homecoming pep fest that week.

> The Hawk [mascot] was getting beat up by the Jaguar, and so the Robin came out—
> comes to the aid of the Hawk. It was a great unification move. The reaction of the

students was phenomenal—unbelievable reaction. It was a notice from CHS that we were welcome and integrated. It was a particularly intense year of rivalry between Cooper and Armstrong.

The Robbinsdale-Cooper yearbook would describe it as, "The Hawk and the Robin Unite to 'Jolt the Jag'" (*Talons*, 1983, p. 19). The school yearbook for the year included many references to unity. "Reaching Out and Working Together" (*Talons*, 1983, p. 18), and "Together We Can Do Anything" (*Talons*, 1983, p. 15), wrote the Cooper yearbook.

But all was not unity. Later in the year, district administrators polled all senior high students on how the transition from three to two senior highs was progressing. A large majority of students overall thought the transition had gone well or very well. But among former RHS students only 38 percent thought so. While less than 10 percent of all students thought they had adjusted poorly or not so well to the changes, among former RHS students, 21 percent thought so (Andersen, 1983). RHS student Alisa Lange remembered that on the busses transporting students from the east side to RAHS on the first day of school that fall, students were chanting, "Armstrong sucks."

During the first school year, former RHS students would listen to make sure that RAHS was properly referred to as "Robbinsdale-Armstrong." "If somebody just said, 'Armstrong,' how do you think it makes you feel? They dropped it so fast once we left." Alisa recalled attending RAHS football games at Mielke Field, since both remaining high schools still used this field located adjacent to the former RHS, as they had for years. "It was sad to look across and see RHS, and it was dark—tremendously sad."

Concerning the flex-mod schedule, Alisa recalled, "It was confusion. It assumed that you knew what to do during two hours of free time. [Plymouth] people went home, skipped out. But you can't go to your home when you live 30 minutes away—wasted time." According to Alisa,

most transferring students kept their blue and gold jackets from RHS rather than switching to AHS' red, white, and blue. Sports teams had to consolidate, leaving some students off the rosters. Some seniors who had played on varsity teams for the previous two years of high school at Robbinsdale did not make varsity at Armstrong. The Robbinsdale-Armstrong yearbook concluded, "Of course, the transition wasn't always easy, and no, it wasn't perfect, but overall, it went better than most expected it would" (*Gyre*, 1983, p. 1).

If the transition was proceeding less than perfectly for students, it was proceeding even worse for many parents. Parents, mostly from the Armstrong area, pleaded to district residents to unify the district, move forward, look to the future, work together, and heal the wounds. "Let us not feed anger but rather encourage understanding and acceptance. Let us seek common ground, rather than points of difference. Let us speak positively of a future rather than negatively of the present.... LET US GET ON WITH IT" (C. Olson, 1982). But the pleas seemed to be falling on deaf ears in Robbinsdale.

RHS supporters continued to advocate for the reopening of the school, but they seemed to be getting nowhere with the proposed Miller Plan of three 7-12 high schools. After their original proposal, district residents submitted a petition that fall, containing 1,500 signatures, asking that Robbinsdale Senior High be reopened. Assistant Superintendent Boynton said the cabinet had looked at it and could not recommend the Miller Plan. He reminded proponents that the Grade Reorganization Committee had overwhelmingly supported the current grade-organization pattern.

> "Closing the junior high schools would involve every geographic section of the school district.... While one area might accept the elimination of the junior high program in order to save a senior high building as a reasonable trade, it is very unlikely the other elements of the community would consider this a fair and reasonable alternative." (Adair, 1982g, p. 1)

"'Know all the evils of mixing seventh graders with 12th graders'" (p. 3), Superintendent Hood added.

On the legal front, the district court judge had amended his findings somewhat but had not changed his ruling, and the case had proceeded to the Minnesota Supreme Court. On October 18, pre-conference hearings began before Justice Lawrence Yetka of the Minnesota Supreme Court. Appellants Joy Robb and Keith Moberg were supported through amicus briefs by Common Cause of Minnesota and the Minnesota Newspaper Association. The defendants, the District 281 school board, were supported through amicus briefs by the Minnesota School Board Association, the City of Minneapolis, the Association of Metropolitan School Districts, and the Bloomington School District, where a less controversial high school closing had recently been completed. It was announced that the entire court would hear the case next year. Questions to be answered included: Did the school board follow proper procedure in closing a school? Were there violations of the Open Meeting Law? It was expected to be a landmark decision in defining the state of Minnesota's Open Meeting Law.

Meanwhile the referendum recall was moving along. A petition had been circulating calling for an election to revoke the excess levy passed the previous fall. About 5,000 residents would have to sign the petition to trigger the election. Robbinsdale mayor Mattson, commenting on the petition, said,

> "It hasn't been presented to the school board yet because we want more names to make it interesting. We want to stick and twist the knife in a little more to show the school board what we mean.... Our local taxes have been darn high because of that referendum and people in the district are hurting because of it. Of course one also has to consider the nebulous way in which District 281 closed the high school (Robbinsdale High.)
> I don't think the taxpayers who have signed are being vindictive. They want their money spent in a proper, prudent manner. We need to remember it was Robbinsdale High which costs the least to operate and Armstrong High the most with Cooper in the middle. We can't continue to burden the people in the area with excessive taxation without representation.... The school district should start thinking about operating the same as a

city." (Chuba, 1982h, p. 1)

The superintendent estimated that a successful recall effort would force the district to cut $5,600,000, hurting only the students and teachers, not the administration or school board. Board chair Webber remarked that passing a recall referendum would not force the board to reopen any school, only force it to close more. Cuts in extracurricular, music, and drama would follow as well. Teachers' union president Sandy Peterson declared, "'The life of the district is at stake'" (Chuba, 1982h, p. 3).

The community newspaper was deluged with a new round of letters concerning a possible recall of the referendum. Proponents of a recall argued that the school district was not using the referendum money in a sensible manner.

> It was quite obvious all along that had the referendum failed, there would have been little doubt in anyone's mind that Armstrong would have been economically the high school to be closed. But since that money was now guaranteed, and safely in hand, the 1981 school board members obviously took the whole matter in different light....The board must be reminded that the end has not yet occurred and ramifications are still available….
> 	When all else fails, let's hit them in the pocketbook...right where we've been hit. (Szymik, 1982)

Another letter stated, "I feel I've been cheated, and I want my money back" (Vos, 1982), and yet another, "Demand your right to hold the school board fiscally responsible! Demand the referendum be put before the taxpayer again for a revote" (Zajicek, 1982).

Opponents of the recall equated the referendum money with quality education, calling the recall effort political blackmail. "The Mattson-Robb referendum petition is a vicious attack on the children of District 281.... The petitioners speak of trying to 'get' the school board.... Robbinsdale is a fine city, but education neither stops nor starts at its borders" (Nelson & Nelson, 1982). "An entire educational system...is offered as a sacrifice to atone for an unpopular high school closing decision, and to provide a measure of revenge for some dissident

citizens....Democracy is always in jeopardy when fanatics prevail" (Threinen, 1982). Anne Marie Hennen asked, "When you say 'let's hit them in the pocketbook' who do you suppose 'them' is, if not us, and more importantly our children" (Hennen, 1982).

As if the continued legal action and the mounting threat of a referendum recall were not enough, on the first day of the teachers' workshop in August, Superintendent Hood announced he would retire at the end of the school year, in the summer of 1983. Hood said he had always planned on retiring at age 65 and that the school closing had nothing to do with it. "'It is strictly my choice to retire'" (Adair, 1982k, p. 1). The board would have to begin the search process for a new superintendent.

Put the Public Back Into the Public Schools:

No Taxation Without Representation

On November 11, the former parent lobbying group from Robbinsdale High now renamed the People's Action Committee (PAC), added its support to the referendum recall movement. At a rally in Robbinsdale's Lakeview Elementary School, leaders Joy Robb and Keith Moberg spoke to a crowd of over 200 under a large banner reading, "Don't fool with mother Robin!" (Chuba, 1982g, p. 1). Robb said "one part of the school district…sacrificed all with the closing of the high school, the junior high and a number of elementary schools in Crystal and one in Robbinsdale" (p. 2).

> "We certainly thought that with the landslide election of three new people to the board that the board would listen and respond to the people. This hasn't happened. We also thought the new board would consider an alternate plan as presented by a faculty member as a compromise." (p. 2)

Robb reminded the audience that they were paying equally but had no secondary school in Crystal or Robbinsdale. "'In asking for another vote, the board would have to tell the public

just how it's spending our money and the public can decide whether or not it has been spent wisely'" (Chuba, 1982g, p. 2).

> "The real issue is economic and educational discrimination. We feel that no longer can we contribute taxes which don't give equal benefits to kids and community. We do care a lot about education and kids. Unlike some of the rest, we care about all of them no matter where they live." (p. 2)

Moberg updated the crowd on the appeal to the Supreme Court. He also noted that out of 29 people on the board's new Futures Committee there was no representative from the southeast corner of district, where Robbinsdale was located.

At the December 20 board meeting, an attorney from the same law firm representing Keith Moberg and Joy Robb presented a petition for a vote on the revocation of the excess mill levy, the year-old referendum. The petition, containing many pages of signatures, was sponsored by Robbinsdale mayor Mattson, former Robbinsdale High principal Milo Mielke, and Robbinsdale council member Mike Holtz (J. Williams, 1983b). Present at the board meeting was Gerald Miller, former RHS teacher, resident of Robbinsdale, and proposer of the Miller Plan. He had originally opposed the recall but was now supporting it. Miller told the board,

> "We were not going to sit by and watch, just like Armstrong if people would not have sat back if both Armstrong and Plymouth Junior were closed.... An injustice has been done and we told you (the board) we would be back." (Adair, 1982c)

Board member Southward told the audience it was wrong for attendance areas to fight each other, but it was also wrong to close the majority of schools in one area. "'I don't want to lose the money, but we must respond to all people'" (Adair, 1982c), he said. Board member Norby stated, "'Life is unfair, but dealing with anger in a vindictive way is catastrophic for a school district'" (Adair, 1982c). She would fight to save the referendum. The board then approved an appraisal of the Robbinsdale High building, to prepare it for possible sale. It also added one of the Robbinsdale city council members to the Futures Committee.

The board began the process of certifying the recall petition, verifying that all signatures were valid and that it contained at least five percent of the district's qualified voters, about 4,500 names, as required by law. The board's lawyer had advised the board that individuals who had signed the petition could withdraw their names by signing a second document before the board's final certification.

In early January, a full-page advertisement was published in the community newspaper, with identical information distributed in pamphlet form, showing how residents could remove their names from the petition. The information was sponsored and paid for by the new Save Our Kids Organization (SOKO). "The District 281 Save Our Kids Organization would like you to read this ad, consider the consequences of the recall you may not have known before, and then remove your name from the petition. Save our kids. 'Unsign' the petition" ("How to 'unsign,'" 1983).

The information distributed by SOKO estimated that recalling the referendum would cause a loss of $5,600,000 in the district's budget and that it would not help the district reopen Robbinsdale High School, only force it to close more schools. Teachers would lose jobs, class sizes would increase, course offerings would be cut, and extracurricular activities would be cut back or dropped. "Music, drama, art, sports.... Gone" ("How to 'unsign,'" 1983), SOKO underscored. "The recall will not punish the school board or the administration. The damage of the recall will fall only on its real victims...all the children of our school district" ("How to 'unsign,'" 1983). The information included a form for residents to complete and mail in to remove their names from the petition.

Students from the Student Referendum Committee also wrote an open-ended letter to community members. The letter, which was included in a mailing to residents with a brochure

and a postage-paid card asking residents to unsign the petition, was paid for by SOKO. The

students wrote,

> We are frightened—our education has been in turmoil for two years.
> We are frightened—for our education and our younger brothers' and sisters' education.
> We are afraid—there is a danger of losing our sports, music, and additional programs—
> all the things that help make our schools and our community special for
> everyone.
> We are afraid—with anymore increase in class size we will lose the personal attention
> that teachers now give us.
> We believe quality education creates informed, open-minded individuals who are
> essential to the community's future!... We appeal to you to re-evaluate your support for
> the petition and withdraw your signature. (no author, personal communication, January
> 10, 1983)

At the January 8 board meeting, board member Southward again proposed the Miller

Plan, with some modifications. Southward proposed reopening RHS and grouping grades 7-12

in three high schools. But rather than closing the junior high buildings, these would be used for

elementary students along with some other elementary buildings. Savings would be achieved

through the closing of many of the district's elementary buildings. A similar plan had recently

been approved in the central Minnesota city of St. Cloud. Southward said that the possibility of

a referendum recall was putting more pressure on the board to make some changes. "'If we're

going to do something, we'd better get going'" (J. Williams, 1983j, p. 1).

On January 13, after posting the three-day required notice, the board met in a special

meeting at 5:00 p.m. A motion was made to certify the recall petition as invalid because it had

not been signed by a number of qualified voters in excess of five percent of the residents of the

school district as required by law. The motion carried 6-0, with board member Bergquist absent.

The meeting adjourned at 5:20, the shortest meeting in the memory of board chair Fred Webber.

After thorough verification of the 4,824 signatures on the petition, 1,116 had been ruled

invalid, causing a shortage of 796 signatures for the required 4,504 signatures required by law.

Of the invalid signatures, the board declared that 584 signatures were not found in voter

registration files, 162 signatures did not match the voter registration card signature, 34 names

were printed instead of cursive as on the voter registration card, 224 names appeared more than

once on the petition, 72 signatures bore an illegible name or address, 33 contained two names on

one signature line, and seven signers did not reside in the district. There had been some

disagreement over whether to count registered voters or eligible voters. The district had chosen

the stricter interpretation. "'For all purposes this petition is dead'" (Chuba, 1983f, p. 2), board

member Norby asserted.

Members of PAC voted that night to begin again with another petition. Robbinsdale

mayor Mattson contended that all eligible voters, not only registered voters, had the right to sign.

He said the district was being suppressive by not according all residents fair and equal treatment

under the law. "'When people are deprived their Constitutional rights...all it will do is polarize

the school district even more. When people are in an acrimonious mood they will help our

cause'" (Chuba, 1983f, p. 2), Mattson stated. Joy Robb said, "'People are more incensed than

ever and because so many are so angry, they will carry the petition to have an election on the

levy increase'" (p. 1). Robb added that PAC was not out to close Armstrong at this point, only to

reopen all three high schools with a 7-12 format. Robb told the Armstrong newspaper,

> "We have never claimed the petition itself would re-open Robbinsdale. That's our
> ultimate goal, but signing the petition will not automatically do that. It will create a
> climate of negotiation….
>   There has never been a compromise in the district because one area lost
> everything. They lost their teachers; they lost their school; they lost their colors and the
> atmosphere you have in your high schools.... Our kids would love to come back. We're
> not disturbing you, in your school; you're still there. We're not disturbing the Cooper
> kids; we're just getting our kids back." (Oliver, 1983)

At the January 17 board meeting, Southward found only one board member in support of

his new 7-12 format, board member Fuhrmann. "'One way to end this is to reopen Robbinsdale

Senior High'" (J. Williams, 1983a, p. 1), Fuhrmann maintained. Fuhrmann saw three problems

with Robbinsdale's closure. 1. The Armstrong flex-mod educational format was not appropriate

for roughly one half of former Robbinsdale students. 2. Former Robbinsdale students were being

deprived of extracurricular participation because both Armstrong and Cooper were beyond

walking distance. 3. The socioeconomic levels of the two new attendance areas were different

by every standard. "'Our society isn't like that.... Our educational experience shouldn't be

either'" (p. 2), Fuhrmann asserted. The board referred the issue to the Futures Committee.

At the February 7 board meeting, board member Norby commented on the continuing

pressure to reopen Robbinsdale High. "'I do not believe that the people who voted for

me...believed that I would, for the sake of a building, throw away children's education. If they

did, they will be disappointed'" (J. Williams, 1983b, p. 2). Quoting Gandhi, she concluded,

"'We can learn to live in peace'" (p. 2). But during a break in the meeting Norby observed,

"'There's something eerie...it just doesn't feel right in here'" (p. 1).

Less than an hour later, during a discussion on summer school session dates, board

member Norby, as clerk of the board, was handed a new 719-page petition and a letter from

attorney Thomas Creighton on behalf of an unnamed client. Norby read the letter aloud. The

letter demanded a referendum on revoking the increased tax levy. In response to the harassment

and invasion of privacy that signers of the earlier petition had experienced in being asked to

remove their signatures, the letter stated that the board could not legally release names,

addresses, or phone numbers of signers of the new petition to any individual or organization

prior to the date the petition was certified, and that any attempt to add or delete signatures after

the petition was filed would be viewed by the client as unlawful and acted upon accordingly (J.

Williams, 1983b). The letter further stated that a "qualified" voter did not have to be a

"registered" voter according to 1932 and 1914 court rulings. The petition was sponsored by Robbinsdale mayor Mattson and two other Robbinsdale residents.

The newspaper reporter present at the meeting noted, "In contrast with the lengthy comments with which board members greeted the December petition, the newest petition was received without verbal reaction by any board member. The three dozen or more people in the audience were silent, also" (J. Williams, 1983b, p. 2).

At the February 14 board meeting Superintendent Hood explained the system that had been used to validate signatures on the new petition. The new petition contained 6,468 signatures. Verifying every signature on the previous petition had cost the district $12,000. This time, only every third signature on each page had been verified, or 698 signatures checked. He estimated there were 5,909 valid signatures, well over the 4,504 needed. Barry Noack, teachers' union official, later recalled that soon after the closing of Robbinsdale High he had helped to slip in a piece of legislation at the state legislature which increased the percentage of signatures needed on petitions to recall school tax increases. "It's in a great big school aid bill. And [Robbinsdale] got [the required percentage]. I couldn't believe it," said Noack. "You bet we got it—and it wasn't hard," Joy Robb later commented.

The board voted to validate the petition and set March 21 as the date for the referendum recall vote. The board also authorized the superintendent and staff to use district resources to inform the public of the issues relating to the reversal of the referendum. Board member Webber said if the referendum were recalled, cuts would come from personnel, extracurricular, two elementary building closures, one junior high closure, and support services. He doubted the board would be able to vote the money back later. In other business, the board voted to close Sunny Hollow Elementary at the end of the school year.

A special board meeting was held on February 22 to review the wording on the recall ballot approved the previous week. "Shall Independent School District 281 of Hennepin County, Minnesota, continue to levy all or part of the excess maintenance levy...?" Here, a "yes" vote would allow the district to keep the additional revenue. The board's attorney had advised the board that this wording did not conform to the petition and could be challenged in court. The board approved new wording for the ballot. "Shall Independent School District 281 of Hennepin County, Minnesota, revoke its increased maintenance levy of 8.5 mills times the most recent valuation of the district authorized by the voters of the district in the referendum election dated October 5, 1981, applicable to taxes collectible in 1984 and subsequent years" (Chuba, 1983a)? Now a "yes" vote would take away district revenue.

In the month preceding the referendum recall vote, the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* newspaper ran an extensive series of articles analyzing the budget of District 281. Noting the differences in wealth between east and west within the district, the newspaper noted that a property tax rate of one mill would raise $79,000 in the City of Robbinsdale, while one mill would raise four times that, or $332,000, in Plymouth (Gendler, 1983a). The community newspaper reported that the district would lose 5.1 million dollars in the 1983-84 budget year and 5.6 million dollars in the 1984-85 year if the recall were successful. This could translate into the loss of 256 staff members. Superintendent Hood asserted that the district had been managed frugally. Compared to other metropolitan school districts, District 281 was eleventh, near the bottom, in instructional costs per pupil (Gendler, 1983a). At the March 7 board meeting, the school board endorsed the goals and principles of SOKO and authorized an appraisal of Mielke Field, the football field next to the Robbinsdale High building, to prepare for its possible sale.

The community newspaper was deluged with letters concerning the referendum recall.

Those favoring the recall emphasized fiscal responsibility, justice, and the democratic process.

Many of the same arguments used during the school closing process were recirculated. "I find it

amazing that anyone would be against a special election to resolve the difference of opinion. I

think this is called the democratic process.... Is the will of the people unimportant"

(Montgomery, 1983)? wrote one recall supporter. Another wrote,

> They want taxpayers to pay premium dollars for inefficiency and duplicity....The western segment of School District 281 is sabotaging the entire district. Certain affluent politicos are quarterbacking this fiasco…. It is [the recall backers'] right to sign the petition—to demand fiscal responsibility....The closing of the schools should have been an economy measure, but the most expensive buildings are still open. (Sather, 1983)

Many recall supporters pointed to the unequal distribution of schools across the district.

> What do we tell a perspective [home] buyer when he asks "Where are the schools?" Go west!
> When all this started I thought it was of primary importance to save money. What happened to that cry? Now the slogan is "Save our kids".... We on the east side of 281, which is where the district originated, have been ill treated; we have no recourse but to "fight back." (Gustafson, 1983)

"Schools must be placed where students live.... Why should we support a school district when

we don't have any schools?... Let's recall the referendum to force fiscal responsibility and get a

fair distribution of schools" (Grygelko, 1983). Already tasting victory, one recall proponent

wrote, "After repeatedly being stepped on by a school board that appears to cater only to the

whims of the wealthy side of the district, repeal of the current excess maintenance levy is almost

a certainty....The free ride is over" (Zieba, 1983).

Those opposing the recall of the referendum emphasized healing the wounds and

maintaining the quality of education in order to avoid harming children. "There's a regular civil

war going on between east and west. It's time to heal the hurts and be a united school district

once again....It's time to forget our personal feelings and start thinking about the kids" (Scollard,

1983), wrote one. The mayor of New Hope wrote,

No elected official likes to support a tax increase but when you have one making political hay out of a very emotional issue at the expense of 16,000 kids then I believe those of us who care more for the quality of education in our district than we do of being politically popular must speak out....No city government wanted their high school closed. (Erickson, 1983)

The chair of SOKO commented,

It is normal for citizens to become emotionally upset when the doors of a school in their vicinity are closed.

The hostility currently expressed by the leaders of the People's Action Committee (PAC) is not normal—it is excessive and potentially destructive.... Now more than ever we must work together—east, west, north and south—to preserve our quality educational program. (Mooney, 1983a)

One recall opponent summarized, "The kids in this district are a lot more important than a

building" (Hanrehan, 1983).

Liz Miller, Robbinsdale resident who had worked to recall the referendum, remembered

the campaign.

I remember sitting around peoples' tables working on brochures, making signs. One sign read, "We Can Do It." I wrote letters to the editor…. We had meetings all the time. We were willing to work hard….in January, in the cold, knocking on strangers' doors…. Armstrong formed SOKO, "Save Our Kids." They're saving their kids? What about our kids? What drove us was the injustice of it. Lee was closed, RJHS was closed, and they said they wouldn't close [the high school].

Joy Robb, of PAC, explained during an interview with a reporter from Cooper's school

newspaper,

"There are two issues involved from our (PAC's) standpoint: The shabby way they closed RHS and the permanency of the 8.5 mill referendum.... We must deal with the tax issue first, before we can deal with the high school issue, because we have no political clout unless we have control of the money...people will not pay excessive property taxes for no benefits of a school in their area." (Flasch, 1983)

On the other side of the district, the mayor of Plymouth and all the city council members

had contacted the board, stating their opposition to recalling the referendum. Armstrong teacher

Carol Peterson, opposed to the recall, remembered calling up recently graduated Armstrong

students and encouraging them to procure absentee ballots to vote from college. On March 12, SOKO held a rally at Cooper High, urging residents to oppose the recall. The *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* covered the event in a prominent article including a photo of then Minnesota Attorney General Hubert "Skip" Humphrey III addressing the rally. Humphrey had three children in district schools ("District gets 2nd look," 1983).

On the Thursday before the vote, the community newspaper published the views of those supporting the recall. "'PAC's one tenet is to reopen Robbinsdale...because it makes sense, not because we're mad.... A school is more than a facility.... It's a community asset. They've taken literally everything away from us'" (Nygaard, 1983, p. 1), said Joy Robb. Robb said she had first worked to elect board members who she hoped would reopen Robbinsdale High, but when that produced no result, she had decided to support the recall. She favored keeping three high schools open with grades 9-12 for next year and eventually grades 7-12. Keith Moberg commented,

> "We're saying, let them keep their nest, but let us have ours too.... The only way to heal the district is to reopen Robbinsdale.... I believed what they told me about their dire need for money.... But all their actions belie that. In business you just don't close your most economical plant and leave open one that has the highest trucking costs." (Nygaard, 1983, pp. 1, 15)

The supporters of the recall published a full-page advertisement in the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* and a second in the community newspaper, urging residents to vote "yes" on the recall effort. The advertisement asked, "District 281 Residents...Got Your Tax Statement? Now Have You Had Enough" ("District 281 residents," 1983)? In one corner of the advertisement a robin declared, "Put the PUBLIC Back Into the PUBLIC SCHOOLS" ("District 281 residents," 1983). The *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* published a lengthy editorial by Joy Robb in support of the recall effort.

At issue is the matter of accountability for the expenditure of our tax dollars and the decision to shut down the majority of the schools in the eastern half of the school district.

The school board's lack of regard for the homeowners and children in this area has resulted in a widespread revolt and rejection of support for a system that closes its eyes to injustice. Their refusal to address the negative impact of past decisions has locked this district into a destructive status quo, which will do more to harm the quality of education than will the loss of money.

To keep only two high schools will ultimately lead to a middle-school organizational pattern, and that will result in all students from grades 6-12 being divided on a disastrous socio-economic basis. It will result in the closure of two or three more elementary schools and will, in the long run, be costlier to the taxpayers than keeping all three high school buildings.

The most cost-effective long-range plan would be to move to a community school concept (K-6 and 7-12). This concept would lend itself best to some of the emerging philosophies in education, such as community-based education and site-management proposals. With both high schools now in the west, the majority of our children and citizens will not have full participatory options in either of these concepts.

To maintain the quality of education, we must first improve the quality of democracy. The time has come to not only care about the children, but we must also care about each other. When the citizens of District 281 are treated equally and when the benefits of their tax contributions are evident, they *will* support the system.

We urge every eligible voter who values equal opportunity for everyone to vote YES to revoke the 8.5-mill levy on Monday, to put a stop to bad policy decisions, to stop the mismanagement of our tax dollars, to stop the discrimination that has entered our educational system, and to make the adjustment so we may move forward once again in District 281. (Robb, 1983)

In the same issue, the community newspaper also published the views of those opposing the referendum recall. Opponents claimed a recall would force cuts of 5.6 million dollars, or 12 percent of the district's budget. This would mean cutting 100 teachers, eliminating extracurricular activities, and closing one junior high school and two elementary schools. They maintained that the superintendent would never recommend high schools of grades 7-12, and that, compared to other districts, District 281 had higher class sizes, spent less per pupil unit, had averaged less in mill levies over the past five years, and had kept salary increases in pace with other districts. The grievance over reopening Robbinsdale High should be kept in the political arena through voting for board members who would support the decision, not through recalling the referendum. "'The schools may not be located exactly where we want them, but the quality

of education is still there'" (Chuba, 1983d, p. 15), said one resident in opposition to the recall.

Opponents of the recall published newspaper advertisements urging residents to vote "no" on the

recall.

> On Monday, you have the chance to save our kids' chance of a lifetime....
>> If the referendum is recalled, our kids stand the chance of losing over 100
> teachers; of losing extra-curricular activities; of losing special programs; and of gaining
> four or five more kids in each class. And they would lose even more.
>> A chance of receiving a good elementary and secondary education happens only
> once in a lifetime. ("On Monday," 1983)

In the corner of the advertisement a sketch of several children read, "Vote 'no' to save a kid you

love" ("On Monday," 1983).

The *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* published a lengthy editorial by Mike Mooney, chair

of SOKO, in opposition to the recall. "Can we continue our excellent educational programs

without money the referendum allows? The answer is an emphatic and unequivocal NO"

(Mooney, 1983b). Mooney pointed to the quality of education in the district, noting the high test

scores. With low administrative costs and tax levels below the average, Mooney felt the district

was also efficiently managed.

> If the 281 levy is taken away, we would have no choice but to make drastic cuts in our
> educational programs—no one disputes this fact.... If there are any inequities, taking
> away the referendum will only make them worse. Reversing the referendum will not re-
> open RHS.... Reversing the referendum will not "help" children in the eastern part of the
> district—it will, in fact, hurt all the children in the district. (Mooney, 1983b)

The vote on whether or not to recall the excess levy referendum was held on Monday,

March 21. On election day there were 60,500 registered voters among the population of 90,040

people within District 281, including a district K-12 student enrollment of 15,750 in its 17

schools ("District gets 2nd look," 1983). A record voter turnout for school-related issues brought

26,826 people to the polls, more than twice the number that had voted on the referendum

question the first time around. With 43 percent of registered voters participating, a 45-minute

wait in line to vote was not unusual. PAC and other supporters of the recall gathered that

evening in the Robbinsdale fire station to await results. SOKO and other opponents of the recall

gathered in the board room where the Monday evening school board meeting was in progress.

After discussing school business, the board recessed at 9:20 to await the vote tally.

The board meeting was called back to order at 12:10 a.m. A motion was made, seconded,

and carried by unanimous roll call to accept the results of the recall referendum election as

11,442 "yes" votes to 15,384 "no" votes. The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 a.m. Voters had

rejected the recall effort and upheld the referendum levy. Out of 16 voting precincts, the seven

precincts in the far eastern part of the district, including all of Robbinsdale's precincts had voted

to recall the referendum. The other nine, including the overwhelming majority in Plymouth had

voted to retain the referendum (J. Williams, 1983h).

Board member Bergquist called the election outcome "'one of the best messages for

public education and an upbeat message for the district'" (J. Williams, 1983h, p. 1).

Superintendent Hood, three months away from retirement, said, "'I feel wonderful.... This

makes it possible to leave with my chin up'" (p. 1).

Responding to the loss, one PAC member sent the following letter to the editor of the

local newspaper.

> This is in response to all those who have asked whether PAC will continue to be. The
> answer is that PAC is still here, we'll never disappear.
>   There are 11,000 concerned citizens in the district who are still not happy with the
> way it is being run and we intend to be accounted for. Justice always takes a long time to
> reign. (Collinon, 1983)

PAC member Keith Moberg said the organization would now concentrate on the May school

board elections. Community newspaper editor Bob Bork, reflecting on the vote in his weekly

editorial, wrote, "The real tragic part of this situation in District 281 is the fact friends became

enemies, and some of the wounds may never heal. The fact almost 27,000 people showed up for this balloting is staggering" (Bork, 1983). He said the newspaper had decided not to print anymore letters on the topic.

The Supreme Court Rules:

Robbinsdale High Finally Laid to Rest?

At its May 2 board meeting, the school board authorized an appraisal of the Robbinsdale Senior High building. Two days later the district held a retirement dinner for Superintendent Hood. Hood was transported to the dinner in a bright orange school bus, where he and the 450 guests were serenaded by district choir students ("Program honors Hood's," 1983). But concurrent with the celebrations, the Minnesota Supreme Court was hearing oral arguments on the Open Meeting Law and the Robbinsdale High school-closing issue. Bernard Zimpfer, District 281 attorney, arguing for a more liberal interpretation of the law, and arguing to uphold the school closing told the court, "'I don't feel phone conversations between two persons violate the law. It's appropriate that this court define meeting of a quorum to transact business. There's been a lot of confusion and misunderstanding concerning the law'" (Chuba, 1983c, p. 2).

Tom Creighton, attorney for plaintiffs Robb and Moberg, arguing for a stricter interpretation and for a nullification of the school closing, told the court,

> "This nation is ruled by laws, not men and women. Where law ends, tyranny begins as stated above your door in the court. Open government is worth preserving and all government proceedings should be open to the public. The public deserves to know a democracy will be passed on and is worth preserving. We need to preserve the system of open government. The public deserves nothing less." (Chuba, 1983c, p. 2)

The court would make its ruling later in the summer.

On May 17 residents went to the polls to elect two board members. Board member

Fuhrmann's seat was open and board member Bergquist was running for re-election. When asked if they would vote to reopen Robbinsdale High School, only a few of the 11 candidates responded affirmatively. Many candidates felt that the most important issue facing the district was healing the split which had occurred among residents ("District 281 candidates air views," 1983). Mike Mooney, chair of SOKO, was running for election, along with Joy Robb and Keith Moberg of PAC.

A total of 11,698 voters went to the polls, as compared to over 19,000 in the previous year's board elections and almost 27,000 in the referendum recall election. Bergquist and Mooney, (both opposed to reopening Robbinsdale High), won with 5,520 and 4,552 votes respectively. Robb and Moberg garnered the next most votes with 4,447 and 4,169 each ("Robbinsdale District 281 voter turnout," 1983). Plymouth had overwhelmingly voted for Bergquist and Mooney, while Robbinsdale had overwhelmingly voted for Robb and Moberg.

On July 15, the Minnesota Supreme Court under Chief Justice Amdahl finally issued its ruling on the closure of Robbinsdale High, at the same time further defining the Open Meeting Law. The entire 20-page court ruling was printed on two full pages of small print in the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* under the headline, "Amdahl's words close school issue" ("Amdahl's words," 1983, p. 3). In its written opinion, the Court thoroughly reviewed the school-closing history as well as the complaints brought by appellants Robb and Moberg (see Appendix L). The Court wrote,

> We do not minimize the significance of public input in situations as important as the closing of a neighborhood school. It is institutions such as Robbinsdale Senior High School which help to cement a community and impart to it an extra measure of vitality and spirit. (*Moberg & Robb v. I.S.D. 281*, 1983, p. 10)

However, the Court noted that society looks to locally elected representatives to receive public input and resolve such conflicts as school closures.

The Court acknowledged that the elected school board members had met on several occasions and had telephoned each other during the time of deliberations on the school-closing issue, but the Court found that the board's objective was to find common ground to break the deadlock, not too achieve a secret result. Such action would only have been improper if designed to avoid public discussion altogether or to build a majority in advance of public hearings. It was board members' duty to try to persuade each other on a difficult issue. Likewise, the Court found the hiring of the panel of experts to be a proper course of action. "[It] was a neutral, fair-minded solution with no foreordained result" (*Moberg & Robb v. I.S.D. 281*, 1983, p. 15) in a further attempt to help break the deadlock. The Court concluded that "the public's right to be informed must be balanced against the public's right to the effective and efficient administration of public bodies" (p. 16).

In its ruling, the Supreme Court affirmed the lower court's decision that the school district had followed appropriate procedures in the school-closing process. "Respondents complied with the notice and hearing requirement of the Schoolhouse Closing Statute…by stating the reasons for closing then known to them, and by holding a special public hearing for each school they considered closing" (*Moberg & Robb v. I.S.D. 281*, 1983, p. 1). Concerning the question of board members' conduct in regards to the Open Meeting Law, the Supreme Court further defined (or redefined) those meetings subject to such law.

> We therefore hold that "meetings" subject to the requirements of the Open Meeting Law are those gatherings of a quorum or more members of the governing body...at which members discuss, decide, or receive information as a group on issues relating to the official business of that governing body. Although "chance or social gatherings" are exempt from the requirements of the statute...a quorum may not, as a group, discuss or receive information on official business in any setting under the guise of a private social gathering. The statute does not apply to letters, or to telephone conversations between fewer than a quorum. (p. 16)

By defining only meetings of a quorum as subject to the law, the Supreme Court rejected

the lower court's ruling fining board members for violations of the Open Meeting Law.

"Conclusions of the trial court adjudicating respondents to be in violation of this statute are

reversed" (*Moberg & Robb v. I.S.D. 281*, 1983, p. 1). The Court concluded,

> Invalidation of school board action in closing a schoolhouse must be sought under statutes governing authority and procedures of a school board by writ of certiorari. Applying the standard of review appropriate to such an action, respondent's action must be upheld.
>> Affirmed in part and reversed in part.
>> Heard, considered and decided by the court en banc after oral argument. (pp. 1-2)

By affirming the lower court's decision that Robbinsdale High had been properly closed,

and by reversing the lower court's decision that the board members had violated the Open

Meeting Law, the Supreme Court had completely exonerated the school district from any

unlawful action relating to the closing of Robbinsdale High. In response to the Supreme Court's

ruling, board chair Webber said,

> "The decision is important because elected officials can talk to one another on the telephone and they can see each other if less than a quorum.
>> The school board was never out to cut deals or meet in secret.... I feel that if the Open Meeting Law was too restrictive, school boards and city councils could render bad decisions." (Chuba, 1983e, p. 2)

Webber also remarked, "'I am happy for the district because the supreme court has said that the

closing of Robbinsdale Senior High was legal...and the district doesn't have to go through the

trauma of a senior-high closing again'" (Gendler, 1983b, p. 1).

Joy Robb commented, "'The moral implications of what was done to a large part of the

community are still there.... Obviously, the Minnesota Supreme Court did not have the public

interest at heart when it issued its decision'" (Chuba, 1983e, p. 1). She further remarked,

> "It was a slim chance, at best, we knew that all along.... That open-meeting law had never been defined, but we never thought it would be defined this liberally....
>> The $100 meant nothing to us.... All we ever wanted was the school re-opened.... We felt they had played a bunch of manipulative politics in keeping Armstrong open and I hope those three board members (who supported Armstrong) are pleased. But they still

have to live with the repercussions of closing Robbinsdale High School, which aren't pleasant....

We're where we are because board members did not follow the recommendations of the administration." (Gendler, 1983b, pp. 1, 17)

Keith Moberg added, "'The basic reasons for the dissatisfaction still exist.... We have a rift in the district; we still have a socio-economic split in the district'" (p. 17). On the other side of the district's split, Ann Rest of Friends of Armstrong later recalled, "I bought an extremely expensive bottle of champagne for Bruce Willis [FOA attorney] when the Supreme Court ruled."

Surrender? Why We've Not Yet Begun to Fight

As the end of the first school year after Robbinsdale High's closure drew to an end, a number of its former students attached the letter "R" to their graduation caps, with small yellow ribbons, as they walked through their new schools' graduation ceremonies ("1,410 graduate," 1983). Superintendent Hood, preparing for his departure, reflected on his tenure in an interview with newspaper reporters. Hood cited the many new programs that were started under his administration, specifically noting that flexible-modular scheduling was one that had not been successful. Hood was proudest of his financial management. "'I know people think I'm an arch-conservative when it comes to spending money but when I arrived in 1965 the district was solvent, as it will be when I leave'" (Chuba, 1983b, p. 21), Hood stated. Board member Joselyn agreed. "'He was responsive and receptive to new ideas from his staff and was a good financial manager'" (p. 21).

Hood's replacement would be Donna Carter, age 39, from Michigan. She would be only the third district superintendent, following E. J. Cooper, hired in 1936, and Leroy Hood, hired in 1965. With a new superintendent and a new board in place, board chair Webber outlined a new era for the district.

"What's important...is that what has been happening in the district in the past is that it has tended to be very crisis-oriented. What is happening now is that the school district is taking a look in the future and deciding that it is going to manage for the future and that it is going to manage in an active, not a reactive, way." (J. Williams, 1983d, p. 1)

Future managing included the shedding of excess property, but three of the district's vacant school buildings were located within the City of Robbinsdale. The city's blessings on the district's sale of any of these buildings would be beneficial and in some instances essential, however, district relations with the City of Robbinsdale had been steadily deteriorating over the past few years. After the closure of Robbinsdale Junior High in 1979, the district had leased a portion of that building to the City of Robbinsdale as a community recreation center. During the high school closing debate, the city had imposed a moratorium on any sale of the junior high building by the district while a study was completed on the best use of the property from the city's perspective.

The district had been anxious to sell the property, losing $30,000 a month in interest and maintenance costs. The district had agreed to sell the property to a chiropractic college, and the city had at one point lifted its moratorium, but the city still wanted to lease part of the building for community recreational purposes. This action had occurred just two weeks before the unexpected school board action closing the senior high, which had then prompted the city to again impose a moratorium on any sale of the junior high building. Robbinsdale city council members asserted that things had changed with the additional closing of the senior high. "'I'm aware of how the school board operates and how they let three scapegoats close our senior high. It all defies logic'" (Chuba, 1982e, p. 2), said one city council member. Relations had been at a standstill since then.

In September of 1983, a local realty company informed the board that a Fortune-500-company "mystery" buyer was interested in the vacant high school property. The realtor stated,

"I am a resident in Robbinsdale...so I am cognizant of the complicated decisions that both School District 281 and the City of Robbinsdale face in disposing of our closed public schools, but I feel moved to encourage all parties to make a timely decision on this request." (J. Williams, 1983g, p. 1)

On October 17, the school board voted 6-1 to declare Robbinsdale Senior High no longer needed for school purposes and to authorize the realtor to offer the building to the mystery buyer for three million dollars. Board member Southward from Robbinsdale, casting the only dissenting vote, explained that the board's quick action to sell the building had created feelings of further disenfranchisement among the district's eastern residents (J. Williams, 1983f).

The next day the realtor called off the deal, stating that the client's time needs could not be met and that "'we're getting into some politics'" (J. Williams, 1983f, p. 1). In later reflection, former assistant superintendent Boynton contended, "The pro-Armstrong board members wanted to sell the Robbinsdale building immediately so there would be no thought of reopening it."

The district then asked the City of Robbinsdale to inform the district which of the two vacant secondary buildings, Robbinsdale Senior or Junior, the city would prefer that the district not sell. Robbinsdale residents filled the city council chambers at the November 14 meeting. Residents made it known they did not want the district to sell either building. One resident thought the district's request was "'like having two kids and having to decide, which do you want to shoot'" (J. Williams, 1983i, p. 2)? Another commented, "'It's very interesting to go to school board meetings and see the people of Plymouth get everything their hearts desire…. The district doesn't care about the people of Robbinsdale'" (p. 2). Yet another stated, "'I don't think they really deserve the dignity of a reply from us'" (p. 2).

Council members explained that the city did have some control over property sales through rezoning considerations and that they might even condemn one of the buildings and take it over. Furthermore, the city had never released title to the streets over which the junior high

had been built. One council member declared, "'I'm for giving them an answer....There's only one recommendation that can be made, and that is to sell Armstrong Senior High'" (J. Williams, 1983i, p. 2)! Another council member stated that the city should answer the board with the same response John Paul Jones gave when asked to give up his battleship. "'Surrender? Why, we've not yet begun to fight'" (p. 2).

Nevertheless, on December 19, the school board voted 6-1 to award Thorpe Brothers Realty a six-month exclusive listing to sell the Robbinsdale Senior High building. During the meeting, "board members' comments were met with repeated cat calls from the audience" (J. Williams, 1983e, p. 2), prompting board member Norby to respond, "'[I've] never been so insulted in my life'" (p. 2). Robbinsdale supporter Barb Southward later explained, "We moved from trying to open the high school to trying to save the building for future educational use. We fought like hornets to keep those buildings from being sold."

In the year following Robbinsdale High's closure, the Robbinsdale town historian completed her book on the 100-year history of the City of Robbinsdale, ending with the lines,

> Robbinsdale residents are depressed because they consider the closing of all but one school catastrophic for our town. Future historians may be able to record brighter news in the decade of the '80's for this interesting town which is loved by so many. (Blodgett, 1983, p. 100)

During that same year, ornamental Christmas-tree bulbs filled with paint were thrown at the house of Armstrong supporter and board member Myrna Marofsky. The Armstrong school sign was also targeted. On the one-year anniversary of the school board's decision to close Robbinsdale High School a candlelight vigil was held outside the school, and the house of board chair Fred Webber was bannered with black crepe paper inscribed with the date, April 27, 1982, the date of the school board's closure vote. His driveway was blocked with orange street-repair cones belonging to the City of Robbinsdale.

Critical Discussion

A sense of finality had begun to take hold in the wake of both the board's decision to close Robbinsdale High and the district court's failure to negate the board's action. With the refusal of the new school board to reopen Robbinsdale High, the discourse from the wider community moved into a healing and uniting phase. The citizen petition requesting no further consideration by the board on the school-closure issue cited the need to "heal from the pain." Themes for the school year included "Working Together," "United," and "Together We Can Do Anything." Letters to the editor implored, "time to heal the hurts," "what it all boils down to is acceptance," "let us seek common ground," "let us get on with it," and "we must work together—east, west, north and south."

School board member Norby asserted, "We can learn to live in peace," and school board candidates concurred, feeling that the most important issue facing the district was healing the split which had occurred among residents. Some parents dismissed talk of a socioeconomic divide, insisting that students at AHS were neither "rich kids" nor "cake-eaters." "The students at AHS are just like the ones you'll find at Cooper and Robbinsdale" (Daly, 1982), stated one parent.

Rubbing up against the pleas to heal and unite, however, was the competing and persistent discourse of injustice which began to highlight and sharpen accusations of socioeconomic favoritism, turning into a discourse of injustice rooted in geography and class, place-based and class-based, west versus east, rich versus poor. "[The school board members] have...shown their obvious partiality toward the upper crust" (Jurgens, 1982), wrote one east-side resident. "The school board chose...to bow to the monied area of the district" (Poole, 1982), wrote another. Others accused "affluent politicos" of catering "to the whims of the wealthy side

of the district."

Robbinsdale students had complained about not having enough clothes to attend Armstrong, since Armstrong students were "completely different" and had "a lot more money" and "a lot ritzier things"—"a bunch of cake-eaters." In their minds, Robbinsdale High had been closed because Plymouth parents were in "the higher tax brackets" and thus carried "more clout." "When Money Talks—People Listen," wrote one student. One Robbinsdale student was relieved to be going to Cooper rather than Armstrong. "'That makes it so much easier, to know [Cooper students are] not going to look down at us'" (Hoose, 1982b, p. 4). The rich-versus-poor talk prompted one west-side parent to fire back, "All we hear is how rich the people in Plymouth are.... I will guarantee you that many of us in Plymouth work equally as hard for our money if not harder" (Berke, 1982).

This "regular civil war" between east and west ran well into following year, with letters to the editor accusing the "western segment" of "sabotaging the entire district." One east-side resident wrote,

> An ad, which recently ran in the real estate section of the Post North Shopping Guide, really made me angry.
> The ad read: "Plymouth—close to junior and senior high schools—give mom and dad a rest!"... There was a time when either of the houses we owned could have been described as "close to junior and senior high school." But thanks to the irresponsible action of the District 281 School Board we no longer have such a marketable location.
> I truly resent someone in Plymouth (a relative newcomer to 281) reaping the benefits of our struggle. This resentment is not going to go away. I do not expect to feel like "healing the wounds" for a very long time. (Krogstad, 1983)

The place-based, class-based division had real substance in fact. As previously noted, a tax rate of one mill would raise four times the amount in Plymouth as in Robbinsdale. Average income and home values were notably higher on the west side of the district. But more importantly, the sense of "otherness" was lived, existing in the minds of many residents. The

east side and the west side, specifically Robbinsdale and Plymouth were separate communities—socioeconomically, geographically, and historically. In interviews, both sides conceded that the other "wasn't even...on the radar," or on further reflection, for the east side, the construction of Plymouth had "ruined some pretty good duck hunting," while for the west side, Robbinsdale represented "the-other-side-of-the-tracks syndrome."

This cultural divide was evident in such contrasts as the old middle class of Robbinsdale holding car washes and bake sales to raise money to fight the school closure, while one west-side resident noted that on their side, "We raised almost $10,000 in one night," and another purchased an "extremely expensive" bottle of champagne to celebrate the Supreme Court's ruling. Residents of Robbinsdale were angry and wanted "action," forming the People's Action Committee, while the new middle class was "concerned," forming Concerned Citizens for 281.

The school closure had provided a forum, a springboard, or a spotlight for a clash of cultures. Former PAC member and school board member Keith Moberg noted in later reflection that prior to the high school closure, "I never heard the 'dirtball,' 'cake-eater' thing going around." In his analysis of a number of school-closure dilemmas, Iannaccone (1979) concluded,

> What is generally true about the situationally specific political conflicts found in these papers is that those unique conflicts were previously present as long-standing and basic, but latent, conflict tensions in the particular situation. These appear to break out of the previous political consensus and process which had contained them prior to the impact of declining enrollments on the school governance system. The new political conflicts are shaped to a significant extent by old cleavages in political cultural values and old alignments which had been effectively subsumed or displaced by dominant political formulae, traditional policy-making structures, and established routine procedures. These often appear unable to withstand the stress placed upon them by the declining enrollment problem. (p. 421)

Interview participants concurred that in District 281, the essence of these previously latent cleavages in political and cultural values was rooted in the place-based and class-based division of east versus west. Former assistant superintendent Boynton remembered that people from AHS

would refer to east-siders as "'those people'—as if they were from the other side of the tracks," and RHS people would refer to west-siders as "cake-eaters."

In later reflection, former RHS student Alisa Lange attributed the closure of RHS to "economics and politics—wealthy more influential people that seemed to have more pull." Custodian and Robbinsdale resident Paul Genadek remarked, "It was the political system at its worst. Go for the rich—too bad for the poor.... Politics, money on the west end of the district was the reason [for RHS' closure]. The tax base was higher over on the west end." Even west-side champions such as former board member Myrna Marofsky later theorized, "There was a conflict in cultures—the haves and the have-nots." "It was a cultural thing—small town, underdog, hatred of the rich guys in the west," stated Barb Nemer. Former teacher Jon Rondestvedt explained,

> There was social stratification within the district. The east was older, less affluent, more blue collar. The west was younger, more affluent with increasing numbers of white collar. The east increasingly saw itself under siege by those who were younger, more affluent, and less reliant on traditional, blue collar sources of income. Hence, in part, this explains the "us versus them" mentality that continues even today among certain residents. The perceived power base had shifted.... There was a perceived callousness, ignorance, perverseness of the school board. Many from the eastern portion believed the seated school board had turned a deaf ear to the concerns of the east, were in bed, politically aligned with the west, and were myopic in that they could not see the ramifications of their decision on property values, bussing, civic pride. Regardless of objective truth, those from the east firmly believed that the school board favored the west and was incapable of a rational, even handed, fair resolution to the crisis. The east was saying, "No question about it, we're getting screwed, royally."

The attempt to reopen Robbinsdale High continued to focus decision making within the political arena through two popular-justice votes. The first, a sort of political-economic threat by means of a referendum recall, trying to force the district's hand, and the second, an attempt to elect two more board members from the east side. As a back-up measure, the judicial arena was also utilized, entrusting a final decision to the state's Supreme Court. The school's closure and

the east-to-west power shift were confirmed, however, with the unsuccessful referendum recall, the loss of RHS champions and PAC leaders Joy Robb and Keith Moberg in the board elections to Mike Mooney and Bill Bergquist, and the rejection of the judicial appeal.

The legitimation crisis, based on a sense of injustice, carried well into the next year, culminating in the referendum recall vote. There was still a persistent feeling that the board had let "three scapegoats" close Robbinsdale High, one resident informing the board on delivery of the recall petition, "An injustice has been done and we told you we would be back." The fact that residents were able to rapidly gather a second set of signatures for the recall petition, with former principals and teachers supporting the recall, expressed the depth of this feeling of injustice.

This sense of injustice took on grander democratic and moral overtones as the year progressed. The board's invalidation of the first recall petition was described as depriving citizens of "fair and equal treatment" and "Constitutional rights." The referendum recall itself represented "the democratic process," "the will of the people," and putting "the public back into the public schools." For east-side residents the referendum recall was about justice, equality, and fairness. Key themes in Joy Robb's written support for the recall included economic and educational discrimination, equal treatment, equal opportunity, full participation, and improving the quality of democracy. Upon the final ruling of the Supreme Court, she noted, "The moral implications of what was done to a large part of the community are still there."

In spite of the calls to heal and unite, it seemed that district leadership was not as actively engaged as it could have been in an effective effort of healing and redressing of grievances. This disengagement undoubtedly helped to drive the continuing legitimation crisis, pushing the east side into a sense of marginalization. At times, in the eyes of the east side, it even appeared that

the school board was actively promoting further division. Perhaps foremost on this list was the

feeling that the newly-elected board members from the Cooper attendance area had turned

against Robbinsdale, declining to reopen RHS. Robbinsdale city council member Bill Blonigan

later commented, "We saved your school when the recommendation was to close Cooper. We

got on board and said, 'That's not right.' And now when the tables are turned, you sold us down

the river."

Also viewed as somewhat spiteful was the board's assertion that the first referendum

recall petition was invalid due to some names being in printed form rather than cursive or

because two names were included on one line rather than on separate lines. Additionally, board

actions related to the sale of school properties in Robbinsdale, while nerves were still raw, added

even more fuel to the fire and were likely construed as a mean-spirited, in-your-face posture.

These included approving an appraisal of the Robbinsdale High building for possible sale

immediately after receiving the recall petition, authorizing an appraisal of Mielke Field to

prepare for its possible sale immediately after endorsing SOKO to fight the recall, and asking the

City of Robbinsdale to inform the district whether it would prefer Robbinsdale Senior High or

Junior High to be sold.

On a wider scale, the failure of the recall referendum, the subsequent failure to elect

Robbinsdale sympathizers in the following school board election, the Supreme Court's ruling

that Robbinsdale High had been lawfully closed, and even the local newspaper's decision not to

print anymore letters on the topic of the school closure all added to this sense of east-side

marginalization, giving its residents nowhere else to turn. Robbinsdale had been defeated in

three strikes, failing in the economic, political, and judicial arenas. Former RHS student Chuck

Webber summarized in later reflection, "RHS tried all three spheres—political, legal, and

economic. They tried every avenue you can try in American society. It underscored their lack of

power. They felt completely toothless—marginalized."

> Commenting on this sense of marginalization, former superintendent Bollin later stressed,

> It comes down to: one—they didn't keep their school; two—they didn't overturn the referendum. "Those rich guys just keep pounding us." It was a total defeat—like asking them to never forgive. There needs to be a victory before they can move on.... Never corner a person. You've got to give them a way out. Robbinsdale felt like they were beaten down.

Within this sense of hopelessness, east-side comments included feelings that they were

"repeatedly being stepped on," that they had "run out of cheeks to turn," that they had "lost

everything," and that "some of the wounds may never heal."

On a macro socioeconomic level, Habermas (1975) contended that as the public became

increasingly disillusioned with the political and economic system, a socio-cultural motivation

crisis would follow. The motivation crisis would be fueled by a general public disenchantment

with the tenets of bourgeois ideology, manifesting itself in societal withdrawal from the system

under a feeling of "we're not going to play this game anymore—it seems rigged against us."

Applying Habermas' crisis tendencies to education, Smyth (1989b) contended that within

educational institutions, "as feelings of increasing alienation and powerlessness develop: we feel

that control lies 'out there with them' and 'not with us in here, in this institution'" (p. 3). A loss

of meaning, identity, and purpose for educational stakeholders would follow.

In Robbinsdale, the legitimation crisis had begun to give way to a motivation crisis.

Although some east-side residents "fought like hornets" to prevent the district from selling

closed schools, a sense of finality coupled with a sentiment of powerlessness had begun to set in.

This mood of "it's over, there's nothing more we can do," was evident in election voter

participation. Whereas 19,000 voters had participated in the 1982 school board election and

27,000 in the referendum recall, less than 12,000 participated in the new school board elections of 1983. By 1983, one district resident had commented, "The district doesn't care about the people of Robbinsdale," and the Robbinsdale town historian had concluded, "Robbinsdale residents are depressed because they consider the closing of all but one school catastrophic for our town."

DATA PART 9
AFTERMATH

Old Robins Never Die...
They Just Feather New Nests
Robbinsdale student

During her interview in the spring of 1983 for the position of superintendent, Donna Carter had emphasized one of her strengths as being able to "'maintain good community relations'" (Nygaard & Andersen, 1983, p. 2). The board had hired her unanimously after only 45 minutes of discussion. At her first board meeting as superintendent, Carter declared, "'The coming years absolutely must be a time of building.... Building bridges...between each of the communities and constituents that make up this district'" (J. Williams, 1983c, p. 1).

In the fall of 1983, Carter proposed a new magnet alternative program for the district, and on November 28, the board approved the Technology Learning Campus (TLC) for grades 6-8. The program would be housed in the old RJHS building. The district would also move its community education program into the building, agreeing that the City of Robbinsdale could continue to house its community center there as well. Commenting on the new TLC, which would open the next school year, Carter remarked, "'It's a marvelous opportunity to help knit this community back together and provide an educational facility on the east side'" (J. Williams, 1983k, p. 1).

The TLC opened the next year with head director Barb Nemer, former Armstrong media specialist, who had actively supported Armstrong during the school-closing process. At the beginning of the school year, Nemer received a bouquet of flowers with a note, "Welcome to the east side, from PAC." Nemer later reflected, "Locating the TLC in RJHS was totally political—but it wasn't the same as having 'our RHS' with its long, long record of memories."

Another of Carter's first-year initiatives was the creation of the Senior High Study Group. The group, composed of staff from the remaining two high schools and district-level administrators, was widely viewed as an attempt to address evolving concerns over socioeconomic inequalities between Robbinsdale-Armstrong and Robbinsdale-Cooper high schools. During the school-closing process, Robbinsdale High proponents had used this as an argument to keep Robbinsdale High open. The new attendance-area boundaries had split the former Robbinsdale attendance area in two, sending half its students to RAHS and half to RCHS, with the wealthier Golden Valley area being added to the RAHS attendance area. The study confirmed what many had feared during the high school closure debate—that the closure of Robbinsdale High had brought further socioeconomic disparity to district high school attendance-area populations.

After a year of meetings and reviewing the 1980 census data, the Senior High Study Group found that there were "substantial differences in the socio-economic levels of the attendance areas served by the two senior high schools" (Cameron, 1985, p. 5) and "a marked difference in the income level of the two school areas" (p. 56). Compared to RCHS, twice as many residents in the RAHS area had family income above $40,000. The RAHS area had twice as many college graduates and a much greater number of adults in professional occupations. The RCHS area had greater blue collar employment, and the school itself had twice as many students receiving free or reduced lunch.

However, the Study Group concluded, "Both senior high schools provide essentially equal and comparable educational opportunities for students....[We] would not recommend a change in attendance area boundaries as a means for creating more nearly identical student bodies" (Cameron, 1985, p. 9). Concerning Carter's efforts to appease the east side of the

district, retired teacher Gretchen Heath commented, "[The east side] didn't have much time for her. She didn't smooth the waters." After shifting the district to a K-5, 6-8, 9-12 middle-school organizational pattern and initiating an elementary Spanish immersion program, Carter departed in 1989.

That fall, an operating referendum passed thanks to support from the district's west side (Cassidy, 1989), however, in 1995 another referendum failed. Residents turned down a fall bond referendum for $163.9 million earmarked for building improvements and increased technology, with two thirds of Robbinsdale and Crystal voters rejecting the measure and overriding the two thirds of Plymouth voters who approved (S. Webber, 1995). The chair of the citizens' committee supporting the referendum received a number of phone calls from people who opposed the bond sale because they were still angry over the closing of Robbinsdale High School. "'I don't understand why people would punish kids because of something that happened in 1982…. That sends a real bad message. It says that people who are going to hold a grudge forever are going to punish my kids'" (p. 8A).

In February of 1996 a follow-up mailed ballot referendum on the same question also failed with similar results (S. Webber, 1996). Robbinsdale residents likely considered a request to support renovation of the "western" schools as somewhat ironic, given that their high school had been closed due its "less attractive" physical appearance. The superintendent concluded, "'Some people are still angry over the closing of Robbinsdale High School'" (p. 11A). Shortly thereafter in March, parents in the Armstrong attendance area, fed up with failed referenda, established the Armstrong Area Education Foundation, a non-profit, tax exempt organization to which parents could contribute funds on a tax-free basis for technology improvements at Armstrong High (McKenzie, 1996).

Facing depleting resources, the school board decided it would close one of its four middle schools at the end of the 1999-2000 school year. The board chair was now former PAC member and law-suit plaintiff Keith Moberg. The district's finance director was Tom Walerius, former long-time district teacher and former teachers' union president. Walerius later recalled the discussion at the school board workshop to discuss the closing process. It was decided there would be no community participation in developing the criteria this time around. Additionally, Walerius remembered, "I said, 'We're not going to do this with a three-judge panel like they did with closing Robbinsdale High.' Chairman Moberg got out of his chair, blood rushing through his head, and said, 'Absolutely not!'" Walerius also recalled that in the previous year, one of the members of the former arbitration, fact-finding panel had actually been a candidate for some consulting work in the district. "He said if he were chosen, 'You cannot use my name and I cannot show up at any board meeting.'"

One recently-arrived district resident at the time recalled the ensuing public meetings on the middle school closing process. "[Many Robbinsdale residents] showed up. They brought up a lot of the old issues about when they closed RHS. I was amazed that there was such hostility against the district—such emotion still about it," recalled Corinne Christensen. The board voted to close Hosterman Middle School (HMS) in New Hope, and it voted to move the TLC magnet program from the former RJHS building into the former RHS building. The program was renamed the Technology and Language Center, and it joined the renamed Robbinsdale Spanish Immersion K-5 elementary program already housed on the first floor of the former high school building. District residents enrolling their children in these two magnet programs could now send them from kindergarten through eighth grade to a building on which the signage would still read "Robbinsdale Senior High School."

The next year, in the fall of 2001, almost 20 years after the closing of Robbinsdale High, the district made another attempt to pass an operating referendum. Finance director Tom Walerius recalled anxiously awaiting the results. "I said, 'As soon as I see the first Robbinsdale precinct come in, I'll be able to call this referendum.' When the first precinct came in, I said, 'It's over.'" For Walerius, the results meant the long-time feud over Robbinsdale High had ended. The referendum had passed 60 percent to 40 percent, with 12,247 "yes" votes to 8,201 "no" votes. The referendum had passed in 19 of the district's 21 precincts, the four Robbinsdale precincts approving with a "yes" vote of nearly 60 percent (S. Webber, 2001).

Reflecting on the district's future in the aftermath of the successful referendum, Stan Mack, superintendent at the time, explained,

> There isn't a time when I'm considering an issue that I don't think about where a disenfranchised community such as Robbinsdale might be on the issue.... It's still an issue. But the turning point was the last operating referendum. Most people are now prepared to work for the future, although some older folk are begrudgingly tolerating what has occurred. It's still an unsettled issue for them.

In a somewhat less optimistic fashion, the various parties in the then more than 20-year-old school-closing drama also reflected on the past and the present. Former board member and Armstrong supporter, Myrna Marofsky, explained,

> I hated that time in my life. Even today somebody will say, "Marofsky—I know that name." So I'll say, "Where do you live? You either love me or hate me." I never go into Robbinsdale. I'm afraid I might get a flat tire there. I don't shop there. There is so much anger. I am fearful. How did it last so long? How can it be that I still don't feel comfortable there?

Former Armstrong teacher Carol Peterson contemplated,

> The meanness of it and also the worry of it, the indecision and the anxiety—it's all those things. It's a subject I don't bring up anymore with teachers. It's all about pride, about loss. Grieving takes the rest of one's life. Even though you won, you know that someone else suffered a loss. Nothing is ever the same again. How do you bring Mom and Dad back from the dead?

Former Robbinsdale student Heather Robb McCollor remarked, "My yearbook was filled with 'the maybes.' 'Robins never die' was written over and over in my yearbook…. It really did change my life. It was tragic to me…. I've spent 20 years trying to bury the facts, bury the emotions." Former Robbinsdale student Alisa Lange recalled attending a class reunion for those students who would have been 1984 graduates of Robbinsdale High had it not closed. It reunited all the sophomore RHS students who were split up between CHS and AHS. About 150 former students attended the event, or about one half of the class.

The last class to graduate from Robbinsdale High, the class of 1982, celebrated its 20th reunion in 2002. A crossword memories puzzle created for the celebration included, "Breaking a commandment and closing RHS are both examples of one." The answer—a SIN (personal communication, September 28, 2002). Robbinsdale resident Liz Miller remembered, "[RHS] had all this tradition behind it. My son Fred took a video camera and walked through the empty hallways and the empty gym, and they played it on cable TV." For "Mother Robin" Joy Robb, housing the two magnet programs in the former high school building was a positive step, however, she noted that only a small number of students from the City of Robbinsdale actually attended because enrollment was district-wide and controlled through a lottery system. She still lamented the closing of the high school. Recalling the audience sing-alongs to "Where Have All the Robins Gone?" at the "Save Robbinsdale High" rallies, she concluded, "The feelings run deep." "It's never 'flowers'—always 'Robins' to me now."

Critical Discussion

As the intense and passionate reactions to Robbinsdale High's closure subsided, decision making moved away from the judicial and political arenas, converging into the administrative

sphere. The hiring of a new superintendent offered a new beginning for healing. The new superintendent, Donna Carter, called for "building bridges" between the district's various communities, calling her implementation of an alternative technology magnet program to be housed in the old RJHS building "a marvelous opportunity to help knit this community back together and provide an educational facility on the east side." She also initiated an elementary Spanish immersion program which would later be housed in the old RHS building.

There were those, however, such as former board member Bernie Reisberg, who maintained in later reflection that hiring Assistant Superintendent Boynton as new superintendent would have fostered a better healing environment. "Boynton should have been superintendent after Hood. Willis would have had a unifying effect on the district. It was a mistake to go outside," stated Reisberg. Willis Boynton lived in Robbinsdale and had served as principal of Lee Elementary and assistant principal at both RJHS and RHS before moving to the district's central office. Other interview participants concurred that, in spite of her efforts, Donna Carter "didn't smooth the waters" on the east side.

Whether or not the appointment of Carter reflected the best leadership for the times, there was a certain irony to the offering of alternative education in order to appease the east side. The east side had lost Robbinsdale High School to the west side's argument of "alternative" and "quality" education at Armstrong. Now the east side was extended the carrot of an alternative technology program to replace the traditional home-grown program of the former RJHS as well as an alternative elementary language immersion program to replace the now dormant Lee Elementary neighborhood school. Both programs would ultimately be housed in the former RHS building, putting it back into play. Such maneuvers provided further evidence to researchers' contentions that, in the end, school consolidation often failed to live up to its projected savings.

The back and forth power shifts between east and west which had characterized the previous two years were now a thing of the past, and a period of stabilization ensued. It could be argued that in light of the new attendance-area boundaries between RAHS and RCHS, however, a north-south socioeconomic power disparity would take the place of the east-west divide. The district did not seem able to summon the courage or the political will to address the socioeconomic gulf represented by the communities and student populations in the new high school attendance areas.

The motivation crisis which followed the defeat of the referendum recall lingered for many years, with many east-side residents questioning why they should engage in and continue to support a system that seemed to have failed them. This was evident in the voting patterns of rejected referendum levies. On the 10th anniversary of Robbinsdale High's closure, commenting on a loss of morale, one Robbinsdale resident wrote, "In my opinion, the singular most obvious cause of loss of morale in District 281 was the cumulative effect of botched school closings. The ultimate effect was a school district torn asunder politically, philosophically and on a socio-economic basis" (Southward, 1992).

Even 20 years later, commenting on Robbinsdale's school closures, former teacher Jon Rondestvedt contended, "These repeated blows to the body politic were seen as knockout punches by a sizeable portion of voters in the east. To this day, many can not rise from the canvass. There's discernible hopelessness." Superintendent Mack offered a more hopeful vision, however, believing that after 20 years the district had reached a "turning point." Unintentionally echoing Armstrong's futuristic theme from 20 years previous, he declared that most people were now "prepared to work for the future."

DATA PART 10
EPILOGUE

Our kids would love to come back.
Robbinsdale resident

On January 10, 2004, the school board received the results of a four-month-long education and facility planning study. The study recommended that the school board sell the former RJHS building as excess property and use the former RHS building as an additional attendance-area middle school rather than as a magnet middle school ("School district releases conclusions," 2004). Residents of the City of Robbinsdale had for years opposed the sale of the former RJHS building, which had also served as the district's original high school building, but they had also been promoters of an attendance-area secondary school for Robbinsdale. After the Supreme Court ruling of 1983 had dimmed any hopes of reopening the high school, Robbinsdale advocates had declared, "'We're not trying to get Robbinsdale High School reopened. We're trying to get an educational facility....We must do everything possible to reopen a secondary building here, first as a junior high and eventually as a middle school'" (J. Williams, 1983i, p. 2).

In 2004, after months of discussions between the Robbinsdale city council and the school board, and perhaps in anticipation of seeing an attendance-area middle school planted in the former RHS building, the city finally agreed to the sale and redevelopment of the RJHS site, the birthplace of the school district. In a further display of city and school district cooperation, the city even agreed to fund $450,000 of improvements to the gymnasium and to the soccer field at the former RHS building in exchange for allowing city usage on weekends and after-school hours (Piehowski, 2004a). On September 7, 2004, the school board voted final approval of the sale of the RJHS building and its 16 acres for four million dollars to a local developer, who planned a 44-million-dollar project including a 60-unit senior cooperative, 10 single-family

homes, and 140 town homes (S. Webber, 2004b). The district then published the following

invitation.

> The City of Robbinsdale and Robbinsdale Area Schools cordially invites everyone to celebrate the history of the Robbinsdale Area Community Education Center (RACEC) [the former RJHS] between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 22, 2004. This event marks the sale of the building and the end of an era spanning more than eight decades of use by residents of the Robbinsdale school district. ("Robbinsdale area community," 2004)

In the late afternoon of September 22, 2004, area residents streamed into the former

RJHS building (the district's original high school) to pay tribute—middle-aged parents with

teenagers, elderly alumni with walking aids, some with portable oxygen equipment, many adults

still in their office work attire, along with a variety of former staff, students, and their parents,

many toting cameras. They walked past gold and blue balloons into the front foyer to sign

memory books by decade, some signing from the 1930s. As they took snapshots of each other in

empty classrooms being readied for the wrecking ball, words floated through the hallways. "Oh

they're big rooms though." "The first day of seventh grade, he put that paddle on the desk."

"This was typing—and chemistry was down there." "We used to have dances in here." "During

the war a lot of guys never graduated." One alum stated, "'Before the end of the day, there'll be

tears flowing'" (Piehowski, 2004b, para. 30).

After strolling through years of memories, about 600 attendees filed into the school

auditorium for a program and refreshments, as photographs of the school building and school life

over the years flashed on front-stage, oversized projection screens. Speeches by members of the

school board, school administration, and the city council followed, many declaring this a win-

win year for the school district and the City of Robbinsdale. The Robbinsdale mayor lauded the

district for listening to the people this time around. Alumni also spoke. "You could not open a

weekly paper when one third of it didn't consist of things happening here," said one member of

With shared sentiment, the school board approved only a slight change by adding some wording to the metal signage bolted to the bricks outside the front entrance of the former high school. It would now read, as it still does today: "Formerly Robbinsdale Senior High School 1956-1982."

The reason we live in Robbinsdale is because
I wanted my kids to have the same education I had.
It was the schools. That's why we live here....
It's the highest accolade you can give.
Robbinsdale resident

DATA ANALYSIS

A fact is like a sack—
it won't stand up till you've put something in it.
Edward Carr, historian

The Robbinsdale case study examined the process and effects of a 1982 school closure. If the data section served to examine and describe the closure, then data analysis becomes its dissection. Beginning in somewhat of a historical forensic social science mode, this section attempts to discern the cause of death of Robbinsdale High. Why did Robbinsdale end up as a closed high school? Shifting into a phenomenological interpretive mode, analysis then considers the strong resistance to the school's closure. Why did the decision create such a high degree of community turmoil and continue as a festering issue within the district over many years? Interwoven into the discussion are some reflections on decisions taken and suggestions of possible alternative paths.

According to historian Edward Carr (1961), "the study of history is a study of causes. The historian...continuously asks the question: Why?; and, so long as he hopes for an answer, he cannot rest" (p. 113). Noted educational historian Joel Spring (2001) likewise contended, "The most important interpretive question is 'Why?'" (p. 1), stressing, however, that among the various historical interpretive responses to the "why" question, there was really no right answer, only differing opinions based mostly on varying social and political values. The three sources of inspiration informing the "whys" of my data analysis included my view, the thoughts of interview participants, and theoretical perspectives, including previous consolidation research.

Theoretical analysis appeared as an intimidating endeavor at the outset. However, as Brookfield (2005) explained, "A theory is nothing more (or less) than a set of explanatory understandings that help us make sense of some aspect of the world" (p. 3). It serves to interpret,

explain, and make meaning of, in this case, the social and political spheres. Copious amounts of data from interviews and historical records lent themselves well to phenomenological analysis. However, understanding the community's voice in a purely descriptive interpretive mode provided limited consciousness of the effects of power. Thus, data has been interpreted within an overarching critical framework largely based on the critical concepts presented in the review of literature: (a) technical and bureaucratic rationality; (b) ideology, hegemony, legitimation; and (c) power and dominant discourse.

Data analysis, presented in two parts, incorporates insights from the "critical discussion" pieces in the previous data section but also considers their bearing on leadership. The first section defines the critical junctures in the creation of factions in the story and in the shifting locus of power throughout the changing discourse. Why was Robbinsdale High closed when all indications at the onset were that it was the one high school off-limits for closure? I analyze power through the changing school board makeup, the formation of parent coalitions, the insertion of the teachers' union, and the engagement of the panel of experts. I then consider power from larger Foucaultian (Brookfield, 2005; Foucault, 1980) discourse communities of efficiency and technical-rationality, essentially the hegemony of economic efficiency and the scientifisation of educational decision making.

The second section attempts to resolve the question of what made this school closure such a long-lasting, festering issue for the district. I argue the turmoil was the result of a perceived injustice, a disregard for history and community identity, a marginalizing and insufficient healing process, and an ingrained socioeconomic divide, both place-based and class-based.

Exploring the Nature of Power in the School-Closure Process

How did community politics and social class shape the process and the outcome of this school-consolidation drama? What were the forces and who were the players, both visible and invisible? What were the dominant hegemonic ideas—the dominant and competing discourses that played out? How did the focus of power and control shift over time? This section considers the various political, economic, social, cultural, and ideological forces influencing the unforeseen decision to close Robbinsdale High.

This school-closure case study can be best understood through a number of critical junctures appearing at opportune stages in the story, many connected to the historical geography and demography of the Robbinsdale Area Schools. When the new Robbinsdale High was constructed in 1956, although the district had recently doubled in size by incorporating large areas to its west, RHS was still the only high school in the district, located on its east side along with most residential and business development. Westward growth throughout the 1960s and 1970s, including the construction of two more high schools, brought about a symbolic east to west power shift as the district's headquarters moved from Robbinsdale to New Hope, followed by a tangible east to west power shift as the school board's composition began to reflect the district's new demographics.

Critical Juncture #1—The elections of west-siders Bill Bergquist and Myrna Marofsky to the school board following the demographic rise of the west side and its political awakening in the aftermath of the East-side Coalition's drive to close Olson Elementary.

By the 1980s, the district's east side could be characterized as a largely old middle-class community, represented by blue-collar, working-class households, while the west side could be

described as largely new middle class, represented by white-collar, professional households.

With the elections of west-siders Bill Bergquist in 1980 and Myrna Marofsky in 1981 to the

school board, in less than two years the six-member 4-2 east to west school board, which had

included two members from the City of Robbinsdale, had become a 2-4 east to west board with

no Robbinsdale representation, a board that would make the fateful decision on which high

school to close. The elections of both Bergquist and Marofsky could be interpreted as a west-

side reaction to the east side's ire from the closure of many east-side schools and its formation of

the East-side Coalition, as well as its role in the closure of Olson Elementary in early 1980.

There seemed to be a greater understanding on the part of the west side concerning the

importance of electing board members sympathetic to its interests.

There also seemed to be an underestimation of west-side political power on

Robbinsdale's part. The east side had allowed two board members to slip away in the two years

preceding the high school closure decision. Former teacher, administrator, and AHS supporter

Barb Nemer explained,

> [Robbinsdale] lost their dominance over the school district with the opening of the
> western schools. There was a change in power.   It shouldn't even be called Robbinsdale
> School District. Robbinsdale is so small. They didn't understand all these things
> happening in the seven communities, not just Robbinsdale…. The center of power of the
> district was not in Robbinsdale anymore.

Since the school board constituted the final authority on school-closure decisions, this

first critical juncture based on school board composition was of prime importance to the demise

of Robbinsdale High. However, a number of auxiliary power sources were also in play, many

clearly influencing the board during its deliberations. Among these were citizen advisory

committees, district administration, parent organizations, the teachers' union, and the fact-finding

panel of experts.

Critical Juncture #2—The failure of the superintendent to forcefully advocate a middle school pattern, the recommendation of the Grade Reorganization Committee to maintain the then current grade pattern and to close one high school, and the school board's adoption of the committee's recommendation.

Superintendent Hood had recommended on a number of occasions that the school board look into adopting a middle school concept. This would have allowed the three high schools to operate at capacity over a number of additional years with the inclusion of ninth graders. Savings would be achieved through the closure of additional elementary schools. However, the board had appointed the Grade Reorganization Committee to study various grade configurations. This committee had determined that staying with the then current K-6, 7-9, 10-12 pattern and closing a high school would save the most money, if only marginally, when compared to a middle school pattern.

The district's teaching staff advocated this scenario. Later analysis showed that under a middle school pattern, twice as many teachers would have been "displaced," having to change buildings. Committee member Joy Robb, who preferred the middle school concept, later commented, "The teachers didn't want to change the system and move ninth grade up…. The point was that people identify with their high schools. To teachers it didn't mean a thing." Upon acceptance of the committee's report, the school board adopted the maintenance of the then current grade pattern and committed to closing a high school within the year. Former Armstrong parent and teacher Ann Rest reflected 20 years later,

> There never should have been a high school closed in my opinion. There was a report from a task force that did not want ninth grade in high school. That decision was the domino that fell that led to the closing of a high school. There was that reluctance to reorganize the structure—2,200 is too big. The [lower] enrollment would have been optimal. Somehow all accepted the decision that we had to close a school. There was nobody around that spoke up and said, 'Why does it mean that?'… Damn that task force!

Critical Juncture #3—The formation of parent and school advocacy groups, their presentations to the school board, and the new middle class's insertion of a competing discourse of curricular-delivery and "quality education" to challenge the previously dominant financial discourse of the administration and the old middle class.

The administration requested that parents and staff at each school organize formal presentations, first to administrators and then to the school board, detailing the reasons their school should remain open. This led to the formation and strengthening of parent and school-advocacy groups, offering a certain level of community participation, but bearing no resemblance to the sort of participative and democratic communication within the public sphere envisioned by Habermas (Brookfield, 2005).

The presentations allowed for an increased level of parental empowerment, but in a polarizing and dissonant fashion. Administration's emphasis on financial considerations was threatening to Armstrong High given its somewhat higher operational costs. Therefore, the formation of Armstrong's parental organization brought about the insertion of a competing curricular-delivery discourse of "quality education" into a process that had been previously dominated by financial discourse.

Critical Juncture #4—The failure of the superintendent to make a firm decision and recommend just one building for closure, followed by his belated and politically unfeasible recommendation one month later to close Armstrong.

The superintendent made a conscious decision not to take sides in the "costs versus quality education" debate when it came to his recommendation on which high school to close. Although recommending that RHS stay open, he left the final decision to the board on whether to

save more money and close AHS, or to save the building constructed for flexible-modular

programming and close CHS. By administrators' own admission, they believed there was

sufficient support on the board to close CHS in the beginning. There seemed to be less

intransigence among the CHS supporters. Board members Fuhrmann and Webber were not from

the CHS area, and board member Olson, who was from the CHS area, had even suggested a

compromise at one point, allowing CHS to close for at least one year.

Had the superintendent made a firm recommendation to close CHS, it was likely that the

board would have avoided a deadlock. The superintendent's non-decision resulted in the de-

legitimation of the administrative decision-making apparatus. When the superintendent then

belatedly recommended that AHS be close, it swayed none of the AHS supporters on the board

and likely caused swing-voter Webber to dig further into the CHS trenches. Recalling the

decision-making process, former teacher and finance director Tom Walerius underscored,

> The single critical event was the superintendent and administration did not have a single recommendation on which school to close. Pick the school—period. Because then the board had to wrestle with it and it became totally political…. Now rather than one school area being upset with you, the whole school district is upset with you.

Board member Myrna Marofsky later hypothesized on Hood's non-recommendation, attributing

it to his knowledge that board member Joselyn supported Armstrong. "Leroy respected Gary

[Joselyn] tremendously. Leroy didn't want to take a stand against his friends."

Critical Juncture #5—The passage of the school board's proposal to close CHS, its

defeat on the final definitive closure vote, and the ensuing lengthy deadlock on the board over

whether to close AHS or CHS.

Board member Webber had originally voted to propose CHS for closure. After public

hearings and lobbying from CHS supporters, Webber had changed his mind and declined to

support the closure of CHS on the final vote. The board became deadlocked, and CHS then held the disadvantage of being the only high school to have fulfilled the public hearings legally required prior to a school closure. Throughout the deadlock, CHS remained the only high school that could have been closed at any time by a simple majority board vote, whereas a proposal to close either of the other buildings would have set the process back by a number of weeks while the required public hearings took place. The AHS bloc on the board understood this, held fast, and waited for the shortening window of time to pressure just one CHS supporter to switch sides. As the months wore on, the deadlock resulted in the de-legitimation of the representative political decision-making apparatus.

Board member Webber in later reflection stated, "If I hadn't changed my vote…people in the Cooper area were resigned to it—probably would have accepted it." In concurrence, board member Fuhrmann remarked, "On the first vote to close CHS I should have voted to close it. The longer you take to make a decision the longer the upset it." Community newspaper reporter Shirley Nygaard agreed. "If they'd closed CHS it would have gone away peacefully. Everything points to not closing RHS."

Critical Juncture #6—The RHS-CHS alliance.

Although not facing any immediate danger of school-board action to close RHS, the parent advocacy groups of RHS joined forces with the parent advocacy group of CHS in a move designed to send a message to the AHS bloc on the school board—if the AHS bloc would not recant and close AHS this year, the combined voting power of the RHS and CHS attendance-area alliance would elect new board members who would close AHS next year. This move likely caused board members in the CHS bloc to dig in further. Absent this action, one CHS board

member may have given up and voted to close CHS. Board member Fuhrmann might have been persuaded to join the AHS bloc in voting to close CHS. Being from the RHS area, Fuhrmann could have stated that closing CHS was his second choice, but closing no school was his third choice. He may have voted to close CHS in order to guarantee the million-dollar annual savings, searching for other economies in the district budget to offset the extra expense of operating AHS. Board member Webber might have done the same.

AHS supporter and former board member Gary Joselyn later reflected, "It was a big political blunder when RHS lined up with CHS." Former administrator Barb Nemer elaborated,

> [RHS] didn't understand how strong the western alliance was. They thought by aligning with CHS, that would show the three school board members. RHS made the wrong choice. They aligned with CHS. They didn't understand the educational philosophy of those three board members.

Critical Juncture #7—The proposal by teacher Don Blore to guarantee the million-dollar savings by creating and staffing two hypothetical high schools and waiting for May's newly-elected school board to assign the schools to their respective buildings during the summer months.

As time was running out for the school board to meet the requirements of the teachers' contract in regards to school closures and re-staffing, teacher Don Blore proposed the creation and staffing of two hypothetical schools, letting a popular vote and a new school board, perhaps with the addition of a seventh member, make the final decision as to which high school building to close. This proposal diminished the sense of urgency that again may have convinced just one CHS supporter on the board to switch sides and close CHS in order to guarantee the million-dollar savings. It also caused the AHS bloc to reconsider a proposal it had previously rejected— asking an arbitration panel to decide the matter.

Critical Juncture #8—The teachers' union's threat of labor action if the board would not hire a panel of experts to decide the school-closure issue.

The teachers' union insisted on a quick resolution, forcing an early spring school-closing decision by threatening labor action if the board would not employ a fact-finding panel of experts to break the deadlock. Keen to avoid labor disruptions, the board complied. "If the teachers' union hadn't been so adamant, the board might have been able to duck it. They were being pushed by the teachers too hard. [The teachers] were relentless," former cabinet member Gary DeFrance later commented. The dilemma would now be resolved by a kind of symbolic judicial justice rather than by Blore's vision of popular political justice at the polls. Deferring to an expert panel was also a proposal to which the AHS bloc on the board could agree, given a certain AHS loss at the polls if the Blore proposal had been enacted.

Critical Juncture #9—The board's engagement of a panel of experts to decide which of the three high schools should close, in conjunction with the CHS bloc's agreement to the insertion of the AHS bloc's curricular-delivery interests in the panel's charge.

The board's lengthy deadlock had resulted in a de-legitimation of its capacity as a representative political decision-making apparatus. The board perhaps saw an opportunity for re-legitimation by the engagement of a neutral third party. The fact-finding panel of experts would include an educator to represent the "quality education" side of the argument, a banker to represent the "financial" side, and a neutral judge to round out the three-member panel.

Most significantly, the CHS bloc on the board agreed to include the curricular-delivery interests of the AHS bloc in the panel's charge. As the panel was deliberating, it would now consider "one overriding mandate"—that one of the two remaining buildings would house a

flexible-modular program and the other a traditional program. Such a mandate almost guaranteed the survival of AHS since it had been built specifically for flexible-modular programming. This was a significant change from the citizen-developed criteria for school closures which had awarded very little weight to unique programming.

Interview participants from all sides seemed to recognize this action as one of the more important developments in the final outcome. RHS supporter Barb Southward later reflected, "They put all three [schools] in the hat rather than just two. We got outfoxed. We were up against astute, politically professional people—we were asleep. It never occurred to us that RHS could close." Pinpointing the pivotal event in the story, AHS supporter Barb Nemer likewise stated without hesitation, "Hiring the panel—they should never have let it go to the panel. That was the death knell—the panel." Former administrator Gary DeFrance later commented,

> Once the board decided to hire the panel, we knew the hand writing was on the wall. It was probably going to be RHS—because of the charge…. Throughout all this, I come back to some board members had more input into that charge. The AHS board contingent kind of out-snookered them.

Critical Juncture #10—The panel's recommendation and school board follow-through on closing Robbinsdale High.

The fact-finding panel likely saw the recommendation of an RHS closure as a sort of compromise on the months-long argument over whether AHS or CHS should close. Replacing the previous financial and quality-education discourses, the panel justified its findings in a discourse of physical facility, but tied into curricular delivery. RHS was an older, "less attractive, functional or flexible building," with less modern equipment. Board members Webber and Olson, who had previously voted as a bloc along with board member Fuhrmann, abandoned Fuhrmann by voting for the closure of Robbinsdale High. Fuhrmann in later reflection, stated,

"The other five board members said, 'We will abide by the panel's recommendation—enough is enough.' People just got tired of it all."

Commenting on his vote to close RHS, board member Joselyn recalled, "I said, 'You don't want that panel out there—because they'll close RHS.' There was no other way out of the impasse…. The panel came out and looked at the facts. I honestly was not for closing RHS." In later reflection on her vote and why the board chose RHS for closure in the end, board member Myrna Marofsky explained,

> You had to get out of the pain. I was a young mother really caring about education. It made no sense—this was about a building. I was emotionally attached to education at Armstrong, not the building. The panel said, "Oldest school." I said, "I'm tired of this thing. At least Armstrong didn't close—I can live in my community."

Other critical junctures that could be considered were those that prevented supporters from reopening Robbinsdale High following its closure. Among these was the delay in releasing the panel's recommendation until after the candidate filing deadline for the school board election. Had the recommendation's release not been delayed, it was likely that RHS supporters could have elected a 4-3 majority to the new school board. Instead they were obliged to rely on newly-elected board members from the CHS area to support them in a reopening bid, support which in the end was never extended. The failure of the reverse referendum rendered a further setback, while the ruling of the state's Supreme Court drove the final nail into the coffin.

Reviewing the three main players—the administration, the school board, and the panel of experts—and tracking the changing discourse clarifies how the west side and the new middle class won this school-closure contest. The administration used technical knowledge to disguise the political situation, claiming it would offer a neutral and focused school-closure decision based primarily on the district's financial and budgetary constraints. Administration favored an

Armstrong closure. It hesitated in its recommendation, however, and deferred to the board.

The school board countered with broader curricular and pedagogical considerations, inserting the interests of the new middle class in the discussion and changing the discourse to one of the "quality education" offered by flexible-modular programming. The board had proposed a Cooper closure before its deadlock. But in the definitive vote, the board stalemated and deferred to the panel of experts.

The panel of experts claimed neutrality in the absence of any emotional attachment. It emphasized physical plant tied into curricular delivery, given the board's desire that there be one flexible-modular school and one traditional school. The panel deliberated and rendered the final decision. It recommended a Robbinsdale closure as a sort of third-option compromise to break the CHS-AHS deadlock.

In the final analysis, though, the decision to select Robbinsdale High for closure over the others did not primarily rest on financial, curricular-delivery, or physical-facility interests. The closure of any of the high schools would have saved about one million dollars annually, it could never have been proven whether a flexible-modular or traditional program was superior, and with all three high schools built within less than 15 years of each other, none could have really been considered outdated. Instead, the outcome was largely based on the political power of the west. The west side had prepared for the politics of economic scarcity by assuring themselves sufficient representation on the school board in advance. Although lacking a majority on the board, they were able to hold off the concerted attacks by administration, CHS parents, and RHS parents just long enough and to then play the critical-juncture cards in their favor.

Focusing analysis on administrators, board members, expert panel members, teachers, or parents, might still however, offer a somewhat incomplete understanding of Robbinsdale High's

closure. Foucault's (1980) critical understanding of power, for example, looked beyond legal and state apparatuses, depicting it as never in the hands of any one person (or group) to possess and exercise over others. Instead, power was all-pervasive, omni-present, and anonymously machine-like—"a machine in which everyone is caught," and yet one "that no one owns" (p. 156).

For Foucault, power functioned in somewhat of an ideological sense, inserting itself into *everyone's* actions and attitudes through wide-spread, net-like discourse communities, or sets of concepts, social practices, and conventions that operated somewhat like a paradigm or worldview. Discourse communities helped to sort out what knowledge was most important and true while simultaneously supporting existing power structures (Brookfield, 2005). Perhaps no one, and yet everyone, could be implicated in the death of Robbinsdale High School.

In this school-closure struggle, a dominant Foucaultian discourse community of economic efficiency was in play, one to which all sides seemed to belong. From the beginning, all sides appeared to concur that, for the sake of efficiency, a high school should be closed, even when other only marginally less efficient options were available. All sides were entranced by this ideology of economic efficiency which had been elevated to mythical status, functioning as a hegemonic force or as a sort of religion, its practitioners willingly ready to offer one of their cherished high schools as a sacrifice to appease this god of economic efficiency.

Here, one is compelled to return to the deliberations of the Grade Reorganization Committee, a committee with widespread community and staff representation and one whose recommendation set in motion the decision to commit to the closure of one district high school. The job of the Grade Reorganization Committee, as instructed by district leadership, was to study whether staying with the then current grade pattern and closing a high school would save

more money, (or be more efficient), or whether moving to a middle school pattern or other elementary configuration by closing additional elementary or junior highs would produce more savings.

In other words, operating in a sort of corporate-managerialist mindset, one of district leaders' top priorities was to ensure that school buildings be as economically efficient and productive as possible. The committee, in willing compliance, determined that closing a high school would render the most economically efficient and productive use of district physical plant—more efficient than moving to a middle school pattern. It was more efficient by one million dollars over five years—or about $200,000 annually.

As later analysis would show, however, this represented a small figure in the district's overall budget. A slight over- or under-estimation of one or the other of these savings calculations would have brought the efficiencies of the middle school and high school closure scenarios to a wash. Additionally, since the administration would later determine that the operating cost differential between the most expensive and least expensive high school was about $300,000 per year, choosing the wrong high school for closure would have rendered no additional efficiencies when compared to the middle school pattern.

Nevertheless, the committee, the administration, the board, and, it would seem, the whole district approved of the high school closure option due it its purported efficiency. Although some limited dissension did apparently exist within the committee and the community, there was little written evidence or letters to the editor arguing against the high school closure option, apparently due to its efficient nature. This limited historical record offers further evidence of the hegemonic force surrounding this discourse of economic efficiency.

Within public education, Rizvi (1989) observed, "Efficiency is a goal, the preference for

which over other goals…has to be argued for in specifically moral and political terms. Efficiency is, moreover, not an ideal which is self-evidently worth pursuing—especially when it conflicts with other human interests" (p. 214). Boyd (1979) pointed out that public-sector policy making generally placed more emphasis on criteria of consensus and compromise, distinguishing it from the private sector, where criteria of efficiency were more likely to be utilized. Even Governor Al Quie of Minnesota, in his 1979 speech to educational leaders, urged them to consider the "'long-term *social and emotional costs* [emphasis added] as well as financial costs'" (p. I-4) in their downsizing decisions.

It would seem that rather than gravitating solely toward economic efficiency in decision making, educational leaders should consider political and social harmony as an important and necessary financial cost (or opportunity cost) of running important social institutions such as schools. A discourse of economic efficiency was indeed the precipitating factor that eventually led to the death of Robbinsdale High. It would seem that the district's overall long-term health may have been better served by adopting the middle school concept and waiting for future leadership to revisit the high school closure option.

A larger Foucaultian "regime of truth" guided the next steps along the path to Robbinsdale High's demise. According to Foucault, overlapping discourses formed larger regimes of truth linked with the systems of power which produced and sustained them (Brookfield, 2005). These regimes of truth were the dominant ideas and frameworks of analysis that shaped how the world was viewed, helping decide which discourses would be allowed.

> Each society has its régime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980, p. 131)

For District 281, science provided the "techniques and procedures" employed in achieving a true verdict on which of the three high schools to close. District administration embarked on an expert-oriented, technical-rational decision-making process. This technical-rational model represented positivisitic and empirical ways of knowing, a kind of scientifisation of educational decision making which claimed neutrality and objectivity as it limited itself to "the facts," mostly quantitative in nature.

The basis for this technical-rational model, the school-closure criteria, had been assembled four years earlier when administration presented the general format and content of the criteria to a committee of residents who were asked to help formulate the final product. The numeric scoring of buildings through weighted school-closure criteria was a model that had been advanced within the corpus of professional literature. Boyd (1983) noted that within educational circles at the time, "to minimize the controversial aspects of school closings, school officials usually try to emphasize the use of neutral, technical criteria in selecting schools to be closed" (p. 258).

Technical-rational objectivity enjoyed support from a wide array of district stakeholders. During the school board elections of the early 1980s, most candidates had agreed that the district's school-closure criteria were an asset to the closure process, providing an objective method to decision making. The community newspaper reported that during the closure of Robbinsdale Junior High, administrators had used this rating system "to objectively determine which school should be closed." When unhappy parents, such as Lee Elementary's parents, learned the criteria had pointed to their school for closure, they still seemed comfortable with the technical-rational process, arguing that administrators just needed to "assess the buildings in a more objective way" when awarding their building its respective points.

In like manner, during the high school closure selection process, the technical-rational model was highly valued by all parent groups. As the process wore on, all sides called for even more facts and objectivity to achieve a definitive conclusion. Robbinsdale supporters insisted that administration use "measureable, objective data" to rate the schools. They believed the school-closure criteria represented "an objective logical process" (Parents Action Committee, personal communication, October 5, 1981). Cooper supporters lamented those residents who were seemingly trying to replace "logic and rationale" with "emotion" (Patterson, 1981). They insisted that residents "look at the facts and not the unsubstantiated opinions that are disguised to look like facts" ("Who needs media center," 1981). Armstrong supporters lauded the panel of experts for being "unbiased" and avoiding "emotional issues" (Adolfson, 1982). The panel's expertise had allowed it to "evaluate the facts…and make an objective decision" (Gilbert, 1982). Even the teachers' union officials were on record for decision making to be "as objective as possible."

Apple (1990) described how science had come to perform a legitimating or justificatory function within education. Legitimation provided justification of action, with the intent of making the action more socially acceptable. In their use of the technical-rational, scientific model and their claims to expert knowledge, members of District 281's administration were engaging in a legitimatory exercise. They understood that science and expertise carried legitimatory weight.

Theorists such as Apple (1990), however, questioned these inclinations of educational administrators to reduce very complicated problems to the observable and measurable in an attempt to solve them through scientific procedures of numbers and formulas. When educational leaders defined decision making as neutral, rational, and linear, and they translated complex

educational and valuative issues into mere "puzzles to be solved by…technical expertise" (p. 119), it resulted in impoverished decision making by missing the broader social, political, and cultural contexts of education. Often technical-rational measures were employed to disguise the political nature of decision making.

The dominant financial discourse of District 281's administration, for example, lent itself well to technical-rational quantitative analysis, helping to disguise the political and social considerations in the divide between the east side and the west side. The technical-rational model, however, was unable to produce a solution for administration on which high school to recommend for closure, even in face of the continued need to confront the district's economic crisis. Although the model acknowledged the location of Robbinsdale High as the only high school on the east side, it failed to produce a result between the lower operating costs of Cooper High and the alternative educational capacity of Armstrong High.

Having studied school closures and consolidation over a number of years, Boyd (1983) noted, "At the heart of the politics and management of declining public services is the question of who will bear the immediate and long-term costs of cutbacks in these services…. Whose schools will be closed" (p. 255)? In District 281, the school-closure selection issue was clearly a political problem that required a political solution, not a technical problem in need of a technical-rational fix. Attempting to apply a technical solution to a political problem was the second most important factor contributing to the death of Robbinsdale High.

The technical-rational criteria, heavily weighted toward efficiency and measurable financial data, were threating to Armstrong High. This contributed to the deadlock on the board, which eventually sent the issue to the panel of experts, who in turn recommended the closure of Robbinsdale High. Superintendent Hood had set out to use the technical-rational model to spare

Robbinsdale and close Armstrong. But the empirical, fact-based neutrality and objectivity of technical-rationality gave him the opposite result. Had the district based its school-closure selection on the basis of criteria of compromise rather than on technical-rational criteria, it is likely that Cooper High would have been closed instead. Cooper lacked both the political base of Armstrong and the historical background and neighborhood characteristics of Robbinsdale. Under political compromise, each area of the district then would probably have ended up losing one secondary building.

Robbinsdale had already lost Robbinsdale Junior High. Under political compromise, the Cooper area would lose Cooper High School, but Hosterman Junior High, just a few blocks from Cooper, would move into the Cooper High building, renamed Cooper Junior High with some added alternative programs as a concession for the loss of the senior high. A few years later, as declining enrollment warranted, the Armstrong area would lose Plymouth Junior High, whose students would attend Cooper Junior High just two miles away. This would leave the district with one pair of junior and senior highs within two miles of each other in the west and north (Armstrong Senior and Cooper Junior), along with a second pair of junior and senior highs within two miles of each other in the east and south (Robbinsdale Senior and Sandburg Junior). The attendance areas under this scenario would achieve the socio-economic attendance-area balance desired by the administration and school board.

Understanding the Long-Lasting Community Turmoil

"It was the birth of an issue that won't die until everybody who remembers it does too" (Rosengren, 2002, p. 12A), stated one Robbinsdale resident, commemorating the 20th anniversary of Robbinsdale High's closure. Listening to the voice of the community both

through the older historical record and the transcripts of more recent interviews, this second

section considers the strong resistance to the school's closure. Why did the decision create such

a relatively high degree of community turmoil and continue as a long-lasting and festering issue

within District 281 over many years? Why did the legacy of closing Robbinsdale High,

according to one teacher, "kill us at every turn" over decades? It is argued that the discord was

the result of a perceived injustice, a disregard for history and community identity, a

marginalizing and insufficient healing process, and an ingrained socioeconomic divide, both

place-based and class-based.

Some might argue that the contention associated with the closure of a school is more

indicative of the kind of grief associated with the loss of a close friend or relative. To describe a

community's reaction to a school closure, Smith (1984) used Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief

when facing the death of a loved one. Applying these stages to the Robbinsdale case study, it

could be contended that "denial" was found in the RHS community's refusal to concede the

validity of the reasons cited for closing their school. They firmly believed they could overturn

the decision. In the "rage and anger" stage, board members and administrators became personal

targets for the anger, including the filing of legal action.

In the "bargaining" stage, Robbinsdale residents threatened and eventually carried

through on a referendum recall vote in order to create what they called "a climate of

negotiation." They also offered the Miller Plan, keeping all three high schools open in a 7-12

organizational form. In the "depression" stage, residents seemed to fall into the grips of a

motivation crisis, voting against any further tax referenda proposals. In the "acceptance" stage,

many years later, residents reluctantly accepted the reopening of the building to first house the

TLC and Spanish Immersion programs and later Robbinsdale Middle School. As Smith (1984)

stated, "Only with time will people reach the point at which they no longer feel unhappy" (p. 31).

Compared with other school-closure discord portrayed in the literature from the 1970s and 1980s, however, the level of intensity and the extended time-period that followed Robbinsdale High's closure seemed to place it out of bounds of an explanation resting primarily on the natural grieving process. Rather than applying a psychological interpretation, the long-lasting turmoil would be better understood on social, political, and cultural grounds.

The intensity and longevity of the reaction from the Robbinsdale community was rooted in part on the perceived injustice of the decision to close RHS. The words "injustice" and "unfairness" were prevalent in the public written record as well as in interview participants' comments. "What drove us was the injustice of it," asserted one Robbinsdale resident over 20 years later. This sense of injustice partially stemmed from a feeling that Robbinsdale residents had founded the district, built the schools in the east, then even supported the construction of schools further west, but were now being pushed aside. Also fueling the sense of injustice was a feeling of betrayal and of empty promises. Even years later, interview participants still perceived this sentiment of betrayal, recalling the "gentlemen's agreement" that "they wouldn't close RHS." It was "a slap in the face" to residents, leaving them feeling "offended, betrayed—angry."

Perhaps the most important factor feeding the sense of injustice, however, was the feeling that the pain of school closures had not been equally shared. Most of the school closings had been concentrated in and around Robbinsdale. "They systematically closed down all the buildings in our side of the district," stated one resident. These "knockout punches" represented "discrimination against the eastern section of District 281," an area that was being "disenfranchised," "victimized," and denied "fair and equal treatment." Robbinsdale residents

were the "sacrificial lambs" for a school board whose actions were viewed as "taking the 'Robbinsdale' out of District 281." Residents appealed to their "Constitutional rights," "the democratic process," and "the will of the people." One letter to the editor summed up the sense of injustice.

> The people of Robbinsdale started the school district and laid the foundation for the district. One by one, we allowed the communities, who form the present district, to join our independent school district… For now these communities, thinking that they are the ones who know it all…want to run the school district….
> When the balance of schools is corrected, the unjust mistake rectified, then we will have a school district for all….
> I shall continue….until justice prevails. (Dinius, 1982b)

In addition to the sense of injustice, the issue of "community"—including community history, tradition, and identity—was fundamental to the intense, long-lived resistance. Boyd's (1982b) study of suburban areas showed that in some suburbs, "people have neighbors, but neighbors do not add up to neighborhoods" (p. 92). This was not the case in Robbinsdale which had become more of a "small town that happened to be in suburbia." The written record and interview participants described the "City" of Robbinsdale as "a good clean town," "an old-fashioned town," and "'a little bit country.'" It was "a small town" with "a social structure, a community structure." A sense of community, defined as "'an awareness of simultaneous 'belonging' of both society and place'" (Livingstone cited in Williams, 1998, p. 71), was prevalent in Robbinsdale.

As more of a small town, Robbinsdale also exhibited the small-town community attachment to school often found in rural communities, where, with a basketball team, marching band, and other trimmings, "the high school was the one place where the shared activities of students, parents, and townspeople had been institutionalized" providing "a community identity for almost everyone in the school district" (Reynolds, 1999, p. 242). RHS was described as "the

hometown school," "the center of the community." "Robbinsdale [was] Robbinsdale High School." "The school and the city were one."

It was likely that the lengthy history and rich traditions of the Robbinsdale locale and its school also added to the strength and "deep roots" of this community-school attachment. Robbinsdale was "the birthplace of the district," "the original 281," whose "parents and grandparents had built these schools," with Robbinsdale High being "the flagship of the fleet" or the "mother ship." RHS was a "lustrous pearl" with a "rich heritage" and a "tradition of excellence" evident in its "winning football team" and the "endless curtain calls" at "nationally recognized," standing-room-only musical productions.

This loss of local culture, history, and tradition through the closure of Robbinsdale's schools all translated into a larger feeling of loss of identity, on the personal level for certain, but more especially on the community level, further amplifying the intensity of the resistance. According to Peshkin (1982), in communities with "integrity" (or feelings of community completeness, wholeness, or unity), like Robbinsdale, in addition to serving an educative purpose, the school represented community autonomy, vitality, integration, and tradition—the school functioned as a reservoir of symbolic meaning and community identity. One resident described RHS as helping to "shape and give direction and joy to life." It offered "that undefinable feeling and spirit that goes with having a high school within the community." The closure of the town "shrine" of Robbinsdale High was viewed as "community genocide" and "an assault on a community's identity." The closure "had robbed them of their past."

Robbinsdale residents likely viewed the closure of RHS and other east-side schools as a suburban attack on their small-town culture, a culture which they more highly valued than the alternative of moving their students away to some supposedly superior "high school of the

future" in a neighboring community. The school-closing battle was viewed as one of tradition and history versus the future—small town versus suburbia. In this struggle, the suburban future had won out. Contemplating Robbinsdale's intense and long-lived rebellion to the closure of Robbinsdale High, one interview participant summed it up. "The whole thing was the culture of a small town and betrayal. It had nothing to do with buildings and education. It goes all the way back to the first football game where AHS beat RHS."

A marginalizing and inadequate healing process was also partly to blame for the continued dissension. It seemed that district leadership was not as actively engaged as it could have been in an effective effort of healing and redressing of grievances. At times, through the eyes of the east, it even appeared that the school board was actively promoting further division. Perhaps foremost on this list was the perception that the newly elected board members from the Cooper attendance area had turned on Robbinsdale. Board members Norby and Schaefer, elected with considerable Robbinsdale support, declined to endorse the Miller Plan of 7-12 high schools and the reopening of RHS. They had "sold us down the river," according to one resident. Also likely viewed as somewhat spiteful was the board's assertion that the first referendum recall petition was invalid due to some names being printed rather than cursive or because two names were included on one line.

Untimely board actions related to the sale of school properties in Robbinsdale, while nerves were still raw, likely added even more fuel to the fire. These included approving an appraisal of the Robbinsdale High building for possible sale immediately after receiving the recall petition, authorizing an appraisal of Mielke Field to prepare for its possible sale immediately after endorsing SOKO to fight the recall, and asking the City of Robbinsdale to inform the district whether it would prefer that Robbinsdale Senior High or Junior High be sold.

Within this sense of marginalization, east-siders claimed that they were "repeatedly being stepped on," that they had "run out of cheeks to turn," that they had "lost everything," and that "some of the wounds may never heal." According to one resident, "The district doesn't care about the people of Robbinsdale."

On a wider societal scale, the failure of the recall referendum, the subsequent failure to elect Robbinsdale sympathizers in the following school board election, and the Supreme Court's ruling that Robbinsdale High had been lawfully closed all added to this sense of east-side marginalization. Robbinsdale had been defeated in three strikes, failing in the economic, political, and judicial arenas. According to one former RHS student, "They tried every avenue you can try in American society. It underscored their lack of power. They felt completely toothless—marginalized." A former superintendent summarized, "It was a total defeat—like asking them to never forgive."

The most important dynamic at play, however, in the high degree of community turmoil and the continued festering tension following the closure of Robbinsdale High could be found in the district's ingrained socioeconomic divide, both place-based and class-based. By the end of the 1970s, District 281 stretched across three different suburban belts including all or parts of seven different municipalities. Over the years it had developed into a demographically unusual district—somewhat urban, with its range of social classes; mostly suburban, with its location on the border of Minneapolis and its lack of an inner city or concentrated commercial and industrial base; and somewhat rural, with the small-town atmosphere of Robbinsdale proper.

The district had grown into delineated community areas that represented, on the one hand, working-class and old middle-class households (mostly in the north and east), and on the other hand, professional and new middle-class households (mostly in the south and west)—a

demographic event better known as the east-west divide. The attendance-area boundaries drawn as the last high school was constructed in 1970 reflected these socioeconomic delineations and facilitated the development of place-based and class-based school identities. The lengthy school-closure decision-making process that included parent-staff school presentations became "a regular civil war" that raised the temperature level and promoted dissonance, polarization, and solidification of these existing but latent socioeconomic cleavages.

Accusations proliferated on the east side that the decision to close Robbinsdale High smacked of favoritism rooted in geography and class—place-based and class-based, east versus west, old middle class versus new middle class, rich versus poor. "I truly resent someone in Plymouth (a relative newcomer to 281) reaping the benefits of our struggle," state one east-sider. In the eyes of the east, west-side residents had "more clout" because they were in the "higher tax brackets." The school board had shown "partiality toward the upper crust" and had bowed "to the monied area of the district." District leaders had gone "for the rich—too bad for the poor."

Ten to 20 years after the closure, two former students, one from RHS and one from AHS, and two district residents, one from the east side and one from the west side, commented on the longevity of the district turmoil. Former RHS student Chuck Webber reflected,

> It's the socioeconomic thing. A lot of what has driven the furor is that it was perceived as the haves versus the have-nots. AHS was in a wealthy area. It had more money—money and the might to have their way. RHS couldn't afford to buy justice. AHS just bought this off. It was the wealthy school able to get its way, and Robbinsdale was left in the dust again. It does have a lot more to do with the haves and have-nots than just a high school closing. The very fact it has lasted as long as it has is evidence that it is more than just closing a high school. It's viewed as a socioeconomic injustice. Robbinsdale was picked on and lost in the end because RHS didn't have the money and hence the political strength that AHS had. That is the sort of sentiment that bothers people. The school closing was particularly powerful and attention grabbing. It was symbolic of feelings that people had had for a long time…. We're getting screwed because we don't have the money to fight this.

Recalling the parent battles between cost and alternative education, former AHS student Liz

Olson explained,

> Somebody would say, "That's the wealthy side of the district and that's why they're willing to spend the money, because they've got the money." It was an unspoken part of the battle…. There was a sense of resentment about the entitlement that AHS had. A lot of AHS people never went to Robbinsdale…. America's dirty little secret about class—that's a big reason that it's still an issue. There was a lot of class warfare there.

Barb Southward, Robbinsdale resident and former member of the RHS parent group, noted, "The schools closed were usually in the modest, lower income areas of the district….A district class war began which remains to this day" (Southward, 1992). Myrna Marofsky, Plymouth resident and former supporter of AHS on the school board, later remarked, "The haves and the have-nots overlay the whole thing—people in pain. It provided a forum, somebody who could be an enemy. It became bigger than a high school closing. It was about—'my life, what the cards dealt me, jealousy.'"

Looking back over 20 years later and comparing District 281's high school consolidation effort with those of other suburban districts, Superintendent Mack commented, "Class lines that were much more clearly identified…led to greater polarization. Classism was in the way of finding a reasonable solution…. The issues of class are still a haunt today."

CONCLUSION

Unlearn yesterday and invent tomorrow.
Michael Berger

Summary of Research

In their study of Seattle-area school consolidation, Weatherley et al. (1983) wrote, "School closure decisions are important to study because they test the boundaries between politics and management and between the school system and the local government and community in which it resides" (p. 11). Historical research into the 1982 closure of District 281's Robbinsdale High in suburban Minneapolis showed similar import, with the added dynamic of a conflict pitting the old middle class on the district's east side against the new middle class on its west side. The historical reconstruction and critical analytical deconstruction of this case revealed a complex story. Digging into the district's past, with the micro-level infusion of Habermas' (1975) crisis tendencies, this dissertation presented the death of Robbinsdale High through the following historical narrative.

As the baby-boom generation of students began to exit the public school system during the 1970s, a decline in enrollment, a reduction in state financial aid, and a period of high national inflation prompted an economic crisis within District 281. District leaders turned to school consolidation as one of the means of addressing this crisis. An ideology of economic efficiency elevated to mythical status and acting as a hegemonic force led district leaders and residents to commit to the closure of one of their three high schools rather than move to a politically safer middle school configuration.

Under the legitimatory control of science functioning as a regime of truth, district leaders employed a technical-rational decision making model based on expert power, quantification, and

claims of objectivity and neutrality to select the one high school to be closed. District residents

also supported this model—formed largely from criteria of efficiency rather than criteria of

compromise. As an extension of this technical-rational process, administrators requested that

parents and staff at each high school organize formal presentations, first to administrators and

then to the school board, detailing the reasons their school should remain open. This attempt at

participative democracy run amok led to the strengthening of parent and school advocacy groups,

allowing for an increased level of parental empowerment, but in a polarizing and dissonant

fashion given that these parent groups reflected the east-versus-west socioeconomic zones of a

demographically divided district.

Both the administration and east-side Robbinsdale and Cooper High parents emphasized

financial considerations within the technical-rational criteria, threatening west-side Armstrong

High parents, given their school's somewhat higher operational cost. Therefore, the formation of

Armstrong's parental-staff advocacy group brought about the insertion of a competing curricular-

delivery discourse of flexible-modular "quality education" into a process previously dominated

by financial discourse. Armstrong was the only high school offering the "alternative"

programming of flex-mod. Although all sides placed great faith in neutral, factual, and objective

outlooks from the start, it was impossible for these to calm the underlying forces as the battle

lines were drawn—east versus west, old middle class versus new middle class, costs versus

quality education.

The technical-rational model was unable to produce a solution for administration on

which high school to recommend to the board for closure, even in face of the continuing need to

confront the district's economic crisis. Although the model acknowledged the location of

Robbinsdale High as the only high school on the district's far-east side, it failed to produce a

result between the lower operating costs of Cooper High and the alternative educational distinctiveness of Armstrong High. The superintendent recommended that Robbinsdale High remain open, passing the fates of Armstrong and Cooper to the school board. This non-decision led to the de-legitimation of the technical-rational model, extending the district's economic crisis into the first phase of a rationality crisis, a rationality crisis in professional administrative expertise.

Although the district had originated on the east side, westward growth and development throughout the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a tangible east to west power shift as school board composition began to reflect the district's new demographics. With the 1980 and 1981 elections of two west-siders to the board in the aftermath of the east side's drive to close the west side's Olson Elementary, in less than two years the six-member 4-2 east to west school board, which had included two members from the City of Robbinsdale, had become a 2-4 east to west board with no Robbinsdale representation, a board that was about to make the fateful decision on which high school to close.

Lacking a majority due to a last-minute defection by one board member, but bolstered by the two newer members from the west side, Armstrong supporters on the board resisted the concerted pressure of administrators, who belatedly admitted they preferred an Armstrong closure. This three-member Armstrong bloc on the board successfully fended off the attacks of Cooper and Robbinsdale parents over a period of months. The board remained deadlocked 3-3 over whether to close Cooper or Armstrong. The school board's inability to end the stalemate resulted in the de-legitimation of the representative political decision-making apparatus and pushed the district into the second phase of a rationality crisis, now one within the legislative arena of the school board.

On the insistence of the teachers' union, the board agreed to the restoration of technical-rationality in the form of a symbolic judicial framework—a fact-finding panel of experts who would study all the evidence, listen to an encore performance of the parent-staff presentations, and then, after careful deliberation, render a verdict on which of the three high schools to close. The Armstrong bloc on the board, which had previously rejected the idea of the panel, was motivated to accept the proposal following the formation of the Robbinsdale-Cooper parents' coalition and its vow to defeat Armstrong supporters in the May school board elections. As a condition to their acceptance of the panel, however, Armstrong board members insisted on inserting the west side's curricular-delivery interests in the panel's charge. One high school would house a flexible-modular program and one a traditional program.

Such a mandate almost guaranteed the survival of Armstrong since it had been built specifically for flexible-modular programming. This mandate represented a significant change from the citizen-developed technical-rational criteria for school closures which had awarded very little weight to unique programming. The board then formally voted for the closure of all three high schools, awaiting the panel's written decision on which two high schools to reopen.

The fact-finding panel of experts likely saw the recommendation of Robbinsdale High for closure as a sort of compromise in the months-long argument over whether Armstrong or Cooper should close. Replacing the previous financial and quality-education discourses, the panel justified its findings in a discourse of physical facility, but tied to curricular delivery. Robbinsdale was an older, "less attractive, functional or flexible building," with less modern equipment. The board, with the exception of one member from the Robbinsdale attendance area, followed through without delay upon receipt of the panel's written recommendation, reopening Cooper and Armstrong and leaving Robbinsdale High closed.

The board's attempt at re-legitimation through the technical-rationality of the panel had produced a contradictory effect. The district now faced a full-blown legitimation crisis, in spite of its apparent and yet belated economic-crisis management success in downsizing from three to two high schools. The inability to hold the vanishing panel of experts accountable, as well as the perceived injustice of the Robbinsdale High verdict, guaranteed the illegitimacy of the decision amidst accusations of socioeconomic favoritism—within three years, the school board had closed three of the four schools located in the City of Robbinsdale, the historical heart of the district.

The board's delay in releasing the panel's recommendation until after the filing deadline for school board candidates had deprived Robbinsdale supporters of the opportunity to elect a 4-3 majority to the new school board that May and reopen Robbinsdale High. Instead they were obliged to vote for board members from the Cooper attendance area and then rely on these newly-elected members to support them in a reopening bid, support which in the end was never extended. The rejection of a Robbinsdale-initiated reverse referendum rendered a further setback, while the ruling of the state's Supreme Court that Robbinsdale High had been lawfully closed drove the final nail into the coffin. The concluding triumph of the new middle class over the old middle class brought with it a sense that an injustice had occurred, one based on power and privilege, leaving lasting scars on a community.

The failure of these political, economic, and judicial avenues to address Robbinsdale's outstanding grievances as well as the school board's attempt to sell the closed school buildings in Robbinsdale led to an extended motivation crisis. In a district that was proud to claim its residents had never defeated a referendum over the more than half century of its existence, during the next two decades residents approved only one referendum, rejecting two others. Many years later a new superintendent would comment, "It's a wound that never has healed….

There wasn't a day that went by that someone didn't bring up the closing of Robbinsdale High School."

Recommendations

As this case study has shown, decision making gone awry has the potential of inducing a long-lived adverse impact on an educational organization and its community, especially when broad social classes are involved. More than 20 years later, interview participants in this study were largely in agreement that, rather than closing a high school, District 281 should have continued operating all three high schools and implemented a different grade organizational pattern in its search for economies. When pushed to name a high school closure choice at this late date, about half of interview participants still pointed to Armstrong and the other half to Cooper. Almost no one selected Robbinsdale High.

As the study's review of literature has shown, it seems that school closures almost always leave an unsatisfactory mark, often referred to as "the superintendents' graveyard." Is there any good way to close and consolidate a high school? Although the closing of Robbinsdale High took place many years ago, are there any present lessons on educational leadership that could be extracted? Tuchman (1998) asserted, "The past has continuing relevance for the present. Most simply, we all live history" (p. 240). Reflecting on the effect of Robbinsdale High's closure on his much later tenure, Superintendent Mack remarked, "It's not history, but a fact that's constantly present." Kyvig and Marty (in Butchart, 1986) summarized the importance of historical research as a tool for utilizing the past to guide us in the present.

> Communities without understandings of their pasts resemble people suffering from amnesia, unable to remember from where they came…and where they intended to go…. Just as memory helps the individual…, historical knowledge helps the community avoid starting at the beginning each time it addresses an issue. (p. i)

In concurrence with Carr's (1961) belief that the historian "provides general guides for future action which, though not specific predictions, are both valid and useful" (p. 87), I would offer the following eight broad recommendations concerning decision making and school consolidation that emerged from this historical research into the closing of Robbinsdale High School.

Recommendation #1—Consider the value of smallness and do not assume that consolidation will necessarily save money.

Sher and Tompkins (1977) concluded, "All in all, consolidation has not been able to live up to the plethora of educational and economic claims made on its behalf" (p. 71). Interview participants in the Robbinsdale study maintained that the best years in the high schools were those before consolidation, when the buildings were operating at less than full capacity. If the expectation behind a consolidation plan is that it will replicate what is happening in a smaller school but on a larger scale, a satisfactory outcome is doubtful. The characteristics of small are largely inherent to small. Consider whether what is being given up (lower pupil-teacher ratio, lower pupil-administration ratio) is worth the expected benefits.

Over two decades after Sher and Tompkins' research, Adams and Foster (2002) likewise warned, "Assume nothing and analyze much when considering proposals for school or district reorganization. Purported benefits of larger organizational units do not materialize automatically" (p. 838). As for the Robbinsdale case study, it may never be determined whether the closure of Robbinsdale High was really a cost-saving move. The closure of the most economical of the three buildings, the failure of ensuing referenda, the increased transportation costs to bring students from east to west, and the opening of the new TLC middle school to appease the east side would all have to be taken into account in any assessment.

Recommendation #2—Balance business and efficiency models with social and human considerations, making sure to attend to issues of justice, fairness, and equity.

The business metaphor is too restrictive and poor a metaphor for the complexity of the educational arena. Concerns for financial efficiency should be carefully balanced against the effects of consolidation on the community. The threat to community identity, for example, might outweigh any expected advantages of cost savings. It is not financially smart to consolidate if it causes a destructive and long-lived loss of public support for an organization. Social and political harmony should be considered as accepted and valued costs of running important social institutions such as schools. Alsbury and Shaw (2005) concluded that within consolidation decisions, leaders should consider the community's pursuit of happiness and its definition of the good life, rather than simply focusing on economic efficiencies.

In the Robbinsdale case study there was a clear overemphasis on the financial by both district leadership and residents. Superintendent Hood declined to strongly advocate a politically safer middle school pattern once it was reported by residents and staff to be slightly less efficient than a high school closure option. He also choose early on in the school-closure selection process to publish and distribute to residents the operational cost differentials of the three high school buildings, sending a threatening message to the politically powerful west side, even though the differentials represented a very small portion of the district's budget. Superintendent Hood was clearly most proud of his financial management abilities, declaring the district "solvent" on his retirement. After a multi-year consolidation process in Salt Lake City, the superintendent of schools concluded that when it comes to school closures, "questions of justice, fairness and equity are more important than bread-and-butter items: cost, transportation, buildings, textbooks, demographics, and staffing patterns" (M. Thomas, 1980, p. 22).

Recommendation #3—Know the community well, the neighborhood attachments, the community identities, and the socioeconomic configurations, and know their relation to the bases of power.

As in the 1980s Seattle consolidation plan, District 281's board and administration seemed to show "a basic inability to handle the neighborhood-based politics of school closure," persisting in the view that "school closures were essentially a problem of building logistics" (Weatherley et al., 1983, p. 15). On the part of District 281's administration in particular, there was an underestimation of the political power of the west side. In light of the spring election of Myrna Marofsky and the support of the west in the 1981 fall referendum, administration made a fatal mistake in considering an Armstrong closure, later recollecting that they thought they could "justify it on a cost basis," given that the school was newer and "not so identified with the community."

Former superintendent Bollin summarized administration's miscalculation in later reflection.

> Hood wanted to close AHS—that was the problem. If he could have gotten a little past his adding machine…. You have to look at the income side of the ledger…. People that are paying the most in taxes—you can't run rough shod over them…. [Hood] was lined up to close AHS, and he got RHS closed, which is what he didn't want.

Finance director Tom Walerius emphatically stated, "You could never have closed Armstrong. They had the power and they knew how to use the power." As in Seattle, District 281's west side parents possessed technical and political sophistication as well as the time to volunteer many hours of effort to develop and change school district policy.

Recommendation #4—Do not underestimate the importance of local culture, values, history, and tradition.

The panel of experts asserted that consolidation decisions should not be approached from historical, social, or cultural standpoints. Historic community patterns and ties, past history of the school district, community loyalties and traditions were merely "distractions." As this and other studies have shown, decision making which undervalues the historical, social, and cultural can lead to problematic results. On the other hand, it seemed that district administration did appreciate the culture, values, and history of the east side, given its initial recommendation that RHS should be off-limits for closure. At some point, one of the cabinet members had stated in regards to RHS, "I just don't think we can close THAT school in THAT community." But administration may have been out of touch with the new middle and upper middle-class values of the west side by underestimating the west side's support for non-traditional, alternative education.

Recommendation #5—Develop a long-range, politically-viable plan with as broad a consensus as possible, while recognizing the inherent liabilities.

As the literature showed, District 281 was not the only district to err in long-range enrollment projections. Former teacher Jon Rondestvedt, however, recalled the particularly critical situation in the Robbinsdale Area Schools.

> 281 demographic projections were overly optimistic, or poorly derived, or never reliably publicized. The bubble bursting came as a shock wave! 281 had even passed a bond issue for a fifth junior high. 'Never was heard a discouraging word.' It was similar to the stock market run up of the late 90s. Expectations were for its continuance…. I recall no occasion when I heard or read cautionary statements with regard to school-age populations and 281 plans until it became the specter at the door….There was no preparation for what was to come…no long-range planning.

Even with enrollment decline staring them in the face, district leaders still lacked a long-range plan in their consolidation decisions, according to many interview participants, while a

survey of metro-area school officials and staff showed district long-range plans to be the top

criteria for building-closure selection decisions elsewhere (*School building utilization,* 1979, p.

III-7). Former superintendent Bollin commented,

> You can't do things in little pieces. If you're going to close the high school [in
> Robbinsdale], you can't close the elementary and junior high too. You've got to have a
> plan. You have to look at it as a series of events tied together. They were nibbling—you
> nibble here and you nibble there. You should have a plan—like rotating corn.

One complicating factor in long-range planning for the district, however, was the changing

composition of the school board. This might explain why decisions seemed to be made in a

piece-meal, nibbling fashion, year by year. To circumvent this problem, it might be wise in some

instances for districts to wait until enrollment has declined to a point at which a critical number

of consolidation needs can be accomplished all in one year by one school board.

As for political viability and broad consensus within planning, in this case study,

administration advocated a politically unviable Armstrong closure, while the panel of experts

recommended a politically disastrous Robbinsdale closure. Although there seemed to be broad

consensus on the need to close a high school, there was no consensus on which one it should be.

In many instances broad consensus may prove to be an unrealistic goal, as Zerchykov (1983)

noted, "No amount of leadership (no matter how charismatic)…will lead the victims of a

proposed cutback…to agree with and participate in the planning of their victimization" (p. 182).

Recommendation #6—Adopt a positive bargaining model that offers some improvement

to the quality of educational or community life.

A bargaining model characterized by criteria of compromise (rather than by the kind of

criteria of efficiency used in District 281's consolidation effort) may not be the most cost

effective in the short term, but it is likely to deliver greater cost effectiveness in the longer term

due to greater political harmony. Part of this compromise should include an improvement in educational services. There really is no point in trying to sell consolidation to the public if it cannot be shown how it will improve the quality of education. "Improving the quality of education is the most powerful way of obtaining public support for closing schools" (M. Thomas, 1980, p. 21), stated the superintendent of schools in Salt Lake City.

> The basic reason for closing schools is to improve the quality of education. There is no purpose in consolidation if it does not provide better education….Unless enough schools are closed to improve educational opportunities, the effort will not be accepted by parents. Consolidation must be sufficient to save enough money to provide additional student services. Quality education and better schools are the reasons that make sense to parents. (M. Thomas, 1980, p. 24)

Selling consolidation through negative scare-tactics should be avoided. District 281 leaders presented consolidation to the community as one of two options: (a) we can choose not to consolidate, cutting programs instead, or (b) we can consolidate and keep the programs we have. It must be shown that the community will end up with something more than a shrunken version of the educational status quo—for example, "By consolidating we will gain a community center and we will be able to afford lower class sizes, more fine arts, and a language immersion program." Leaders in District 281 may have been able to gain support for a Cooper closure if they had offered the Cooper area something in return—such as moving the area's junior high students into the Cooper building.

Recommendation #7—Respect the limitations of technical rationality.

Above all, this case study was a testimonial to the limitations of technical rationality: reducing very complicated educational problems to the observable and measurable in an attempt to solve them through scientific procedures of numbers and formulas; defining educational decision making as neutral, rational, and linear; and translating complex educational and

valuative issues into technical-expertise puzzles. Such thinking resulted in impoverished decision making within the district by missing the broader social, political, and cultural contexts of education. Both leaders and residents seemed to have placed an untenable trust in the potential of technical rationality, applying a scientific, rational, objective decision-making model to a political, irrational, and subjective problem.

The district's leaders and residents had already succumbed to the hegemony of economic efficiency by insisting on the closure of one high school. The selection of the particular high school to close was not a problem to be solved by either scientific application or judicial-type judgment—it was a political problem that required a political solution through a political-compromise bargaining model at the outset or through a popular vote to elect new board members in the end. The technical-rational model presented a number of contradictions.

First, the relative weighting of the school-closure criteria within the technical-rational model did not reflect the relative importance of the issues as the process unfolded. Two of the criteria which were awarded very little weight and considered as rather insignificant—"unique educational programs" and "relationships of schools and municipalities"—actually ended up wielding considerable impact in the final analysis. Secondly, the criteria's point-system failed to differentiate, giving all schools essentially the same score, and causing the superintendent to only partially differentiate in his school-closure recommendation. Superintendent Hood had built up a technical-rational process based on expert knowledge and then had essentially admitted its failure, tossing the decision to the political winds. He delegitimized the decision-making apparatus of the district which prior had been considered credible and legitimate.

Third, the extension of the technical-rational model through the controlled citizen participation of the parent-staff presentations worked against building common ground.

Although the purpose of the presentations was to pursue even more objective fact-gathering, they produced competition, dissonance, and division instead. Berger (1982b) noted that although the participation of various constituents may be desirable in some situations, "if carried to an extreme it could increase (rather than decrease) opposition to retrenchment decision in decline situations" (p. 335). Retired teacher Irv Nerdahl described the process as "the most terrible thing that I've observed in the non-violent part of my life." Other residents and staff explained, "The presentations only seemed to divide us more." "They pitted one community against the next." "They started the war." Even board members concurred in later reflection, "We went overboard trying to get input from the community." "There was too much involvement." "It was counterproductive."

Lastly, hiring the panel of experts to replay the technical-rational game plan took the decision away from a popular vote, placing it into a symbolic judicial framework where an attempt would again be made to solve a political dilemma through deliberation and careful weighing of the facts. The panel's decision was bound to be viewed as illegitimate by the losers given that panel members did not live in the district, had not been elected to their positions, and were accountable to no one. The kind of political problem facing the district at that juncture would have been better addressed through a public political solution by popular vote in the school board elections. Superintendent Hood had set out to keep Robbinsdale High open and close Armstrong. Technical rationality had given him the opposite result.

Recommendation #8—Honor the relevance of geography and the sacredness of place.

District 281's school-closure criteria placed very little weight on "placement of building." The panel of experts, likewise, considered building location to be of little importance. But

closing a third school in Robbinsdale, an area that had already accepted two previous closures, was one of the main factors driving the longevity of the backlash to the school board's decision. Providing a geographical balance of schools should be on the top of any school-closure criteria list. Zerchykov's (1982) study of school closures did indeed indicate the key factor in many final closure decisions seemed to mirror the real estate business—location, location, location. Updating older facilities, due to their geographic location or their potential for creating a greater degree of political and social harmony within a district, should be considered as an important and necessary financial cost of running school districts.

Sacredness of place refers to ties between home, school, and community—bonds that, where they exist, should be respected in school-closure decisions. District 281's school-closure criteria placed very little weight on "relationships of schools and municipalities" and "role (use) of school by community." The panel of experts, likewise, considered municipal boundary lines, community loyalties, and citizen identification with particular schools and communities to be of little importance. But as the reaction to the closure of Robbinsdale High showed, they were mistaken. In neighborhoods where feelings of wholeness exist—where the school represents autonomy, tradition, and identity—the school and the community become one. This sense of community "integrity" (Peshkin, 1982) should be honored to the greatest degree possible when considering school consolidation. Howley and Theobald (1996) commented, "Local circumstance—call it 'sense-of-place'—inspires people to make meaning and to give meaning to life (p. 45).

> Persisting in the place where you live, with the people you love, and discovering and cultivating the meaning in those relationships arguably constitute the meaning of life.... Education, unlike schooling, must deal cogently at its center with questions about the good life. (p. 47)

So where have all the Robins gone? In District 281, rather than flying south, they faded into the west—and without their Robins, both the community of Robbinsdale and the school district lost a part of their souls. Robbinsdale High School exists now only as a community of memories. A district leadership and citizenship that overemphasized the financial, underestimated the political, and placed an untenable trust in the potential of technical rationality all contributed to the death of a high school and the abandonment of the Robins' nest. For District 281, it is hoped that this research will provide a sort of "means of coming to terms with the past" (Kyvig & Marty in Butchart, 1986, p. i) and perhaps at the same time will help to develop an awareness of future possibilities. Although future decisions may not come any easier, hopefully the process of reaching such decisions will be achieved in a more reflective manner.

Every school district will have to ponder for itself the relative importance of the school as (a) "primarily a place belonging to a local community," or (b) "a temporary site for the transmission of knowledge and skills" (DeYoung, 1995, p. 206). And for those emphasizing the latter and choosing the path of consolidation, as with the generation of the late 20th century, it is likely their leaders will similarly have to "'unlearn yesterday' and 'invent tomorrow'" (Berger, 1982a, p. 3). But in doing so, it is hoped that they will move beyond the technical-rational management that characterized much of the previous decades' consolidation efforts and more fully embrace the kind of critically-based leadership that Foster (1989) and others have called for.

> If leadership cannot be reduced to management, then it must involve something more than management. We will make the claim here that leadership is fundamentally addressed to social change and human emancipation, that it is basically a display of social critique, and that its ultimate goal is the achievement and refinement of human community. (p. 48)

REFERENCES

1,410 graduate in District 281. (1983, June 16). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Adair, M. (1981a, November 19). Board deadlocked on school closing. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1981b, October 22). Board decides Cooper will close. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1981c, December 10). Board remains deadlocked. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1981d, November 19). Cooper, Armstrong proponents fight hard for their schools. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1981e, September 10). Easy transition required when high school is closed [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 4.

Adair, M. (1981f, November 26). Hood recommends Armstrong closure in board's high school deadlock. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1981g, December 17). In District 281 board discusses finances, arbitrator at work session. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1981h, July 9). Referendum sits on priority list. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1981i, August 27). Robbinsdale has athletic facilities, gifted program. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 13A.

Adair, M. (1981j, June 18). School board gives okay to referendum. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 7.

Adair, M. (1981k, October 15). School closing deferred to school board, but RHS gets nod to remain open. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1981l, December 24). Senior highs will remain open in '82. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Adair, M. (1981m, December 10). Work session held to loosen deadlock. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1982a, July 29). Backers voice requests for traditional setting at AHS. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Adair, M. (1982b, February 11). Board determines fact finding rules. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Adair, M. (1982c, December 23). Board given recall petition for referendum. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Adair, M. (1982d, July 15). Board rejects Robbinsdale re-opening. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Adair, M. (1982e, January 7). Board re-opens high school debate. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1982f, February 25). Board selects Crystal Heights as school closing candidate. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Adair, M. (1982g, September 30). Cabinet says no to six-year high schools. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Adair, M. (1982h, January 21). Closing, re-opening plan eyed. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Adair, M. (1982i, February 4). Crystal Heights recommended to close this year. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1982j, April 22). District 281 revises transfer policy. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Adair, M. (1982k, September 2). Hood announces retirement. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1982l, January 14). Motions rise, fall in closing debates. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Adair, M. (1982m, May 6). Plant design important in panel decision. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*,

pp. 1, 15.

Adair, M. (1982n, April 22). Restraint order halts staffing. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Adair, M. (1982o, May 6). RHS supporters voice disgust over closing decision. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1982p, February 18). Support groups rally around schools at hearings. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 3.

Adair, M., & Chuba, M. (1981, May 14). Four seek spots on District 281 board. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 13A-14A.

Adams, J., & Foster, E. M. (2002). District size and state educational costs: Should consolidation follow school finance reform? *Journal of Education Finance, 27*, 833-856. Retrieved from www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/jef.html

Adolfson, B. (1982, June 24). Unfair to city? [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

AHS gets a little help from its friends. (1981, August 27). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

All under one roof. (1979, Summer). [District brochure]. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Alsbury, T., & Shaw, N. (2005). Policy implications for social justice in school district consolidation. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 4*(2), 105-126. doi:10.1080/15700760590965578

Amdahl's words close school issue. (1983, July 21). *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 3, 18 (Community/Northwest 1).

Andersen, A. (1979, February 8). Another elementary school will close in District 281. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Andersen, A. (1981, October 8). School levy passes in record turnout. *New Hope-Plymouth*

Post, p. 1.

Andersen, A. (1982a, May 13). District 281 candidates look beyond school closing question. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 12.

Andersen, A. (1982b, May 6). Ex-mayor, board member angered over loss to city. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 15A.

Andersen, A. (1982c, May 27). School reopening could boost costs, delay start in fall. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Andersen, A. (1982d, March 11). Voters will decide Tuesday on seven-member school board. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Andersen, A. (1983, March 3). Survey: Students adapted well to high school merger. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Anderson & Blore v. I.S.D. 281, *No. 790158*. (MN 4th District Court, April 30, 1982). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Anderson, C. (1982, May 27). Mistake was made [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Andrews, M., Duncombe, W., & Yinger, J. (2002). Revisiting economies of size in American education: Are we any closer to a consensus? *Economics of Education Review, 21*, 245-262. doi:10.1016/so272-7757(01)00006-1

Andrews, R., Soder, R., & Eismann, D. (1974). *The environmental impact of school closures*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED112521)

Angus, L. (1989). "New" leadership and the possibility of educational reform. In J. Smyth Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 63-92). London: Falmer Press.

Apple, M. (1990). *Ideology and curriculum (2nd ed.)*. New York: Routledge.

Apple, M. (1995). *Education and power (2nd ed.)*. New York: Routledge.

Armstrong celebrates "united" homecoming. (1982, October 14). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

The Armstrong program. (1981, May 11). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Banaszynski, J. (1981, October 14). Robbinsdale High will stay open; one to close not picked. *Minneapolis Tribune*, pp. 1B, 4B.

Bard, J., Gardener, C., & Weiland, R. (2006). Rural school consolidation: History, research summary, conclusions, and recommendations. *Rural Educator, 27*(2), 40-48. Retrieved from www.ruraleducator.net

Bates, R. (1989). Leadership and the rationalization of society. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 131-156). London: Falmer Press.

Beckner, W., & O'Neal, L. (1980). A new view of smaller schools. *NASSP Bulletin, 64*(438), 1-7.

Beddow, J. (1965, February 5). 35 years of dedication. *Hawks' Quill*, p. 2. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Benton, D. (1992). A consolidation success story. *American School Board Journal, 179*(4), 42-43.

Berger, M. (1982a). *Stages in decline: How an educational organization scales down*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED233453)

Berger, M. (1982b). *Two paradoxes in managing decline: Comprehensive planning and participation*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED233449)

Berger, M. (1983a). Managing enrollment decline: Current knowledge and future applications. *Peabody Journal of Education, 60*(2), 1-9.

Berger, M. (1983b). Why communities protest school closings. *Education and Urban Society, 15*, 149-163. doi:10.1177/0013124583015002002

Berke, J. (1982, May 13). Disputes "label" [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Bernstein, R. (1976). *The restructuring of social and political theory*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Berry, C. (2004). School inflation: Did the 20th century growth in school size improve education? *Education Next, 4*(4), 56-62. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/files/ednext20044_56.pdf

Bickel, R., Howley, C., Williams, T., & Glascock, C. (2000). *High school size, achievement equity, and cost: Robust interaction effects and tentative results*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED450991)

Bishop, L. (1979). Dealing with declining school enrollments. *Education and Urban Society, 11*, 285-295. doi:10.1177/001312457901100302

Blackmore, J. (1989). Educational leadership: A feminist critique and reconstruction. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 93-130). London: Falmer Press.

Blodgett, H. (1983). *Robbinsdale 1893-1983*. Robbinsdale, Minnesota: Printing Arts, Inc.

Blonigan, B., Gisslen, A., Holtz, M., Karki, C., & Mattson, R. (1982, May 20). Robbinsdale council offers school opinions [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

Board of Education v. Superior Court (Hebard), 93 Cal. App. 3d 578 [155 Cal. Rptr. 839] (1979). Retrieved from http://law.justia.com/cases/california/calapp3d/93/578.html

Board votes to close Robbinsdale High. (1982, April 28). *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 1A, 6A.

Board votes to close three buildings. (1978, January 13). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, pp. 1, 4.

    Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981.*

    (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1992). *Qualitative research for education*. Needham Heights, MA:

    Allyn and Bacon.

Bork, B. (1978, October 19). The closing of school is now final [Editorial opinion]. *North*

    Hennepin Post, p. 4A.

Bork, B. (1981a, October 8). "Death notice" for a high school [Editorial opinion]. *New Hope-*

    Plymouth Post, p. 4A.

Bork, B. (1981b, May 28). Future of schools in Robbinsdale [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin*

    Post, p. 4.

Bork, B. (1981c, November 12). Will school board make a switch? [Editorial opinion]. *North*

    Hennepin Post, p. 4.

Bork, B. (1981d, November 5). "Zero-hour" for a high school [Editorial opinion]. *North*

    Hennepin Post, p. 4.

Bork, B. (1982, May 13). They should flock to the polls [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin*

    Post, p. 4A.

Bork, B. (1983, March 31). Recall referendum vote [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p.

    4A.

Boyd, W. (1979). Educational policy making in declining suburban school districts: Some

    preliminary findings. *Education and Urban Society, 11*, 333-366.

    doi:10.1177/001312457901100305

Boyd, W. (1982a). The politics of declining enrollments and school closings. In N. Cambron-

McCabe & A. Odden (Eds.), *The changing politics of school finance. Third annual yearbook of the American Education Finance Association* (pp. 231-267). Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing.

Boyd, W. (1982b). *School governance in an era of retrenchment [final report]*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED236810)

Boyd, W. (1983). The management and consequences of decline. *Education and Urban Society, 15*, 255-261. doi:10.1177/0013124583015002011

Boyd, W., & Wheaton, D. (1983). Conflict management in declining school districts. *Peabody Journal of Education, 60*(2), 25-36.

Boynton to assist Kansan named superintendent. (1965, March 12). *Hawks' Quill*, p. 1. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Brandt, S. (1979, February 5). Inner schools feeling pinch of declining school enrollment. *Minneapolis Tribune*, pp. 1A, 4A.

Breen, T. (1982, August 5). Merge the students [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

A brief history of Robbinsdale Area Schools: Growth, development and achievement in District 281. (1997, August). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Brody, J. (1976). How to close a school and not tear your community apart in the process. *American School Board Journal, 163*(6), 31-35.

Brookfield, S. (2005). *The power of critical theory: Liberating adult learning and teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bueschel, E. (2004). A community divided. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 7*(2), 21-26. doi:10.1177/155545890400700203

Burns, E. (1990). Michel Foucault. In G. Stade (Ed.), *European writers of the twentieth century, Volume 13* (pp. 3323-3364). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Bussard, E. (1981). *School closings and declining enrollment*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED209730)

Butchart, R. (1986). *Local schools: Exploring their history*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History.

Cabinet recommends. (1981, October 19). *The Odyssey*, p. 2. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Cameron, R. (1978, May 15). *A report of comparative information concerning the three senior high schools of District 281*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Cameron, R., (Ed.). (1985, January). *Report of the senior high study group*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Carr, E. (1961). *What is history?* New York: Vintage Books.

Carspecken, P. (1989). *What's new about "new" social movements? Some notes on a Liverpool protest movement over a school closure*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED335242)

Carspecken, P. (1990). *Intersubjective structure and systems of practice in school-community relations*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED322245)

Carspecken, P. (1991). *Community schooling and the nature of power: The battle for Croxteth Comprehensive*. London: Routledge.

Cassidy, J. (1989, November 15). Voters approve District 281 referendum: Crystal and Robbinsdale voted no to 7-mill levy increase. *Crystal-Robbinsdale Post News*, p. 1.

Chance, E., & Cummins, C. (1998). School/community survival: Successful strategies used in

rural school district consolidations. *Rural Educator, 20*(2), 1-7.

Chuba, M. (1979a, December 13). East-side coalition formed to keep school from closing. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1979b, November 29). Lee parents unite to keep school open. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1980, September 4). Five run for mayor in Robbinsdale. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1981a, August 27). Armstrong boasts high technology, low heating costs. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 13A.

Chuba, M. (1981b, October 29). E. J. Cooper says high school closing may not be last one. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Chuba, M. (1981c, May 7). Junior high land use to be studied. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Chuba, M. (1981d, February 19). Public meeting wasn't open [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 4.

Chuba, M. (1981e, July 23). Robbinsdale, school board open communication lines. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Chuba, M. (1982a, July 1). Board members testify on meetings, procedures used. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 22.

Chuba, M. (1982b, June 10). Court calls temporary halt in RHS closing. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Chuba, M. (1982c, July 1). Court upholds school closing process; levies fines for open meeting violations. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Chuba, M. (1982d, May 6). Milo Mielke: "It's the last thing I thought would happen." *New*

Hope-Plymouth Post, p. 15A.

Chuba, M. (1982e, August 12). Moratorium extended on junior high school. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1982f, June 24). Night sessions may speed trial. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1982g, November 18). PAC explains reasons for recall referendum support. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1982h, September 9). Reverse referendum would mean drastic program cuts. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Chuba, M. (1982i, May 6). Robbinsdale officials "shocked" at decision. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 15A.

Chuba, M. (1982j, July 8). Robbinsdale parents to take appeal to Supreme Court. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1982k, June 3). Robin backers rally again to save school. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1982l, May 13). "Save RHS" rally draws 1,000. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Chuba, M. (1983a, February 24). District 281 sets wording for ballot. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Chuba, M. (1983b, April 28). Hood reflects on 18 years of educational feast, famine. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 21.

Chuba, M. (1983c, May 12). Minnesota Supreme Court hears arguments in open meeting law case. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1983d, March 17). "No" supporters cite keeping quality education. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 15.

Chuba, M. (1983e, July 21). Reaction to court ruling brings varied comments. *Golden Valley Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1983f, January 20). Recall petition is thrown out. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Cibulka, J. (1983). Explaining the problem: A comparison of closings in ten U.S. cities. *Education and Urban Society, 15*, 165-174. doi:10.1177/0013124583015002003

Closing—not a matter of money [Editorial opinion]. (1981, April 10). *The Odyssey*, p. 3. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Codd, J. (1989). Educational leadership as reflective action. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 157-178). London: Falmer Press.

Coleman, P. (1971). *The perils of bigness: The case against large school systems*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED059529)

Collinon, J. (1983, April 14). PAC will continue [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Colton, D., & Frelich, A. (1979). Enrollment decline and school closings in a large city. *Education and Urban Society, 11*, 396-417. doi:10.1177/001312457901100307

Cooper has spirited homecoming. (1982, October 21). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Cooper students play "ring around the school." (1981, November 5). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 17.

Corbett, S. (1982, May 13). Acceptance needed [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6A.

Creighton, T. (1982, ca. July). *Notice of motion and motion for amended and additional findings pursuant to rule 52.02. Court File No. 791807*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Crowe, R. (1979). Can logical decisionmaking work on school closings and other hot issues? *Executive Educator, 1*(3), 19-21.

Cuban, L. (1979). Shrinking enrollment and consolidation: Political and organizational impacts in Arlington, Virginia 1973-1978. *Education and Urban Society, 11*, 367-395. doi:10.1177/001312457901100306

Curtis, R. (1965, February 5). Says principal Ulrich "tremendous plans in CHS." *Hawks' Quill*, p. 4. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Daly, R. (1982, May 27). Make new friends [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6A.

Davis, J., & Davis, J. (1980, February 7). Maintaining quality of education [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Deal, T., & Derr, C. (1980). Toward a contingency theory of organizational change in education: Structure, processes, and symbolism. In *Education finance and organization: Research perspectives for the future* (pp. 91-118). Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED188318b)

Dean, J. (1981). *Dealing with decline: The politics of public school closings*. ERIC/CUE Urban Diversity Series, Number 77. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED211659)

Dean, J. (1982). Criteria to determine which schools to close: The role of subjective as well as objective considerations in New York City. *Urban Education, 17*, 323-350.

Dean, J. (1983). Neighborhood impacts of school closings: The case in New York City. *Education and Urban Society, 15*, pp. 245-254. doi:10.1177/0013124583015002010

DeYoung, A. (1989a). The disappearance of "social capital" in rural America: Are all rural children "at risk"? *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 10*(1), 38-45.

DeYoung, A. (1989b). *Economics and American education: A historical and critical overview of*

the impact of economic theories on schooling in the United States. White Plains, NY: Longman.

DeYoung, A. (1995). *The life and death of a rural American high school: Farewell little Kanawha*. New York, NY: Garland.

DeYoung, A. (2002). *Dilemmas of rural life and livelihood: Academics and community*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED471920)

DeYoung, A., & Howley, C. (1990). The political economy of rural school consolidation. *Peabody Journal of Education, 67*(4), 63-89.

Dinius, R. (1982a, June 17). Community of future [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

Dinius, R. (1982b, December 2). He had reasons to sign petition [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

District 281 candidates address the issues. (1980, May 15). *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 6B-7B.

District 281 candidates air views: A look at 281 school board candidates. (1983, May 12). *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 14A-15A.

District 281 residents...got your tax statement? Now have you had enough? [Advertisement]. (1983, March 17). *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, p. 7 (Community/Northwest 1).

District 281 school board candidates air views. (1979, May 10). *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 5B, 8B, 9B.

District gets 2nd look at levy. (1983, March 17). *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, p. 1 (Community/Northwest 1).

District sets new attendance area boundaries [District 281 news release]. (2004, December 13). Retrieved from news release archive http://rdale.org

Divoky, D. (1979). Burden of the seventies: The management of decline. *Phi Delta Kappan, 61*(2), 87-91.

Dreier, W., & Goudy, W. (1994). *Is there life in town after the death of the high school*? Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED379117)

Dumanoski, D. (1979). Lexington: Declining enrollment in an educational boom town. In N. Seymour (Ed.), *Rising above decline* (pp. 129-144). Boston, MA: Institute for Responsive Education.

Eagleton, T. (1991). *Ideology: An introduction*. London: Verso.

Ebmeier, H. (1986). *The effect of closing a high school on parent attitudes, student attitudes, and student achievement*. Community Unit School District 200, Wheaton, IL. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED278107)

Editors give opinions on high school closing. (1982, May 6). *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 4A.

Edmondson, J., Thorson, G., & Fluegel, D. (2000). Big school change in a small town. *Educational Leadership, 57*(7), 51-53.

Egelson, P. (1993). *Change for worse? One teacher's experience of rural school consolidation*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED362351)

Eidell, R. (1983). *What we know about administering enrollment decline and fiscal retrenchment in schooling*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED303303)

Eisenberger, K. (1974). Closing a school: Some ways to ease the trauma. *School Management, 18*(7), 33-36.

Eisenberger, K. (1975a). *Enrollment decline: The task force*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED125129)

Eisenberger, K. (1975b). How to prepare the public for the closing of a neighborhood school.

American School Board Journal, 162(6), 42-45.

Eisenberger, K. (1978). How to learn to manage decline in your school system. *American School Board Journal, 165*(7), 36-38.

Eisenberger, K., & Keough, W. (1974). *Declining enrollment: What to do. A guide for school administrators to meet the challenge of declining enrollment and school closings.* American Association of School Administrators Executive Handbook Series, Volume 2. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED111094)

Emotions explode in walk-out at Robbinsdale. (1982, May 6). *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, pp. 1, 15.

Energy use and cost report for Armstrong, Cooper and Robbinsdale senior high schools, Independent School District #281, New Hope, Minnesota. (1981, July 1). Comm. No. 2052, Gada & Associates, Inc., Consulting Engineers, 1030 Soo Line Building, Minneapolis, Minnesota. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Erickson, E. (1983, February 3). New Hope mayor opposes recall [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 4A.

Fanning, J. (1995). *Rural school consolidation and student learning*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED384484)

Feldman, D. (2001). Empowering students in a consolidated rural high school. *Rural Educator, 22*(3), 17-23.

Flasch, T. (1983, March 4). Date for referendum recall vote approaching. *Hawks' Quill*, p. 2. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

FOA stays on the ball. (1981, September 8). *Odyssey*, p. 2. (Available from District 281, 4148

Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Foght, H. (1917). *The American rural school: Its characteristics, its future and its problems*.
New York: Macmillan. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED392566)

Foster, W. (1989). Toward a critical practice of leadership. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 39-62). London: Falmer Press.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1971-1977*.
New York: Pantheon.

Fowler, D. (1978). *Declining school enrollments*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED151920)

Freiderich, K. (1981, February 5). Get involved now [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*,
p. 5A.

Friederich, K. (1982, August 19). A letter that needs some answers [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

Froom, J. (2004, March). District 281's football's history begins with championships and great players. *Reflections*, *22*(2), 8. (Available from Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers, 2960 Winnetka Avenue North, Suite 100, Crystal, MN 55427).

The future of District 281. (1981, May 11). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Gendler, N. (1983a, March 17). District must meet obligations of 5 funds. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 1, 4, 10, 11 (Community/Northwest 1).

Gendler, N. (1983b, July 21). Justices affirm school closing. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 1, 17 (Community/Northwest 1).

Gilbert, H. (1982, July 15). Put high school closing issue behind us [Letter to the editor].

New Hope-Plymouth Post, p. 5A

Gonzalez Ettel, D. (1981, May 21). Neighborhood losing tradition in school closing: Parents

watch passing of Lee tradition. *Minneapolis Star*, pp. 3, 7.

Gonzalez Ettel, D. (1982, April 29). Robbinsdale High a surprise sacrifice: Long awaited

decision shocks many residents. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 3, 4, 8

Community/Northwest 1).

Grade reorganization report. (1980, October). Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a*

senior high school, October 12, 1981. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka

Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Grade structure will stay same. (1981, March). *Newscaster*, n.p. Retrieved from *Resource book*

on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981. (Available from District 281, 4148

Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Green, R., Belsches, C., & Mladenoff, M. (1980). Richmond's progressive solution to declining

enrollment. *Phi Delta Kappan, 61*, 616-617.

Grenis, M. (1976). How to close a school without spilling blood. *American School and*

University, 49(1), 58-59.

Group establishes criteria for school closings. (1977, March). *Newscaster*, n.p. Retrieved from

Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981. (Available from

District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Grygelko, J. (1983, March 10). Reasons given for PAC support [Letter to the editor]. *North*

Hennepin Post, p. 4A.

Gustafson, N. (1983, March 10). Save money too [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p.

5A.

Guthrie, J. (1980). Organizational scale and school success. In *Education finance and organization: Research perspectives for the future* (pp. 119-134). Program on Educational Policy and Organization, National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED188318a)

Gyre, 1971 [Armstrong High School yearbook]. (1971). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Gyre, 1982 [Neil A. Armstrong High School yearbook]. (1982). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Gyre, 1983 [Robbinsdale-Neil A. Armstrong High School yearbook]. (1983). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Haas, B. (1979, December 6). One elementary school to close. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 1.

Haas, B. (1980a, August 14). Assistant superintendent returns from sabbatical. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 23.

Haas, B. (1980b, September 18). Board to consider changes in criteria. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 7A.

Hass, B. (1980c, January 10). Closings tabled until Jan. 21. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 2.

Haas, B. (1980d, August 21). Criteria for school closings to be studied. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 2.

Haas, B. (1980e, September 25). Decision on criteria delayed. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 2A.

Haas, B. (1980f, November 6). Grade reorganization worth checking [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 4A.

Haas, B. (1980g, December 4). Lee school should be closed. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Haas, B. (1980h, February 14). Olson hearing draws crowd but no answers. *North Hennepin*

Post, pp. 1-2.

Haas, B. (1980i, October 23). Reorganization report heard, no answers yet. *North Hennepin Post*,

   pp. 1-2.

Haas, B., & Nygaard, S. (1980, January 31). Olson closing proves they don't any get easier.

   North Hennepin Post, pp. 1-2.

Habermas, J. (1975). *Legitimation crisis*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hamilton, K. (1981, November 12). Western support [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*,

   p. 5.

Hampel, R. (2002). Historical perspectives on small schools. *Phi Delta Kappan, 83*, 357-363.

Hanrehan, J. (1983, March 10). Kids are the future [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p.

   4A.

Hedley, R. (1982, April 1). Modular scheduling initiates nuclear warfare. *Odyssey*, p. 2.

   (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Hennen, A. (1982, November 11). A bad situation [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p.

   18A.

Hess, F., Martin, W., Beck, J., Parker, D., & Lagoe, R. (1979). *They left their audience*

   applauding: How one district's reorganization efforts won approval—and cheers!

   Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED172399)

High school decision due on April 27. (1982, April 15). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 3A.

High school supporters give last, best shot. (1982, April 1). *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Hood, L. (1976, January). Shrinking financial resources plague 281. *Newscaster*, p. 2. Retrieved

   from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from

   District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Hood, L. (1981, August 19). A referendum: Sooner or later it had to happen. *Newscaster*, n.p. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981.* (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Hoose, S. (1981a, October 15). Armstrong, Cooper await decision. *Minneapolis Star*, pp. 3-4 (Community/Northwest 1).

Hoose, S. (1981b, October 22). Hearings on closing Cooper set. *Minneapolis Star*, p. 3 (Community/Northwest 1).

Hoose, S. (1981c, November 25). Hood advises closing Armstrong. *Minneapolis Star*, pp. 3, 6 (Community/Northwest 1).

Hoose, S. (1982a, May 6). Robbinsdale burns over school closing. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 3, 4, 8 (Community/Northwest 1).

Hoose, S. (1982b, May 6). Seniors will have 1st school choice in Robbinsdale. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 3-4 (Community/Northwest 1).

Hoose, S. (1982c, July 22). Tax-levy opponents face a tough battle. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, p. 20 (Community/Northwest 1).

Hosler, G., & Weldy, G. (1977). How one district is closing a high school. *NASSP Bulletin, 61*(407), 35-46.

Hough, D., & Sills-Briegel, T. (1997). Student achievement and middle level programs, policies, and practices in rural America: The case of community-based versus consolidated organizations. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 13*(1), 64-70. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu

How to "unsign" the District 281 recall referendum petition…and save our kids [Advertisement]. (1983, January 6). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 16A.

Howley, C. (1996a). Compounding disadvantage: The effects of school and district size on student achievement in West Virginia. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 12*(1), 25-32. Retrieved from http://jrre.psu.edu

Howley, C. (1996b). *Sizing up schooling: A West Virginia analysis and critique* [Dissertation synopsis]. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED396880)

Howley, C. (2001). *The rural school bus ride in five states: A report to the Rural School and Community Trust*. Rural School and Community Trust, Washington, DC. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED456013)

Howley, C., & Bickel, R. (2000). *When it comes to schooling...small works: School size, poverty, and student achievement*. Rural School and Community Trust, Randolph, VT. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED447973)

Howley, C., & Theobald, P. (1996). The life and death of a rural American high school [Book review]. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 12*(1), pp. 44-49. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu

Hughes, B. (2003). Surviving closings and consolidations. *School Administrator, 60*(7), 16-18.

Iannaccone, L. (1979). The management of decline: Implications for our knowledge in the politics of education. *Education and Urban Society, 11*, pp. 418-430. doi:10.1177/001312457901100308

It all started last January. (1978, October 19). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, pp. 1, 6. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Jessner, J. (1979). Closing schools, Bay Area style. In N. Seymour (Ed.), *Rising above decline* (pp. 95-128). Boston, MA: Institute for Responsive Education.

Johnson, C. (1982, June 4). A ballad for Robbinsdale. *Robin's Tale*, pp. 6, 8. (Available from

    District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Johnson, H. (1978). School closure: How much impact on the community? *Phi Delta Kappan,*

    59, 357-359.

Johnson, T. (1965, February 5). Cooper employs modern ideas, offers expanding curriculum.

    Hawks' Quill, p. 1. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope,

    MN, 55427).

Jurgens, E. (1982, May 13). People will decide [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*,

    p. 5A.

Kannapel, P., & DeYoung, A. (1999). The rural school problem in 1999: A review and critique of

    the literature. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 15*(2), 67-79. Retrieved from

    http://www.psu.edu/dept/jrre/articles

Kemis, M., Schnelker, D., Sorensen, C., & Simonson, M. (1994). *Perceptions of educational*

    quality following a school closing. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED373390)

Keough, W. (1978). *Declining enrollments: A new dilemma for educators*. Bloomington, IN:

    Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED165301)

Krogstad, M. (1983, February 10). Reaping the benefits [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin*

    Post, p. 5A.

Kurtzahn, L. (1981, April 10). High school to close in 1982—but which one will it be?

    Odyssey, pp. 4-5. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN,

    55427).

Laurel, T. (1982, May 13). A lost promise [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6A.

Lee, C. (2007, June 7). Community recalls the closing of Robbinsdale High School 25 years ago.

Sun Newspapers. Retrieved from http://www.mnsun.com

Lee outlasts Olson in painful process of closing school. (1980, February 4). *Minneapolis Tribune*, pp. 1B, 7B.

Leland, S., & Southward, B. (1981, October 1). Yes despite "timing" [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

Lengthy ordeal ends [Editorial opinion]. (1982, May 4). *Odyssey*, p. 6. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Loechler, J. (1979, October 5). Joselyn supports mods. *Odyssey*, p. 7. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Loechler, S. (1982, May 3). So long RHS. *Robin's Tale*, p. 1. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Mayer, F., & Steenland, J. (1984). We dodged disaster by putting all of our schools up for sale. *Executive Educator, 6*(3), 40.

McKenzie, S. (1996, October). Parents take school money matters into their own hands. *Odyssey*, pp. 1, 3. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Miller, F. (1982, June 4). Reflections on the school closing issue. *Robin's Tale*, p. 9. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Moberg & Robb v. I.S.D. 281, *No. C6-82-1108*. (MN Supreme Court, July, 15, 1983). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Monson, D. (1981, May 8). Which school will close? Answer should be quite simple [Editorial opinion]. *Hawks' Quill*, p. 4. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Montgomery, J. (1983, February 3). Follow the process [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Mooney, M. (1983a, February 10). Help is needed [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Mooney, M. (1983b, March 17). Levy money necessary for quality education [Editorial opinion]. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, p. 6 (Community/Northwest 1).

Moravec, S. (1982, July 22). Getting back on track [Letter to the editor]. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, p. 6 (Community/Northwest 1).

More information on closing a senior high school: Presented at a school board meeting, Monday, October 12, 1981. (1981, October). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Mullins, C. (1973). School district consolidation: Odds are 2 to 1 it'll get you. *American School Board Journal, 160*(11), 23-26.

Narver, B. (1983). Success in Seattle: Creative reuse and community participation. *Education and Urban Society, 15*, 211-223. doi:10.1177/0013124583015002007

Nelson, G., & Nelson, J. (1982, November 25). Attack on our children [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

Nerdahl, I. (1982, January 21). "Odd man out"? [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Nerothin, C. (1982, May 20). Pastor's opinions [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

Newstrom, J. (1981a, December 11). Board debates while CHS awaits. *Hawks' Quill*, p. 2. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Newstrom, J. (1981b, November 6). Board proposes Cooper as school to close. *Hawks' Quill*, p.

    3. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Newstrom, J. (1981c, November 6). Priorities wrong in board decision [Editorial opinion].

    Hawks' Quill, p. 6. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope,

    MN, 55427).

Newstrom, J. (1982a, January 15). Deadlock persists as school closing deadline nears. *Hawks'*

    Quill, p. 5. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN,

    55427).

Newstrom, J. (1982b, May 14). Robbinsdale to close. *Hawks' Quill*, p. 3. (Available from District

    281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

North central accreditation report of Robbinsdale Cooper Senior High School. (1987, Spring).

    (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Notice of public hearing, Independent School District 281, senior high school closing. (1981,

    October 29). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 11B.

Notice of public hearing, Independent School District 281, senior high closing. (1982, January

    21). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 3A.

Nuttall, R. (1976). *Positions on declining enrollment issues and school values commitment*.

    Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED122433)

Nygaard, S. (1982, March 11). Rumors surface about fact-finding panel. *North Hennepin Post*,

    p. 2A.

Nygaard, S. (1983, March 17). "Yes" supporters focus on school closing, tax issues. *North*

    Hennepin Post, pp. 1, 15.

Nygaard, S., & Andersen, A. (1983, April 28). Carter says she's ready to "take off and do great

things." *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Oliver, S. (1983, January 25). Board rejects petition; Controversy continues. *Odyssey*, p. 2.

(Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Olson, C. (1982, May 13). Seek common ground [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p.

6A.

Olson, E. (1982a, April 1). Board bores reporter. *Odyssey*, p. 3. (Available from District 281,

4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Olson, E. (1982b, January 26). Board considers alternatives. *Odyssey*, p. 2. (Available from

District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Olson, E. (2000, March). A new beginning, not the end of the world. *Reflections*, *18*(2), 5.

(Available from Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers, 2960 Winnetka Avenue North, Suite

100, Crystal, MN 55427).

Olson, P. (2012, July 29). Joe got it right [Letter to the editor]. *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, p. 9B.

On Monday, you have the chance to save our kids' chance of a lifetime [Advertisement]. (1983,

March 17). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 7A.

Orrell, D. (1983). *Closing schools without enraging the public*. Retrieved from ERIC database.

(ED250793)

Pankake, A., & Bailey, M. (1986). Managing decline in public schools. *Urban Education, 21*,

180-188.

Patterson, K. (1981, November 26). Keep Cooper open [Letter to the editor]. *New Hope-*

Plymouth Post, p. 5.

Pauline, L., & Pitruzzello, P. (1982). You can close schools without enraging everyone—Here's

how. *American School Board Journal, 169*(7), 21, 22, 38.

Pedersen, D. (1982, May 6). Robin super sophs eye distribution of talent. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 11A.

Peshkin, A. (1982). *The imperfect union. School consolidation and community conflict*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Peterson, D., & Hoose, S. (1981, October 20). Inner-ring schools now white elephants. *Minneapolis Star*, pp. 1, 10A.

Piehowski, J. (2004a, May 6). Community gym at old senior high approved. *Sun Newspapers.* Retrieved from http://www.mnsun.com

Piehowski, J. (2004b, September 30). More than 600 former students show up to share memories of former Robbinsdale Junior High. *Sun Newspapers.* Retrieved from http://www.mnsun.com

Planning for declining enrollments: Planning assistance manual and case studies. (1976). St. Paul, MN: Minnesota State Planning Agency. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED128918)

Plant operation & maintenance costs by senior high building 1977-78, 1978-79, 1979-1980, actual costs averaged. (1981, March 16). Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Pohlmann, A. (1981, April 10). RFT recommends plan 1 for school closing. *Odyssey*, p. 4. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Poole, J. (1982, May 6). He's moving away [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6A.

Post, D., & Stambach, A. (1999). District consolidation and rural school closure: E pluribus unum? *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 15*(2), 106-117. Retrieved from

http://jrre.psu.edu

Pound, J. (1976). *How to close a school without enraging the public*. Retrieved from ERIC

database. (ED122456)

Powers, B. (1979). Fitting schools to fewer students. In N. Seymour (Ed.), *Rising above decline*

(pp. 1-18). Boston, MA: Institute for Responsive Education.

Presentations from three high schools to the superintendent and cabinet: Armstrong Senior High

School presentation—Monday, May 11, 1981. (1981, May 26). (Available from District

281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Presentations from three high schools to the superintendent and cabinet: Cooper Senior High

School presentation—Tuesday, May 12, 1981. (1981, May 26). (Available from District

281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Presentations from three high schools to the superintendent and cabinet: Robbinsdale Senior

High School presentation—Thursday, May 14, 1981. (1981, May 26). (Available from

District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Program honors Hood's 18 years in District 281. (1983, May 12). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 13A.

Public input sought on middle school name [District 281 news release]. (2004, November 18).

Retrieved from news release archive http://rdale.org

Public notice [Advertisement]. (1981, December 17). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 16A.

Puleo, V. (1981). *Rationale for the multifactor method of elementary school closing*. Retrieved

from ERIC database. (ED213091)

Purcell, D., & Shackelford, R. (2005). *An evaluation of the impact of rural school consolidation:*

What challenges may a new round of rural school consolidations have on the "safety,

educational performance and social environment" of rural communities? Retrieved from

ERIC database. (ED497051)

Purdy, D. (1997). An economical, thorough, and efficient school system: The West Virginia School Building Authority "economy of scale" numbers. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 13*(3), 170-182. Retrieved from http://www.psu.edu/dept/jrre/articles

Puzke, M., & Monson, D. (1981, March 26). Criteria for closings [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

Questions and answers about closing a senior high building [District brochure]. (1981, April). Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981.* (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Recommendations for closing a junior high school 1979-80, presented at the school board meeting, Monday, September 11, 1978. (1978, September). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, June 21, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, August 5). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 23.

Reid, L. (1981, October 8). Sound fiscal facts [Letter to the editor]. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 3A.

Reynolds, D. (1999). *There goes the neighborhood: Rural school consolidation at the grass roots in early twentieth-century Iowa*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.

Richey, J. (1982, May 6). Panel of outsiders [Letter to the editor]. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 6A.

Rizvi, F. (1989). In defence of organizational democracy. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 205-234). London: Falmer Press.

Robb, J. (1981, October 8). Support for RHS [Letter to the editor]. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p.

3A.

Robb, J. (1983, March 17). Closed minds, not levy recall, harm education [Editorial opinion]. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, p. 6 (Community/Northwest 1).

Robb, J., & Hennen, A. (1981, December 17). Face the issues [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Robbinsdale: A betrayed community [Editorial opinion]. (1982, June 4). *Robin's Tale*, p. 2. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Robbinsdale area community education center celebration is Sept. 22 [District 281 news release]. (2004, September 10). Retrieved from news release archive http://rdale.org

Robbinsdale District 281 voter turnout shows return-to-normal rate of 11,689 persons. (1983, May 26). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 11A.

Robbinsdale Middle School to serve east-side of district [District 281 news release]. (2004, December 13). Retrieved from news release archive http://rdale.org

Robbinsdale, Minnesota: A pictorial history 1893-1993. (1993, January). The Robbinsdale centennial committee. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Roberts, G. (2001). *The consolidation of public schools in Randolph County, West Virginia: A case study* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED462211)

Robin, 1957 [Robbinsdale High School yearbook]. (1957). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Robin, 1982 [Robbinsdale High School yearbook]. (1982). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Rondestvedt, J. (2000, March). Change brings best and worst of times. *Reflections*, *18*(2), 8, 4.

(Available from Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers, 2960 Winnetka Avenue North, Suite 100, Crystal, MN 55427).

Rosengren, C. (2002, June 26). 2002 marks 20 years since RHS closed. *Plymouth Sun-Sailor*, pp. 12A, 27A.

Roth, M. (1981a, August 27). Cooper called economical, but love is "bottom line." *North Hennepin Post*, p. 13A.

Roth, M. (1981b, December 10). Time to terminate this delay [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 4A.

Roth, M. (1982, April 1). Support, community split mark final school closing hearing. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Russo, A. (2006). Mergers, annexations, dissolutions: Whatever it's called, school district consolidation can try superintendents' souls and test the limits of rural community pride. *School Administrator, 63*(3). Retrieved from http://find.galegroup.com

Sargent, C., & Handy, J. (1974). *Fewer pupils/surplus space: A report*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED093046)

Sather, B. (1983, January 27). Misleading strategy [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Saturday sales total $4,500. (1982, June 10). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 3.

Schon, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.

School building utilization: Crisis or opportunity? (1979). Educational Cooperative Service Unit of the Metropolitan Twin Cities Area, University of Minnesota. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED202115)

School controversy captures, divides Robbinsdale district: Community poll. (1982, July 22).

Minneapolis Star and Tribune, pp. 1, 16, 17 (Community/Northwest 1).

School district releases conclusions, recommendations from facility study [District 281 news

release]. (2004, January 14). Retrieved from news release archive http://rdale.org

School district reorganization: A review of selected studies. (1977). Educational Cooperative

Service Unit, University of Minnesota. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED202114)

Schwartz, H. (1982, May 6). No responsibility [Letter to the editor]. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*,

p. 3A.

Scollard, S. (1982, May 13). Time to sacrifice—call on Robbinsdale [Letter to the editor].

North Hennepin Post, p. 4A.

Scollard, S. (1983, January 27). Forget the past [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p.

5A.

Search committee endorses three for 281 board. (1982, May 6). *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p.

3A.

Self, T. (2001). Evaluation of a single school district consolidation in Ohio. *American Secondary

Education, 30*(1), 71-81. Retrieved from www.ashland.edu/academics/education/ase

Sell, R., Leitstritz, F., & Thompson, J. (1996). *Socio-economic impacts of school consolidation

on host and vacated communities*. Agricultural economics report no. 347. Department of

Agricultural Economics, North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND. Retrieved from

ERIC database. (ED423100)

Shakeshaft, C., & Gardner, D. (1983). Declining to close schools: Alternatives for coping with

enrollment decline. *Phi Delta Kappan, 64*, 492-496.

Sher, J., & Tompkins, R. (1977). Economy, efficiency, and equality: The myths of rural school

and district consolidation. In J. P. Sher (Ed.), *Education in rural America: A reassessment*

of conventional wisdom (pp. 43-77). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Sheran, R., Hetland, J., & Maas, J. (1982, April 26). *In the matter of the recommendation to the school board of District 281, on the two senior high schools to be maintained in operation: Arbitration panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Sieradski, K. (1975). *Implications of declining enrollments for schools*. NAESP School Leadership Digest Second Series, Number 4. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED114906)

Sim, S., & Van Loon, B. (2001). *Introducing critical theory*. Royston, UK: Icon Books.

Skenes, R., & Carlyle, C. (1979). Self determination for rural schools. In N. Seymour (Ed.), *Rising above decline* (pp. 19-48). Boston, MA: Institute for Responsive Education.

Slavin, P. (2006). The long way home. *Teacher Magazine, 17*(4), 32-37.

Smaciarz, S. (1982, May 6). Reverse the vote [Letter to the editor]. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 6A.

Smette, D. (2001). When boom becomes bust. *School Administrator, 58*(3), 50-53.

Smith, W. (1984). Don't deny these five distinct stages of a school's demise. *American School Board Journal, 171*(7), 31.

Smyth, J. (1989a). A "pedagogical" and "educative" view of leadership. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 179-204). London: Falmer Press.

Smyth, J. (Ed.). (1989b). *Critical perspectives on educational leadership*. London: Falmer Press.

Southward, B. (1981, March 19). Obit for a school [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 9B.

Southward, B. (1992, May 6). Reader takes exception to District 281 teacher's conclusions

[Letter to the editor]. *Crystal-Robbinsdale Sun-Post*, p. 4A.

Southward, D., & Southward, B. (1980, January 31). Transplant to different location [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, December 15, 1981 [Board minutes]. (1982, January 28). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 22.

Spring, J. (2001). *The American school: 1642-2000 (5th ed.)*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

State recognition for Dr. E. Gary Joselyn. (1982, January 21). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 3A.

Stephenson, J. (1973). *Consolidation: The impact of a new high school on the achievement, aspirations, and adjustment of students in an Appalachian county*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED083520)

Streifel, J., Foldesy, G., & Holman, D. (1991). The financial effects of consolidation. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 7*(2), 13-20. Retrieved from http://www.psu.edu/dept/jrre

Stuart, A. (1978, July 5). Suburban schools cope with problems by cutting back staff. *Minneapolis Tribune*, pp. 1A, 6A.

Student interest inventory – opinions of students. (1975). Olympia Community Unit District 16, Minier, IL. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED104601)

Students, faculty give E. J. huge birthday party. (1982, February 19). *Hawks' Quill*, p. 6. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Szymik, B. (1982, November 4). Urges support for recall [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

Talons, 1965 [Edwin J. Cooper Senior High School yearbook]. (1965). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Talons, 1982 [E. J. Cooper Senior High School yearbook]. (1982) (Available from District 281,

4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Talons, 1983 [Robbinsdale Cooper High School yearbook]. (1983). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Thank you Cooper [Editorial opinion]. (1970, November 25). *Odyssey*, p. 2. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Theobald, P. (1999). There goes the neighborhood: Rural school consolidation at the grass roots in early twentieth-century Iowa [Book review]. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 15*(2), pp. 118-120. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu

Theobald, P., & Nachtigal, P. (1995). *Culture, community, and the promise of rural education*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED388464)

Thomas, C. (1980, December 19). Fate of Cooper hangs in the balance: School board weighs reorganization decision. *Hawks' Quill*, p. 3. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Thomas, C. (1981, April 10). Closing issue takes a twist. *Hawks' Quill*, p. 3. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Thomas, M. (1978). Declining school enrollments. *School Business Affairs, 44*(1), 6-8.

Thomas, M. (1980). Administrative leadership in school closures. *NASSP Bulletin, 64*(439), 21-26.

Threinen, J. (1982, November 18). Only the children will suffer [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 3A.

Tough decision: Close a junior high school. (1978, November). *Newscaster*, n.p. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Tuchman, G. (1998). Historical social science: Methodologies, methods, and meanings. In I. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry (pp. 225-260)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Two elementary buildings will be closed. (1978, March). *Newscaster*, n.p. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Two elementary schools are recommended for closure. (1978, February 10). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 3. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Valencia, R. (1984). *School closures and policy issues. Policy paper no. 84-C3*. Stanford University Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED323040)

Van Leer, T., & Boren, R. (1979). Twenty years of crisis: Shrinking enrollment in the Salt Lake City School District. In N. Seymour (Ed.), *Rising above decline* (pp. 49-74). Boston, MA: Institute for Responsive Education.

Vos, D. (1982, November 18). Admit the mistake [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 3A.

Ward, J., & Rink, F. (1992). Analysis of local stakeholder opposition to school district consolidation: An application of interpretive theory to public policy making. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 8*(2), 11-19. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu

Watkins, P. (1989). Leadership, power and symbols in educational administration. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 9-38). London: Falmer Press.

Watz, D. (1978a, October 19). Emotion level high at public hearing. *North Hennepin Post*, pp.

1, 6.

Watz, D. (1978b, August 24). Financial report favors junior high closing. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 9.

Watz, D. (1978c, September 28). Residents question board on junior high school closing. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Watz, D. (1978d, October 19). RJHS closed: Board rejects tax vote bid. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 6.

Watz, D. (1978e, September 14). Staff picks Robbinsdale Junior to close. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Watz, D. (1979, March 1). Lee Elementary may close. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, pp. 1-2.

Weatherley, R., Narver, B., & Elmore, R. (1983). Managing the politics of decline: School closures in Seattle. *Peabody Journal of Education, 60*(2), 10-24.

Webber, C. (1982b, June 4). The tangled web. *Robin's Tale*, p. 6. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Webber, S. (1980, January 31). Single family home will remain favorite. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 2B, 4B.

Webber, S. (1995, October 11). District 281 voters turn down $63.5 million bond issue. *Plymouth Sun-Sailor*, pp. 1A, 8A.

Webber, S. (1996, March 6). District 281 issue voted down. *Plymouth Sun-Sailor*, pp. 3A, 11A.

Webber, S. (2000, August 16). Policy on changing program or school names is proposed in District 281. *Plymouth Sun-Sailor*, p. 11A.

Webber, S. (2001, November 14). District 281 referendum passes by wide margin. *Plymouth Sun-Sailor*, p. 4A.

Webber, S. (2004a, May 13). Former Robbinsdale Junior High School sale is approved. *Sun Newspapers.* Retrieved from http://www.mnsun.com

Webber, S. (2004b, September 16). A landmark building for Robbinsdale and District 281 is sold. *Sun Newspapers*. Retrieved from http://www.mnsun.com

Webber, S. (2004c, October 21). School board stymied when regarding reorganization plan. *Sun Newspapers.* Retrieved from http://www.mnsun.com

Weingartner, S. (1982, May). Importance of tradition is stressed [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5.

Where will the children go? (1977, May). *Newscaster*, n.p. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981.* (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Which organizational plan will work best? (1980, October 31). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, pp. 1, 6. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981.* (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Who needs media center? [Editorial opinion]. (1981, November 6). *Hawks' Quill*, p. 6. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Why keep Cooper? (1981, May 12). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Wilary, C. (1981a, February 26). 281 board names Lee school for closing this year. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Wilary, C. (1981b, January 22). Administration recommends grade organization plan. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Wilary, C. (1981c, January 15). District 281 residents hear grade reorganization plans. *North*

Hennepin Post, p. 1.

Wilary, C. (1981d, February 19). Last-stand effort made to save Lee. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 6.

Wilary, C. (1981e, January 22). Lee Elementary is next to close. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Wilary, C. (1981f, March 26). School closing timing to be set April 6. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 2.

Wilary, C. (1981g, January 29). Senior high closing supported. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Williams, B. (1998). The genius of place. In V. Perrone (Ed.), *Toward place and community* (pp. 62-78). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED444793)

Williams, J. (1983a, January 20). 281 board nixes grade-shuffle plan. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Williams, J. (1983b, February 10). Board gets encore petition. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Williams, J. (1983c, July 7). Carter calls for "a time of building" for District 281. *Golden Valley Post*, pp. 1-2.

Williams, J. (1983d, August 18). Carter sets priorities for District 281. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Williams, J. (1983e, December 22). District 281 gets $60,000 training grant. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 6.

Williams, J. (1983f, October 27). Phantom school buyer disappears. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Williams, J. (1983g, October 20). Potential RHS buyer eager to move in. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Williams, J. (1983h, March 24). Record turnout upholds District 281 levy. *North Hennepin Post*,

pp. 1-2.

Williams, J. (1983i, November 17). Robbinsdale citizens caution council: Don't play "divide and conquer" game. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Williams, J. (1983j, January 13). Shift grades, open Robbinsdale in '83, Southward says. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Williams, J. (1983k, December 1). Tech learning campus slated for Robbinsdale junior. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Wood, P., & Boyd, W. (1981). Declining enrollments and suburban school closings: The problem of neighborhoods and neighborhood schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 17*(4), 98-119.

Yeager, R. (1979). Rationality and retrenchment: The use of computer simulation to aid decision making in school closings. *Education and Urban Society, 11*, 296-312. doi:10.1177/001312457901100303

Young, P. (1980, March 13). Board shuts down Olson - but not its philosophy. *Minneapolis Star*, p. 26 (Community/Northwest 1).

Zajicek, C. (1981, April 9). Stand together [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 10B.

Zajicek, C. (1982, December 2). Should demand rights [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Zerchykov, R. (1982). *A review of the literature and an annotated bibliography on managing decline in school systems*. Boston, MA: Institute for Responsive Education. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED217533)

Zerchykov, R. (1983). Closing schools and managing conflict: What works? *Education and Urban Society, 15*, 175-188. doi:10.1177/0013124583015002004

Zieba, J. (1983, March 3). Free ride is over [Letter to the editor]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 5A.

Zitur, B. (1981, October 8). Save "the best" [Letter to the editor]. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 5A.

Supplementary Resources

1982-the year in review. (1982, December 30). *Golden Valley Post*, p. 1.

281 school board to have extra sessions. (1981, January 8). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 10.

Academics: Larger class sizes - or cut administration? (1983, March 10). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Adair, M. (1981, October 29). In staffing the two remaining high schools seniority gets a lot of respect. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 6B.

Adair, M. (1982, April 8). Board finalizes budget items, oks price for junior high. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1982, December 9). Board oks sale of Lee property. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M. (1982, April 29). The decision: Robbinsdale High will close. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 1.

Adair, M. (1982, August 19). RHS parents appeal to Supreme Court. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Adair, M., & Chuba, M. (1982, May 13). District 281 candidates address issues. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 4B, 5B, 10B.

Andersen, A. (1981, October 29). "Best ever" year pledged if it's Cooper's finale. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 1.

Andersen, A. (1982, May 13). AHS, CHS eye "super" status. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 3A.

Andersen, A. (1982, September 9). Former Robins are excited, confident as new year starts. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Andersen, A. (1983, January 6). "Save our kids" gears up to sustain school referendum. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Area residents split over closing of Robbinsdale High. (1982, July 23). *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 1C-2C.

As population grows, so does District 281. (1965, February 5). *Hawks' Quill*, p. 4. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Bergquist, Mooney win in District 281. (1983, May 19). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Big voter turn-out expected in election. (1983, May 12). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Board cuts budget by $655,000. (1978, March 10). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, pp. 1, 6. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Board cuts budget by $750,000. (1977, March). *Newscaster*, n.p. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Board hears city's concerns. (1980, January 8). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Board holds public hearing on school closings. (1978, March 10). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 4. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Board stalemates. (1981, November 23). *Odyssey*, p. 2. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Board votes to close Lee school. (1981, March 6). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 3. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Bollin, T. (1995, April). Working together to move forward. *Vital Link*, *10*(6), 2. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Bork, B. (1982, June 10). Will there be an RHS class of '83? [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 4.

Candidates set in 5 school districts. (1982, April 29). *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, p. 21 (Community/Northwest 1).

CAPE candidates top voting in District 281. (1982, May 20). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Chuba, M. (1981, December 24). First portion of consultants study shows junior high use residential-institutional. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1981, February 12). Lee parents present their case. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1981, May 21). Robbinsdale votes for interim zoning for junior high site. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Chuba, M. (1981, February 12). Secret meeting held by board. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1981, February 12). Third ward candidates present views. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1981, January 29). Two show interest in purchase of Robbinsdale Junior High. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Chuba, M. (1982, September 9). District judge further defines Minnesota open meeting law. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Chuba, M. (1982, April 15). Moratorium lifted on junior high land. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Chuba, M. (1982, October 28). Robbinsdale candidates give views on city issues. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 2A.

Chuba, M. (1982, October 28). State Supreme Court to rule on school case. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Chuba, M. (1982, June 10). What has made RHS strong academically? Students' feelings.

North Hennepin Post, pp. 1, 3.

Chuba, M. (1982, June 10). What has made RHS strong academically? Teachers' views. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Chuba, M. (1982, July 8). Words, by the millions, flowed in recent trial. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1983, July 21). Court defines open meeting law; RHS to remain closed. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1983, March 17). District 281 board poll shows cuts would come. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 15A.

Chuba, M. (1983, March 3). Extracurriculars, what would happen if they are no more? Musicals, debate could go. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Chuba, M. (1983, June 23). Long history of Robbinsdale is recorded by Helen Blodgett. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Chuba, M. (1983, December 8). Robbinsdale residents react to high tech campus proposal. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

District 281 reorganizes leadership to focus on service to children, schools, community. (1995, August 28). *Direct Line*. p. 1. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

District administrative costs examined. (1983, March 17). *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, p. 3 (Community/Northwest 1).

District has been willing to pay for good teachers. (1983, March 17). *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 3, 17 (Community/Northwest 1).

District voters turn down bond referendum question by narrow margin. (1995, October 6). *Direct*

Line, *13*(3), 1. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Edelman, M. (1988). *Constructing the political spectacle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Final decision on school closings. (1980, March 7). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 3. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Fuhrmann, Bergquist elected to 281 board. (1980, May 22). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Gendler, N. (1983, March 17). Salaries, fringes take 75 percent of revenue. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 1, 4, 11, 14 (Community/Northwest 1).

Gendler, N. (1983, January 20). Tax-levy backers to fight on. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 1, 6, 8 (Community/Northwest 1).

Greene, M. (1988). *The dialectic of freedom*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Group defends Cooper. (1981, May 29). *Hawks' Quill*, p. 3. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Group to examine court order effects. (1982, June 10). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Groups gear up for District 281 recall vote. (1983, February 24). *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Haas, B. (1979, December 20). Three schools named to District 281 closing list. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Haas, B. (1980, June 5). Flip of coin puts Bergquist on board. *North Hennepin Post,* pp. 1-2.

Haas, B. (1980, January 24). Olson named to close. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Haas, B. (1980, November 6). One school to close by year's end. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Hearing begins in teachers' lawsuit. (1982, April 29). *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 1.

Hoose, S. (1982, February 4). District's hands-off leader: Hood defends his role in debate.

Minneapolis Star, pp. 3, 6, 7.

Hoose, S. (1982, July 22). Poll shows strong reactions to closing: Board members welcome results despite criticism. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 1, 17 (Community/Northwest 1).

Hoose, S. (1982, May 6). Ruling upsets Robbinsdale staffing plan. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, p. 18 (Community/Northwest 1).

Hoose, S. (1982, April 29). Suddenly, "spared" students become "victims." *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, pp. 3, 4, 8 (Community/Northwest 1).

An important message from the school board of District 281. (1996, February 12). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Kurtzahn, L. (1982, June 4). Tale of three beaches. *Odyssey*, p. 8. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Larsen, B. (1981, November 12). How can they close Cooper? [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 4.

Letters on school closings are withheld. (1981, October 15). *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 5.

Ligman, P. (1992, June 10). Archives keep memory of Robbinsdale alive. *Crystal-Robbinsdale Sun-Post*, p. 31A.

Lincoln, B. (1989). *Discourse and the construction of society: Comparative studies in myth, ritual, and classification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Loechler, S. (1982, June 4). RHS continues fight. *Robin's Tale*, p. 4. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Long-range planning committee report. (1978, May 19). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 4.

Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981.* (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

A mandate for change [Editorial opinion]. (1982, June 4). *Robin's Tale*, p. 3. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Maxcy, S. (1991). *Educational leadership: A critical pragmatic perspective.* New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Mixing three schools [Editorial opinion]. (1981, October 19). *Odyssey*, p. 4. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

A most difficult assignment. (1977, December 16). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 4. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981.* (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Newstrom, J. (1981, March 13). Which one? *Hawks' Quill*, p. 3. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Newstrom, J. (1981, October 2). Will Cooper close? *Hawks' Quill*, p. 5. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Newstrom, J. (1982, June 4). Board decision could change. *Hawks' Quill*, p. 6. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Newstrom, J. (1982, March 19). Panel investigates school closing issue. *Hawks' Quill*, p. 2. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

No elementary building to close this school year. (1979, March 9). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 6. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981.* (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Nygaard, S. (1980, October 16). Districts 281, 279 test waters of cooperation. *North Hennepin*

Post, pp. 1-2.

Nygaard, S. (1980, October 16). Lindbergh earns high marks from Golden Valley students. *Golden Valley Post*, pp. 1-2.

Nygaard, S. (1980, May 29). The passing of a school district [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 3.

Nygaard, S. (1981, February 19). Building's age often is factor [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 4.

Nygaard, S. (1981, March 19). Referendum could alter timetable for closing high school. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Nygaard, S. (1982, February 25). Another high school closing [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 4.

Nygaard, S. (1982, May 6). Judge rules district can't reassign all high school staff. *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, pp. 1-2.

Nygaard, S. (1982, September 9). New students feel welcome spirit at Armstrong High. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Nygaard, S. (1983, March 10). Board cuts 40 teaching spots. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Nygaard, S. (1983, April 28). Carter is unanimous choice for District 281 superintendent. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Nygaard, S. (1983, March 3). Extracurriculars, what would happen if they are no more? Sports are called a focal point. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Nygaard, S. (1983, January 27). Superintendent search moves into high gear. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 2A.

Organization meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, July 6, 1981 [Board

minutes]. (1981, September 10). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 22.

Organization meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, July 12, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, August 5). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 23.

Piehowski, J. (2004, October 14). Robbinsdale city council "politely asks" District 281 not to consider Lakeview closure. *Sun Newspapers*. Retrieved from http://www.mnsun.com

Play marks 25 years of musicals. (1981, March 12). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

RAHS and RCHS graduate 1,410 students. (1983, June 16). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 11A.

Reconvened meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, May 18, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, July 1). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 11.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, June 15, 1981 [Board minutes]. (1981, September 10). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 22.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, November 16, 1981 [Board minutes]. (1982, January 7). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 19.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, December 21, 1981 [Board minutes]. (1982, January 28). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 22.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, January 18, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, March 11). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 11B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, February 22, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, April 8). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 22.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, March 22, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, June 3). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 21.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, September 13, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, November 4). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 21.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, September 27, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982 November 4). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 21.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, October 18, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, December 2). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, November 1, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, December 2). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, December 6, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1983, January 6). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, January 3, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, February 3). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, January 17, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, February 24). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, February 7, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, April 7). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, February 14, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, April 7). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, March 7, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, April 7). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, March 21, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, May 19). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, April 25, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, June 2). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 7B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, May 2, 1983 [Board minutes].

(1983, June 2). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 7B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, May 16, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, June 30). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Regular meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, December 20, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, February 3). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Resolution no. 3242, resolution urging opposition to registration of title to certain land conditionally conveyed by the state of Minnesota [City council resolution]. (1982, July 22). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 10B.

Resource book on closing a senior high school: Presented at a school board meeting, Monday, October 12, 1981. (1981, October 12). (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Robbinsdale cuts force larger class sizes. (1982, February 4). *Minneapolis Star*, p. 8 (Community/Northwest 1).

Rockwood, H. (1992, June 10). Robbinsdale High School closure still angers some. *Crystal-Robbinsdale Sun-Post*, pp. 1, 31.

Roth, M. (1982, November 4). Recall vote would again split district [Editorial opinion]. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 4.

Schedule for next school board meeting. (1978, September 22). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 3. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

School board adopts plan 1. (1981, February 6). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 5. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

School board asked to add new member. (1982, February 4). *Minneapolis Star*, p. 8 (Community/Northwest 1).

School closing raises concern about transfers in athletics. (1982, May 6). *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, p. 12A.

School closings don't get easier. (1980, December). *Newscaster*, p. 4. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, October 5, 1981 [Board minutes]. (1981, November 5). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 23.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, January 4, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, January 28). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 21.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, January 11, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, March 11). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 11B.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, February 1, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, March 11). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 11B.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, February 4, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, April 8). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 22.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, April 5, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, June 3). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 21.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, April 27, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, June 10). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 23.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, May 3, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, June 10). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 23.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, September 20, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, November 4). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 21.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, October 12, 1982 [Board minutes]. (1982, November 4). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 21.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, January 13, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, February 24). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, February 10, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, April 7). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Special meeting, school board, Independent School District 281, February 22, 1983 [Board minutes]. (1983, April 7). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 6B.

Students wish E. J. a "happy birthday." (1980, February 21). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

To Joy Robb [Advertisement]. (1983, May 12). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 10A.

Two elementary schools to close this year. (1977, April). *Newscaster*, n.p. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Under enormous pressure, a decision. (1980, January 25). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 1. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Voters want seven on Robbinsdale board. (1982, March 18). *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Watz, D. (1979, March 8). No school will close. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Webber, C. (1982, June 4). Editorial opinion. *Hawks' Quill*, p. 4. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Webber, S. (2004, April 29). District 281, Robbinsdale agree on sale of RACEC. *Sun*

Newspapers. Retrieved from http://www.mnsun.com

Which elementary school will close? (1979, March 9). *Superintendent's Bulletin*, p. 3. Retrieved from *Resource book on closing a senior high school, October 12, 1981*. (Available from District 281, 4148 Winnetka Avenue, New Hope, MN, 55427).

Wilary, C. (1981, February 5). District 281 won't change grade plan. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1-2.

Wilary, C. (1981, April 9). Senior high slated to close next year. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 2A.

Williams, J. (1983, January 13). $5 million cuts would be from salaries. *North Hennepin Post*, pp. 1, 3.

Williams, J. (1983, January 6). District 281 plans to accept late recall petitions signatures. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Williams, J. (1983, February 17). District 281 referendum recall petition certified, election set for March 21. *North Hennepin Post*, p. 1.

Wolfe, A. (1989). *Whose keeper? Social science and moral obligation*. Los Angeles: University of California.

APPENDIX A

Time Line

1865	First school in the area is built on the Stillman farm
1887	Andrew Robbins purchases 90 acres of land and proceeds to plat a suburban town, Robbinsdale Park
1890	Parker School is built with two and one-half stories, eight rooms
1893	Robbinsdale organizes as a village
1913	Parker School adds four more rooms and changes name to Robbinsdale Public School
1936	Robbinsdale High School (RHS) opens on 42nd Ave. and Regent Ave., With E. J. Cooper as superintendent, Milo Mielke as principal
1938	Robbinsdale forms as a city
1940s	District begins a series of annexations which continue through the 1950s, growing to include parts of present day Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Golden Valley, Plymouth, and all of present day New Hope, Crystal, and Robbinsdale
1948	Lee Elementary opens in Robbinsdale
1956	Robbinsdale High School moves into new building on 36th Ave., a few blocks away from old building, old building becomes Robbinsdale Junior High (RJHS)
1960	District is building a new school every year
1964	Lakeview Elementary opens in Robbinsdale
1964	Cooper High School (CHS) opens in New Hope, named after long-time superintendent of district
1965	E. J. Cooper retires as superintendent, Leroy Hood from Kansas hired as replacement
1967	District's athletic field next to RHS is officially named Milo M. Mielke Field after long-time principal of RHS who retires at the end of the school year

1970	Armstrong High School (AHS) opens in Plymouth, named after Neil Armstrong, astronaut who had just completed first moon walk, during fall semester Armstrong and Cooper students housed in Cooper in morning and afternoon shifts while waiting for late completion of Armstrong
1971	Olson Elementary opens in Crystal, last school to be built
1971	District enrollment peaks at 28,300 students, district is operating three senior high, four junior high, and 19 elementary schools
1972	School closings begin with Twin Lake Elementary and Oak Grove Elementary
January, 1977	Long-range Planning and Facilities Use Committee created by board, develops school-closure criteria
March, 1977	Board uses criteria to close Thorson Elementary and Cavanagh Elementary in Crystal
December, 1977	Long-range Planning and Facilities Use Committee modifies criteria slightly and reports to board
January 9, 1978	Board votes to close two elementary schools at end of school year and one junior high at end of next school year
March 6, 1978	Board votes to close Fair Elementary and Winnetka Elementary in Crystal and New Hope
May 15, 1978	Report comparing three high schools is completed in response to parental complaints over inconsistencies in programs of three schools
September 11, 1978	Hood recommends closing RJHS at end of year, uses criteria as justification
September 25, 1978	Board proposes closing RJHS
October 12, 1978	Public hearing on closing RJHS
October 16, 1978	Board votes to close RJHS, 6-0, an attempt is made to petition a referendum for increased money to keep RJHS open but is never formally presented
February 5, 1979	Board votes to close an elementary school at end of year
February 26, 1979	Hood recommends closing Lee Elementary School in Robbinsdale

March 5, 1979	Board reverses decision, votes to close two elementary schools at end of next school year, none at end of this school year, 200 people attend board meeting
May, 1979	Olson re-elected to school board
September, 1979	District and Robbinsdale city council begin talks on the use of RJHS, city would like to use part of building for community center
September, 1979	Future Concerns Committee formed by parents of Lee Elementary to protect Lee Elementary in Robbinsdale from closing if board proposes it for closure
December 3, 1979	Board votes to close just one elementary school at end of school year, not two as previously planned
December, 1979	Parents of Lee, Lakeview, and Noble elementary schools in Robbinsdale and Golden Valley form the East-side Coalition, try to convince board members not to close an east-side school
December 17, 1979	Hood again recommends Lee Elementary School for closure
January 7, 1980	Board votes against closing Lee, 4-2, votes against closing Crystal Heights, 4-2
January 21, 1980	Board votes to propose closing Olson Elementary School in Golden Valley, 4-2
February 11, 1980	Public hearing on proposed Olson closure
February 26, 1980	Board votes to close Olson at end of school year, 4-2
May 20, 1980	Fuhrmann re-elected to board, Bergquist (an Olson Elementary champion) ties with Marofsky for second board seat
June 2, 1980	Toss of coin puts Bergquist on board
July 1, 1980	Golden Valley School District merges with Hopkins, Golden Valley High School closed (later sold to Breck, a private school)
August 18, 1980	Board appoints two of its members to meet with cabinet to review school-closure criteria
September 22, 1980	Board decides to wait until October 20 for its decision on changing criteria
October 20, 1980	Board hears report from Grade Reorganization Committee, report shows

staying with current district grade-organization pattern of K-6, 7-9, 10-12 is most cost efficient by closing one high school, Board adopts some changes in criteria for closing schools

November 3, 1980   Board votes to close one elementary school at end of school year after some discussion on whether to close one or two

December 1, 1980   Hood recommends for the third time closing Lee Elementary in Robbinsdale

January 5, 1981   Robbinsdale city council presents board with petition against closing Lee (Ray Mattson, former city council member has recently taken over as mayor of Robbinsdale)

January 8, 1981   Board holds informational meetings for public input on different possible
January 12, 1981   grade reorganization plans for the district as it searches for cost-saving
January 15, 1981   measures

January 19, 1981   Board votes to propose Lee Elementary for closure, 5-1, Hood recommends staying with current grade-organization pattern of K-6, 7-9, 10-12

January 26, 1981   Public hearing on administrative proposal to keep current grade-organization pattern

February 2, 1981   Board votes to keep current grade-organization pattern, 6-0, the understanding is that one high school will close in the near future

February 5, 1981   District residents begin to send letters to the editor published in local newspaper comparing the three high schools and stating their preferred high school for closure

February 11, 1981   Public hearing on closing Lee, David Southward (Robbinsdale resident) leads argument against closure

February, 1981   Administration discusses best time line and process for closing a senior high

February 12, 1981   Local paper accuses board of holding secret meetings on high school closure in violation of Open Meeting Law

February 23, 1981   Board votes to close Lee Elementary, 5-1

March 16, 1981   Board approves time table for closing a senior high school (August 3—recommendation from administration, September 14—board proposal, October 1—public hearing, October 5—final action), some concern about

	these dates coinciding with a possible referendum for increased school taxes in the fall
April 6, 1981	Board votes to commit to close a senior high school at the end of the 1981-82 school year
April, 1981	District distributes pamphlet on questions and answers about the high school closing process
May 11, 1981 May 12, 1981 May 14, 1981	Administration meets with parent/faculty/student committees of Armstrong, Cooper, and Robbinsdale high schools concerning the strengths of each building
May 19, 1981 May 20, 1981 May 22, 1981	District administration tours Armstrong, Cooper, and Robbinsdale high school buildings, spends a day in each building as follow-up to committee presentations
May, 1981	Board approves sale of RJHS to a chiropractic college
May, 1981	Robbinsdale city council puts hold on RJHS redevelopment while study of best zoning use is undertaken
May 19, 1981	Webber re-elected to board, Marofsky elected to vacated board seat
June 15, 1981	Board votes to approve referendum election for increased school taxes in fall, consensus to use traditional weightings for school-closure criteria, Friends of Armstrong addresses board
July 6, 1981	New board is seated with new member Marofsky, Webber elected chair, board sets October 5 as date for referendum, board approves change in time line for closing a senior high school (October 12—administrative recommendation, October 19—board proposal, November 10 and 12—public hearings, November 16—final action)
July 20, 1981	Board holds meeting with Robbinsdale city council at city hall
July 27, 1981	Armstrong High parent-faculty committee makes presentation to board and community
July 28, 1981	Cooper High parent-faculty committee makes presentation to board and community
August 3, 1981	Board approves referendum request of 8.5 mills
August 17, 1981	Robbinsdale High parent-faculty committee makes presentation to board and community

August 22, 1981   Armstrong "keeps the ball rolling," continuously rolling a ball in front of school day and night for seven days in show of community support for keeping Armstrong open

September 1, 1981   Robbinsdale city council approves a study for best future use of RJHS (and maybe Lee) site

September 14, 1981   Board rejects request by Robbinsdale city council to share cost of study for future use of RJHS and Lee

October 5, 1981   Referendum for increased school taxes passes, 6,960 yes - 5,783 no, Board votes to terminate lease of RJHS to Robbinsdale city council at end of year

October 12, 1981   Administration recommends that Robbinsdale High remain open and that board choose between closing Armstrong or Cooper

October 19, 1981   Board proposes closing Cooper on second vote, 4-2, audience of 1,000+

October 20, 1981   Media descends on Cooper

October 29, 1981   Students form human ring around Cooper

November 10, 1981   Public hearings on proposal to close Cooper, Cooper student council
November 12, 1981   organizes march from Cooper to board meeting, audience of 1,000+

November 16, 1981   Motion to close Cooper fails at board meeting, 3-3, Webber switches vote, audience of 1,000+, board schedules special meeting for November 23, neighboring school district of Wayzata holds 12 million dollar bond referendum, fails 1,017 to 2,573

November 23, 1981   Board meets in special meeting for discussion, no motions, superintendent belatedly recommends Armstrong for closure, board sets another special meeting for December 1

December 1, 1981   Board meets in special session

December 7, 1981   Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers (RFT) strongly urges board to close a senior high at the end of the school year, motion to propose Armstrong for closure fails, 3-3, board schedules another work session for December 11

December 11, 1981   Board holds work session, Bergquist submits plan to reopen Robbinsdale Junior, close Robbinsdale Senior, and then over next two years close Plymouth Junior and Hosterman Junior, plan rejected

December 15, 1981   Representatives of American Arbitration Association are present at board

meeting, discussion of role they might play to help end deadlock, Hood says all three schools should be proposed for closure if arbitrators are used, says January 18 should be the final deadline for board action, motion to propose the closure of Armstrong and Robbinsdale fails, 3-3, meeting adjourns after midnight

December 17, 1981   Full page advertisement in newspaper, signed by hundreds, advocates the closing of Armstrong

December, 1981   RHS Parent Action Committee (PAC) and CHS Cooper Parent Organization join forces

December 18, 1981   First portion of study of future use of RJHS site presented to Robbinsdale city council, recommends residential or institutional use

December 21, 1981   President of RFT, Sandy Peterson, urges action on closing a senior high, motion to propose Robbinsdale for closure fails, 3-3, motion to employ arbitrator to assist in making a decision fails, 3-3, motion to table the subject of a high school closure until fall of 1982 is ruled out of order by chair, Robbinsdale city council asks to continue to rent space in RJHS until April, board approves on condition that council will pay difference between actual expenses in maintaining building and mothballing building

January 4, 1982   RFT banners board meeting, elementary schools' PTA presidents tell board they expect board to close a high school, RFT president again urges board to close a high school, says board should propose all three high schools for closure and hire arbitration panel with one economist, one educator, and one neutral chair, board wants to check with state's Attorney General on the legality of hiring an arbitrator, board approves final action of March 8 for elementary closure decision, board sets special meeting for January 11

January 11, 1982   500 teachers march outside board meeting, RFT president again urges board to close a high school, motion by Bergquist to close a high school using a numbers method fails, 3-3, motion to propose to close Armstrong and Robbinsdale fails, 3-3, motion to split the motion into two separate motions concerning Armstrong and Robbinsdale fails, 3-3, motion to propose to close Robbinsdale fails, 3-3, motion to close Cooper fails, 3-3, motion to direct the administration to contact the American Arbitration Association for a list of names of possible arbitrators fails, 3-3

January 15, 1982   Teacher Don Blore suggests district staff for two hypothetical high schools, after May board elections new board members would decide which buildings would house the high schools, district would inform students and staff where to report for school in fall

January 18, 1982   At board meeting, a motion is made (a) to propose to close Armstrong and

Robbinsdale high schools, (b) to reopen two schools with two different programs, one flexible with Scarbrough as principal and one traditional with Kemppainen as principal, and (c) to direct the superintendent to engage a fact-finding panel with board input and approval to advise board on which two schools to reopen, motion passes, 6-0

January 20, 1982   Record snow storm of 17.4 inches

January 22, 1982   Another record snow storm of 19.19 inches interrupts board work session

February, 1982   School board in Bloomington School District votes to close Lincoln High School

February 1, 1982   Board receives petition requesting that board act on adding a seventh member to board, cabinet recommends closing Crystal Heights Elementary in Crystal, board reviews names of persons recommended as potential members of fact-finding panel

February 4, 1982   Special board meeting, Dick Miller, experienced arbitrator answers questions from board and administration, board decides that fact-finding panel will consist of three people, selects eight persons from the list and asks superintendent to contact them in order, board makes decision on process panel will use

February 8, 1982   Public hearing on proposed closure of Armstrong

February 10, 1982   Public hearing on proposed closure of Robbinsdale

February 16, 1982   Joselyn, Webber, and Hood meet with three-member panel and present them with their charge: "Recommend which two senior high school buildings will best serve the interests of school District 281 for the foreseeable future."

February 22, 1982   Motion to close Armstrong, Cooper, and Robbinsdale high schools passes, 6-0, motion to approve charge of fact-finding panel passes, 6-0, motion to approve process of fact-finding panel passes, 6-0, motion to approve three members of fact-finding panel passes, 6-0, motion to approve resolution to submit question of seven-member board to electors passes, 6-0, motion to propose closure of Crystal Heights passes, 6-0

March, 1982   School board in Hopkins School District votes to close Eisenhower High School

March, 1982   School board in Minneapolis votes to close 18 school buildings

March 13, 1982   Panel members tour all three high school buildings on a Saturday in an

order determined by lot

March 16, 1982	Special election approves changing board to seven members, 2113 yes, 1267 no
March 22, 1982	Board votes to close Crystal Heights Elementary, 6-0
March 26, 1982	Fact-finding panel hears two-hour presentations from all three schools in one day
March 29, 1982	Interviews begin staffing for two hypothetical high schools
April 5, 1982	Board approves second purchase agreement for sale of RJHS to chiropractic college, (expects Robbinsdale city council to approve), board receives notice that two staff members have filed a grievance against the school board concerning the staffing procedure for two hypothetical high schools
April 13, 1982	Robbinsdale city council lifts moratorium imposed on development or redevelopment of RJHS property
April 19, 1982	After two teachers file suit, court issues temporary restraining order on selection process district is using to staff two hypothetical high schools
April 26, 1982	Fact finding panel issues its report, report delivered to board members, report recommends closing Robbinsdale High
April 27, 1982	Board presents fact-finding panel's recommendation to public of 1,300+, motion made to reopen Cooper and Armstrong, Cooper with a traditional program, Armstrong with a flexible program, Robbinsdale remains closed, motion passes, 5-1, Fuhrmann votes no, board approves new attendance boundaries for schools
April 28, 1982	Flag flown at half-mast at Robbinsdale High School, 700 students spontaneously walk out of school and form a giant letter "R" on Mielke Field
April 30, 1982	Court rules district's staffing plan was in violation of teachers' contract, district must begin staffing again
May 3, 1982	Board meeting is packed with Robbinsdale High supporters, turns into a meeting of public disapproval of board's decision to close Robbinsdale
May 4, 1982	Robbinsdale city council rejects approval for sale of RJHS to chiropractic college
May 5, 1982	Orientation meetings held at Armstrong and Cooper for Robbinsdale

students who will be transferring next year

May 6, 1982	Rally to save Robbinsdale High School held in old RJHS gym, over 1,000 attend
May 17, 1982	Rally to save Robbinsdale High School held in parking lot of district's central office under rain, over 600 attend
May 18, 1982	School board elections held, Coalition for Accountability and Progressive Education (CAPE) candidates, Norby, Schaefer, Southward, (all Robbinsdale and Cooper supporters), win all three seats in heavy voting, long-time incumbent board member Joselyn, an Armstrong supporter, loses
May 24, 1982	Administration invites newly-elected board members to a meeting to explain district procedures, says school would have to start five weeks late in the fall if board decides to reopen Robbinsdale High
May 27, 1982	Rally to save Robbinsdale High, 500 attend, Moberg, Southward, and Robb speak, plans made for "Save RHS Day"
June 4, 1982	Judge grants restraining order halting closure of Robbinsdale High after Robb and Moberg file suit against district, they allege violations of Open Meeting Law
June 5, 1982	"Save Robbinsdale High School Day" declared by Robbinsdale mayor, garage sale, bake sale, car wash held at old RJHS, downtown decorated in school colors of blue and gold, $4,500 raised for legal expenses to keep RHS open
June 8, 1982	Newly formed Concerned Citizens for 281 holds meeting at Armstrong to discuss the restraining order against closing Robbinsdale High
June 10, 1982	Last graduating class from Robbinsdale holds graduation ceremonies at Mielke Field
June 21, 1982	Trial begins on request for permanent injunction on closing Robbinsdale High based on allegations that board violated state's Open Meeting Law
June 29, 1982	Court rules that board followed proper procedures in closing Robbinsdale High, but rules that board did violate Open Meeting Law, board members fined $100 each
July 6, 1982	Robbinsdale city council passes resolution opposing state's granting title of land deeded to 281 for playground purposes free from previous restrictions

July 12, 1982   New board is seated, board receives petition signed by 12,000 people to uphold decision and move on, roll call vote to reopen Robbinsdale High fails, 6-1, only Southward votes yes

July 22, 1982   *Star Tribune* newspaper publishes poll of district residents, 48%-34% say board made a poor decision, 41%-28% say board did not act appropriately

August, 1982   Robbinsdale city council extends moratorium of development or sale of RJHS for another year

August 10, 1982   Robb and Moberg request amendment from district judge and also file an appeal to Minnesota Supreme Court on district court's ruling upholding school closure

August 31, 1982   Hood announces he will retire at end of school year

September 3, 1982   District court judge issues additional findings on case with little change in original ruling

September 7, 1982   School year begins with 800 former Robbinsdale students moved to Cooper and 600 moved to Armstrong

September 27, 1982   1,500 signatures presented to board to reopen Robbinsdale High, plan is to create three high schools with grades 7-12 in each, administration disapproves of plan

October 4, 1982   Armstrong homecoming week begins with theme "United—the only way to fly"

October 11, 1982   Cooper homecoming week begins with theme "Birds of a feather flock together"

October 18, 1982   Pre-conference hearings begin before Minnesota Supreme Court on Open Meeting Law and closing of Robbinsdale High, entire court agrees to hear case

November 11, 1982   PAC holds meeting, Robb and Moberg explain why PAC now supports a recall of the referendum for increased school taxes

December 6, 1982   Board approves one year option with Robbinsdale city council for possible sale of Lee Elementary

December 20, 1982   Board receives petition for vote to recall referendum, board approves an appraisal of Robbinsdale High

January 6, 1983   Save Our Kids Organization (SOKO) takes out full-page advertisement in

community paper asking residents to "unsign" the petition

January 8, 1983	In light of pending recall vote, board member Southward recommends K-6 and 7-12 plan in order to reopen Robbinsdale High for next school year
January 13, 1983	Board declares petition for recall to be invalid, lacks sufficient allowable signatures, PAC says it will assemble new petition
January 17, 1983	Fuhrmann is only other board member to support Southward on K-6, 7-12 plan, board sends plan to Futures Committee
February 7, 1983	Board receives second petition for vote to recall referendum
February 14, 1983	Board validates and certifies second recall petition, sets voting date for March 21, approves wording on ballot, "yes" upholds referendum, "no" recalls referendum, board votes to close Sunny Hollow Elementary in New Hope, 5-2
February 22, 1983	Attorney advises board it must revise wording on recall ballot to conform with wording on petition, "yes" now recalls referendum, "no" upholds referendum
March 7, 1983	Board votes 5-1-1 (one abstention) to support goals of SOKO, approves appraisal of Mielke Field
March 12, 1983	SOKO holds rally to uphold referendum, Skip Humphrey, an Armstrong parent and state attorney-general, addresses crowd
March 17, 1983	Advertisements appear in newspapers on both sides of proposed referendum recall, Yes—"Put the public back into the public schools", No—"Vote 'no' to save a kid you love"
March 21, 1983	Referendum recall election takes place, referendum is upheld, 15,384 reject recall, 11,442 approve recall, record turnout (26,826) for school-related election in district
April 20, 1983	Board selects new superintendent, Donna Carter, 39 years old, African-American female from Michigan, only third superintendent since district's first high school was built in 1936
May 2, 1983	Board approves appraisal of Robbinsdale High
May, 1983	Oral arguments begin before Minnesota Supreme Court on Open Meeting Law and Robbinsdale High school-closure case
May 17, 1983	Bergquist wins re-election to board, Mooney wins seat being vacated by

Fuhrmann, Robb and Moberg follow in next most votes

June 8, 1983 — Graduation ceremonies take place at Cooper, "R" for Robbinsdale worn on graduation caps of former Robbinsdale students

July 4, 1983 — At first board meeting, new superintendent calls for "a time for building," building bridges across the district, institutes a community 24-hour action line phone-answering service

July 15, 1983 — Minnesota Supreme Court upholds decision that Robbinsdale High was properly closed, more clearly defines Open Meeting Law, in redefining Open Meeting Law it overturns lower court's decision, says board members did not violate Open Meeting Law and will not be fined

October 17, 1983 — Board passes motion declaring Robbinsdale High no longer needed for school purposes, authorizes sale of building to potential buyer, 6-1, Southward opposes and potential buyer withdraws shortly thereafter

November 14, 1983 — Robbinsdale city council holds hearing on board's request to indicate whether the City of Robbinsdale would prefer to keep the RJHS or RHS building, council makes no decision

November 28, 1983 — Board approves new middle school program, Technology Learning Center (TLC), to be housed in part of RJHS, rest of building still to be used by Robbinsdale city council as a community center

December 19, 1983 — Board approves Robbinsdale High to be listed exclusively with a new realty company, 6-1, Southward opposes, building is never sold

1984 — TLC begins in RJHS building

1985 — Study Group compares RAHS and RCHS

1993 — Spanish Immersion program moves into RHS building

2000 — TLC moves into RHS building, shares building with Spanish Immersion, eventually housing over 1,200 students grades 1-8

2005 — After extensive remodeling, RHS building becomes attendance-area middle school named Robbinsdale Middle School

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions
(used to guide conversations with
interview participants)

What was your position at the time of the high school closing process, both within and/or outside the district?

How many years had you worked with the district at the time?

Where did you live at the time?

How many years had you lived there?

Did your children or other family members have any connection with the district?

Did you go to school in the district?

Do you recall the early days of the school district? How would you describe....

Do you recall the openings of any schools? How would you describe....

How would you describe any perceived differences among the three high schools: RHS (Robbinsdale High School), CHS (Cooper High School), and AHS (Armstrong High School)?

How would you describe any perceived differences among the communities served by the three high schools?

What three words (or less) best describe RHS, CHS, AHS?

What three words (or less) best describe the community served by RHS, CHS, AHS?

In what ways were you involved in the school closing process?

Are there any good stories that come to your mind from the school closing process?

What forces were at play during the school closing process?

What three words (or less) best describe the parent action group of RHS, CHS, AHS?

Could you describe something that somebody did or said, or some event that happened that made you say, "That's what this is all about."

Could you describe something that somebody did or said, or some event that was pivotal in

giving the decision process the direction it took?

How would you describe the challenges involved in leadership under a period of shrinking resources?

Is there something you believe that district leadership could have done differently, if anything, during this time period?

Which school do you think should have closed?

Why did RHS end up being chosen for closure?

Which actions taken by the district do you perceive as being taken to heal the wounds and unify the district after the closing of RHS?

Why has this been such a festering issue for the district over the years?

Why are people still talking about the closing of RHS?

In what way is the closing of RHS still and issue in District 281?

Are you aware of any other high school closings that live up to the reputation of the closing of RHS?

APPENDIX C

**Additional Interview Questions
(used to guide conversations
with selected interview participants)**

Why and how were the 'criteria' developed?

How did the Grade Reorganization Committee come into being?

Was there any support within the Grade Reorganization Committee to reorganize the grade pattern for schools and not close any high school?

Why were the 'criteria' used for the high school closure?

Where did support reside for flex-mod programming?

Why did Hood not recommend one specific high school for closure initially?

Did Hood really favor closing AHS as he publicly stated?

Why were all three high schools asked to participate in presentations (three presentations total for each school)?

Why did RHS support CHS initially in the 'coalition'?

Where did support reside for using the panel of experts?

Why were all three buildings considered by the panel, rather than just CHS and AHS?

Why did you vote to close RHS in the end?

APPENDIX D

Map of Three High Schools and Communities

Source: *Resource book on closing a senior high school: Presented at a school board meeting, Monday, October 12, 1981*. (1981, October 12). p. A-14.

LOCATION OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL BUILDINGS
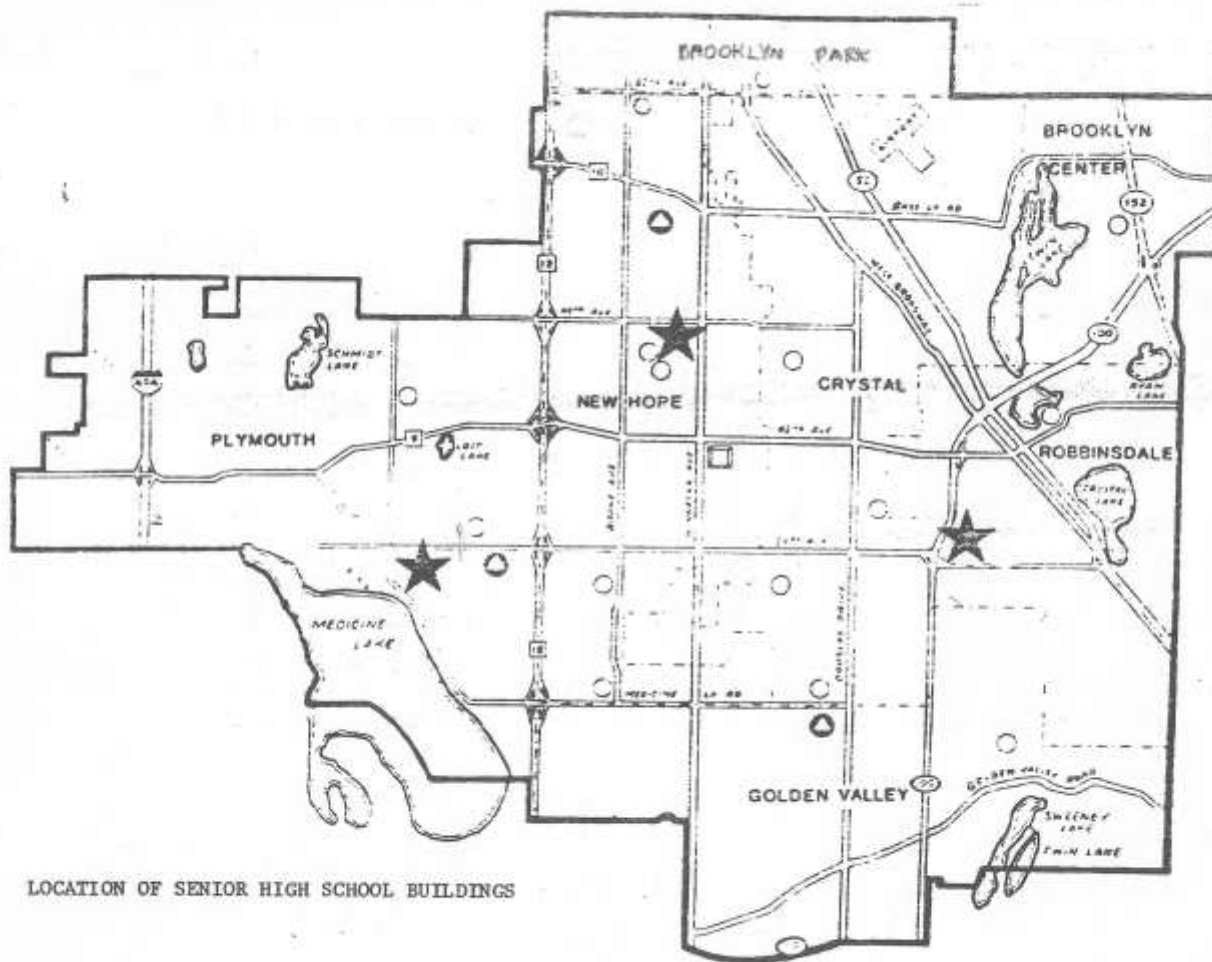
APPENDIX E

Map of Three Attendance-Area Boundaries

Source: *Resource book on closing a senior high school: Presented at a school board meeting, Monday, October 12, 1981*. (1981, October 12). p. A-1.

PRESENT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL BOUNDARIES
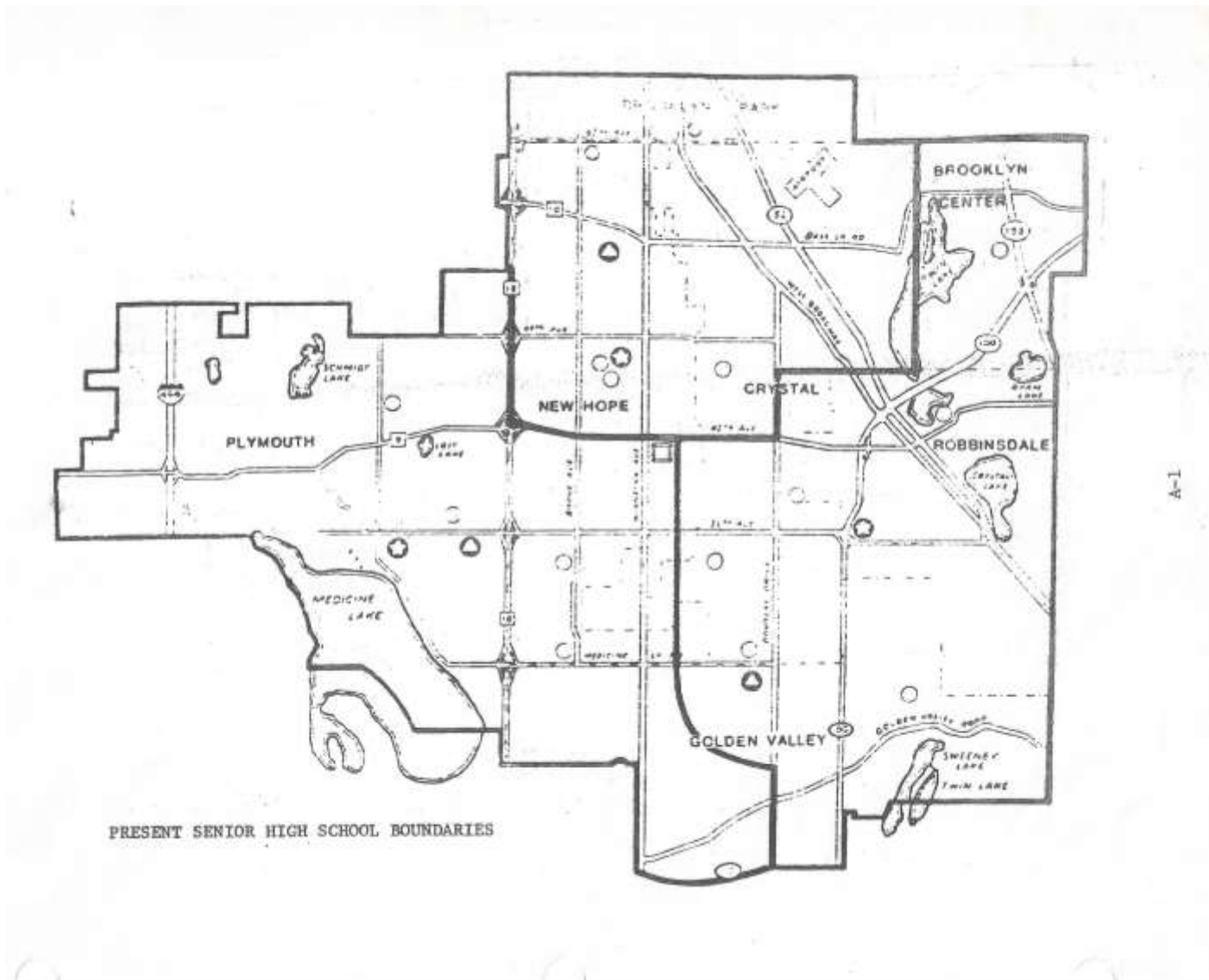
APPENDIX F

Map of 1980 Census Tracts by Median Family Income

Source: *North central accreditation report of Robbinsdale Cooper Senior High School*. (1987, Spring). p. 25E.
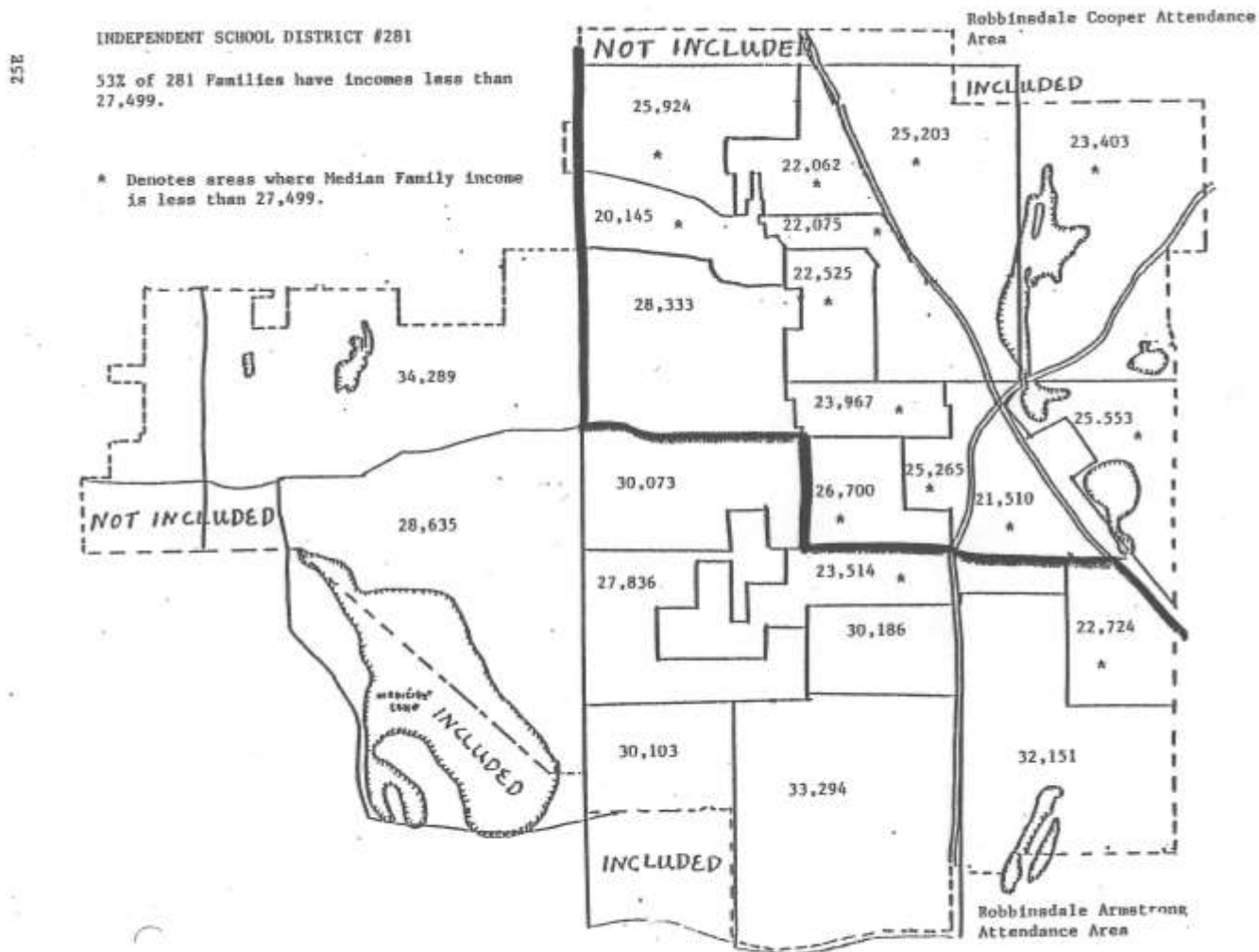
APPENDIX G

Median Family Income of 1980 Census Tracts Shaded by Thirds

Source: *North central accreditation report of Robbinsdale Cooper Senior High School*. (1987, Spring). p. 25F.
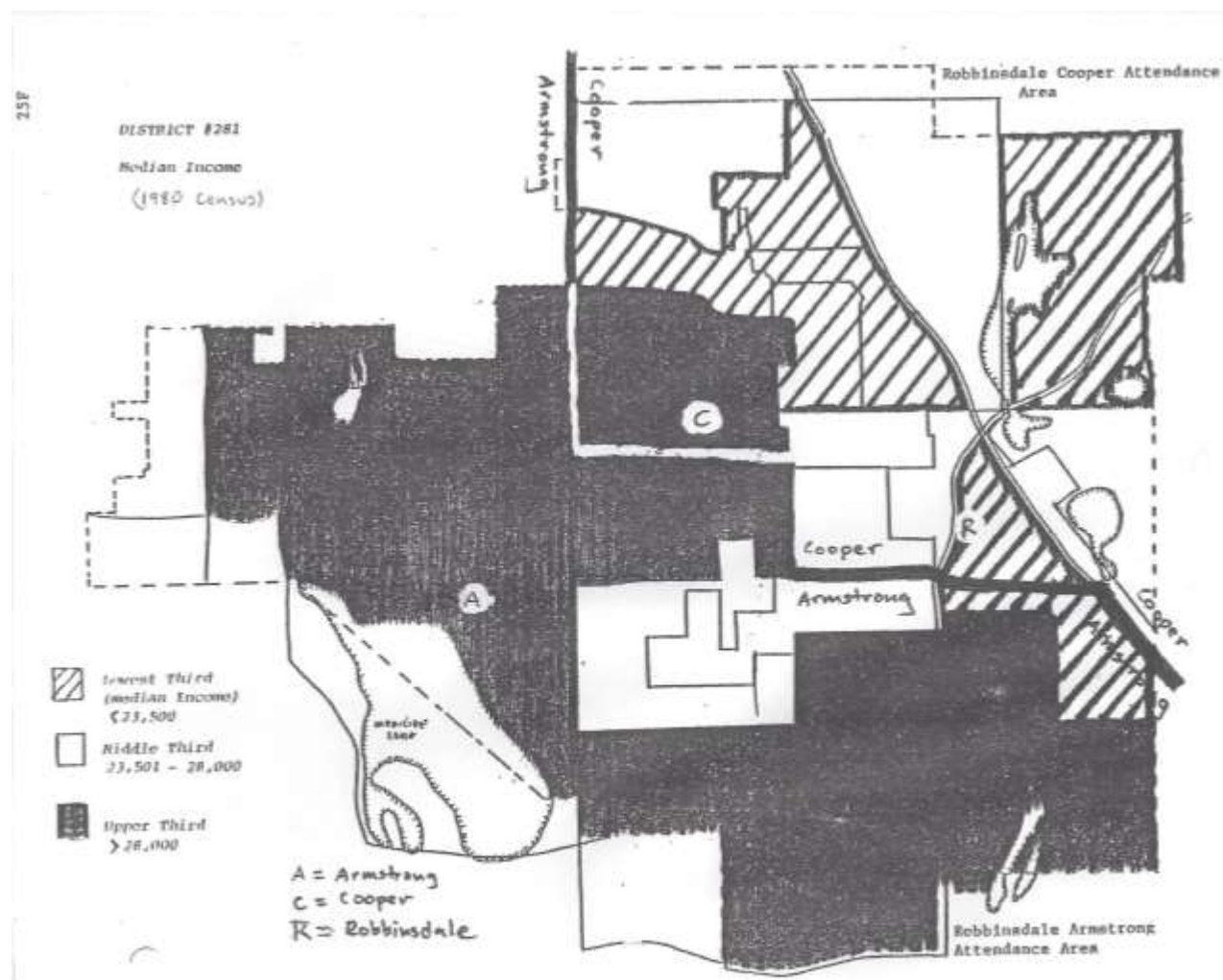
APPENDIX H

Comparison of Three High Schools

RHS	CHS	AHS
constructed 1956 (1936)	constructed 1964	constructed 1970
named for city of Robbinsdale, namesake of whole district	named for long-time superintendent of district	named for Neil Armstrong, first man on the moon
football stadium, Mielke Field, named for first principal of RHS	no football stadium, (used RHS' Mielke Field)	no football stadium, (used RHS' Mielke Field)
mascot—robin, songbird, named for city, robin painted on city water tower	mascot—hawk, hunting bird	mascot—falcon, hunting bird
traditional educational scheduling	started flexible-modular educational scheduling, switched back to traditional	flexible-modular educational scheduling
traditional program, basics, basic skills	traditional program, Cooper Cares	alternative program, options, future
located in residential neighborhood	located in residential neighborhood	located on wooded hilltop overlooking lake
community settled from 1890-1940, small-town feeling, main street, Whiz Bang Days	community settled from 1940-1960, no definable city center	community settled from 1960-1980 and ongoing, no definable city center, much undeveloped land
old middle class, part working class, part middle class	old middle class, part working class, part middle class	new middle class, part middle class, part upper middle class
lower educational level among parents	lower educational level among parents	higher educational level among parents
lower housing prices	lower housing prices	higher housing prices

APPENDIX I

Summary of School-Closure Criteria and Weightings

Source: *More information on closing a senior high school: Presented at a school board meeting, Monday, October 12, 1981*. (1981, October 12). pp. 5-6.

I. Students, Staff and Community

Weighting	Criteria
7	Aa. Displacement of students
5	Ab. Placement of building
9	B. Minimum enrollment needed
9	C. District population patterns and trends
4	D. Role (use) of school by community
4	E. Unique educational programs
5	F. Relationships of schools and municipalities

II. Physical Facilities

Weighting	Criteria
11	A. Completeness and flexibility of facilities
10	B. Physical condition of building
7	C. Appropriateness of site location

III. Financial Factors

Weighting	Criteria
13	A. Cost per pupil and per square foot
8	B. Alternative use
8	C. Transportation costs per pupil

APPENDIX J

Criteria Worksheet

Source: *More information on closing a senior high school: Presented at a school board meeting, Monday, October 12, 1981*. (1981, October 12). n.p.

CRITERIA WORKSHEET

SCHOOL	ARS		SCHOOL	CHS		SCHOOL RHS

		ARS		CHS		RHS
I. A. a.	7 X 10 = 70		7 X 8 = 56		7 X 9 = 63	
b.	5 X 7 = 35		5 X 8 = 40		5 X 10 = 50	
B.	9 X 10 = 90		9 X 10 = 90		9 X 10 = 90	
C.	9 X 10 = 90		9 X 8 = 72		9 X 8 = 72	
D.	4 X 9 = 36		4 X 9 = 36		4 X 10 = 40	
E.	4 X 10 = 40		4 X 8 = 32		4 X 8 = 32	
F.	5 X 9 = 45		5 X 9 = 45		5 X 10 = 50	
	TOTAL: 406		TOTAL: 371		TOTAL: 397	
II. A.	11 X 10 = 110		11 X 8 = 88		11 X 7 = 77	
B.	10 X 10 = 100		10 X 9 = 90		10 X 8 = 80	
C.	7 X 9 = 63		7 X 10 = 70		7 X 10 = 70	
	TOTAL: 273		TOTAL: 248		TOTAL: 227	
III. A.	13 X 6 = 78		13 X 9 = 117		13 X 10 = 130	
B.	8 X 10 = 80		8 X 10 = 80		8 X 10 = 80	
C.	8 X 7 = 56		8 X 10 = 80		8 X 8 = 64	
	TOTAL: 214		TOTAL: 277		TOTAL: 274	
	100 GRAND TOTAL: 893		100 GRAND TOTAL: 896		100 GRAND TOTAL: 898	

APPENDIX K

Map of Proposed Boundary if Robbinsdale High Closed

Source: *Resource book on closing a senior high school: Presented at a school board meeting, Monday, October 12, 1981*. (1981, October 12). p. A-6.

TENTATIVE BOUNDARIES:

ARMSTRONG & COOPER

(ROBBINSDALE CLOSED)
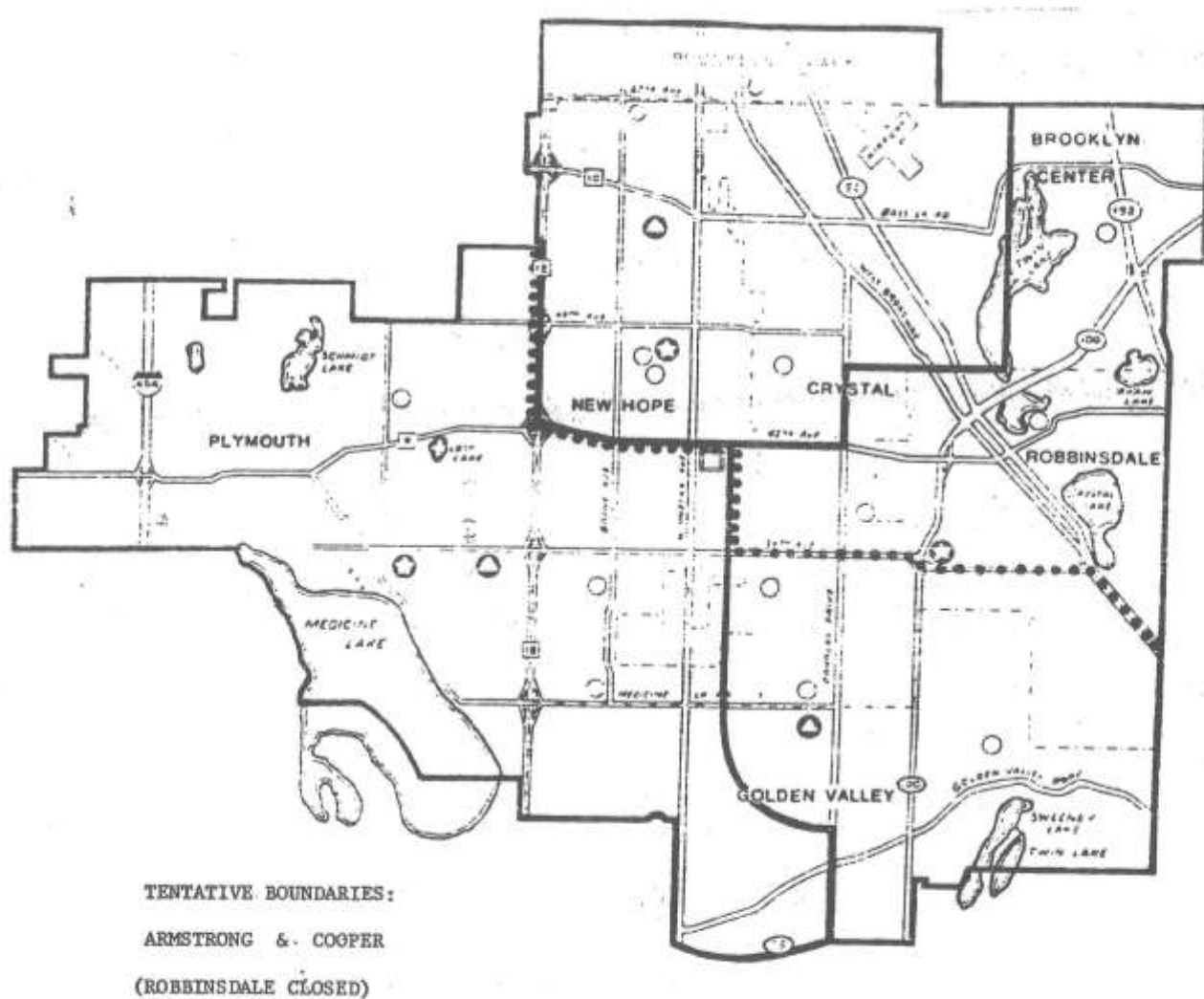
APPENDIX L

Minnesota Supreme Court Ruling

Source: *Moberg & Robb v. I.S.D. 281*, *No. C6-82-1108*. (MN Supreme Court, July, 15, 1983). pp. 7-16.

"During the time the Board was engaged in the process of determining which school to close, individual Board members gathered in private on at least seventeen occasions and discussed the school closing issue. In addition to these face-to-face meetings, all of the Board members had numerous telephone conversations with other Board members concerning the school closing. On January 12, 1982, Board member Marofsky sent a letter to Board members Webber, Olson and Fuhrmann, attempting to persuade them to change their votes on the school closing issue.... Appellants and many other interested citizens participated fully in the many public meetings and hearings that followed, and the fact that they did not anticipate the panel's ultimate recommendation and rationale did not deprive them of a meaningful voice in the process.

Appellants allege in their brief and at oral argument that the 'ground rules' for the decision changed at the time the panel was engaged, shifting the focus from financial considerations to future educational needs of the district. We are unpersuaded that the Board's focus changed appreciably during the course of these events. Although a need to conserve financial resources prompted the initial decision to close one high school, it is unlikely that the Board ever intended to base its choice of which school to close wholly on financial grounds. On the contrary, substantial savings were predicted from closure of any of the three schools, and therefore appellants must have known from the outset that the decision would ultimately and logically turn upon the Board's primary objective of providing the best possible educational program for the district in the years to come.

Nor can we credit appellant's claim that they were lulled into believing that closing Robbinsdale was not a serious possibility. The Board was not bound by representations and advice of district administrators. There was a separate hearing on the closing of this school, and a separate motion to close Robbinsdale was presented to the Board; the possibility of its closing was never placed beyond consideration by the body having ultimate authority to make the decision.... The trial court found no violation in the Board's use of the fact-finding panel's recommendations, which were based upon facts obtained from public documents and open hearings.... In this case, the Board, which has wide discretion in such matters, chose to weigh the panel's recommendations heavily in making its decision. It was also capable of discounting any possible errors contained in the panel's report without submitting it to another round of public debate.

We do not minimize the significance of public input in situations as important as the closing of a neighborhood school. It is institutions such as Robbinsdale Senior High School which help to cement a community and impart to it an extra measure of vitality and spirit. When the utility of such institutions begins to conflict with other community exigencies, however, we look to the locally elected representatives to receive public input, and weigh and resolve such conflicts within the parameters of their statutory authority. In the case at hand, there was no alternative before the Board that would not have caused anguish to some segment of the community. When, as here, a governing body has followed applicable statutory procedures and its decision is supported by substantial evidence, the courts must uphold that decision though

there be heartfelt opposition to it.... There is a point beyond which open discussion requirements may serve to immobilize a body and prevent the resolution of important problems. In the instant case, for example, it appears that the private discussions were conducted for the purpose of breaking the deadlock rather than for achieving some secret intended result. All members participated in at least one private meeting, but no clear majority was working together, nor was there any suggestion of improper influence or untoward pressure exerted by any members. The Board was under great time pressure to reach a decision, and members sought out each other's views and positions in an effort to find some common ground. The decision to hire a fact-finding panel was a neutral, fair-minded solution with no foreordained result. This case may serve as an illustration that in formulating a definition of 'meetings' that must be open, the public's right to be informed must be balanced against the public's right to the effective and efficient administration of public bodies. Contrary to appellants' position, it is the duty of public officials to persuade each other in an attempt to resolve issues, and it makes little sense to suggest that they may listen to a group of non-members on important matters but not to their colleagues, who may be more expert on the subject than any other persons. Intra-agency persuasion and discussion become improper when designed to avoid public discussion altogether, to forge a majority in advance of public hearings on an issue, or to hide improper influences such as the personal or pecuniary interest of a public official.”

APPENDIX M

Historical Photographic Account

Sources and credits for images (by number and page):

#1, p. 649, top, *Robbinsdale, Minnesota: A Pictorial History 1893-1993*, back cover, courtesy of Robbinsdale Historical Society

#2, p. 649, bottom, *Robbinsdale, Minnesota: A Pictorial History 1893-1993*, n.p., courtesy of Robbinsdale Historical Society

#3, p. 650, top, *Robbinsdale, Minnesota: A Pictorial History 1893-1993*, n.p., courtesy of Robbinsdale Historical Society

#4, p. 650, bottom, *Robbinsdale, Minnesota: A Pictorial History 1893-1993*, n.p., courtesy of Robbinsdale Historical Society

#5, p. 651, top, Margaret Chuba photographer, *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, October 29, 1981, p. 1, reprinted with permission

#6, p. 651, bottom, Larry Davenport photographer, *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, May 6, 1982, p. 11A, reprinted with permission

#7, p. 652, top, Tom Kloos photographer*, Odyssey*, October 19, 1981, p. 2, courtesy of District 281

#8, p. 652, middle, Tom Kloos photographer, *Odyssey*, October 19, 1981, p. 2, courtesy of District 281

#9, p. 652, bottom, Tom Kloos photographer, *Odyssey*, October 19, 1981, p. 2, courtesy of District 281

#10, p. 653, top, *Odyssey*, October 4, 1982, p. 2, courtesy of District 281

#11, p. 653, middle, Jack Gillis photographer, *Minneapolis Star*, February 4, 1982, p. 3 (Community/Northwest 1), reprinted with permission

#12, p. 653, bottom, Larry Davenport photographer, *North Hennepin Post*, May 12, 1983, p. 13A, reprinted with permission

#13, p. 654, top, *Odyssey*, October 5, 1979, p. 6, courtesy of District 281

#14, p. 654, middle left, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, July 21, 1983, p. 18 (Community/Northwest 1), reprinted with permission

#15, p. 654, middle right, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, July 21, 1983, p. 18 (Community/Northwest 1), reprinted with permission

#16, p. 654, bottom left, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, July 22, 1982, p. 17 (Community/Northwest 1), reprinted with permission

#17, p. 654, bottom middle, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, July 21, 1983, p. 3 (Community/Northwest 1), reprinted with permission

#18, p. 654, bottom right, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, July 22, 1982, p. 17 (Community/Northwest 1), reprinted with permission

#19, p. 655, top, Larry Davenport photographer, *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, October 15, 1981, p. 1, reprinted with permission

#20, p. 655, bottom, Larry Davenport photographer, *North Hennepin Post*, October 22, 1981, p. 1, reprinted with permission

#21, p. 656, top, Mike Adair photographer, *North Hennepin Post*, November 19, 1981, p. 1, reprinted with permission

#22, p. 656, bottom, Mike Adair photographer, *North Hennepin Post*, December 10, 1981, p. 1, reprinted with permission

#23, p. 657, top, Julie Weiss photographer, *Odyssey*, April 10, 1981, p. 4, courtesy of District 281

#24, p. 657, bottom, Tom Becklund photographer, *Odyssey*, January 26, 1982, p. 2, courtesy of District 281

#25, p. 658, top, Alan Ramos photographer, *Odyssey*, May 4, 1982, p. 2, courtesy of District 281

#26, p. 658, bottom, Chip Becklund photographer, *Odyssey*, May 4, 1982, p. 1, courtesy of District 281

#27, p. 659, top, Art Hager photographer, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, May 6, 1982, p. 3 (Community/Northwest 1), reprinted with permission

#28, p. 659, bottom, D. Shore cartoonist, *New Hope-Plymouth Post*, May 6, 1982, p. 4A, reprinted with permission

#29, p. 660, top, courtesy of Gary Laurant, personal photograph collection

#30, p. 660, bottom, courtesy of Gary Laurant, personal photograph collection

#31, p. 661, top, courtesy of Gary Laurant, personal photograph collection

#32, p. 661, bottom, courtesy of Gary Laurant, personal photograph collection

#33, p. 662, top, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, March 17, 1983, p. 7 (Community/Northwest 1), reprinted with permission

#34, p. 662, bottom left, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, July 21, 1983, p. 1 (Community/Northwest 1), reprinted with permission

#35, p. 662, bottom right, *North Hennepin Post*, May 12, 1983, p. 15A, reprinted with permission

#36, p. 663, courtesy of Gary Laurant, personal photograph collection
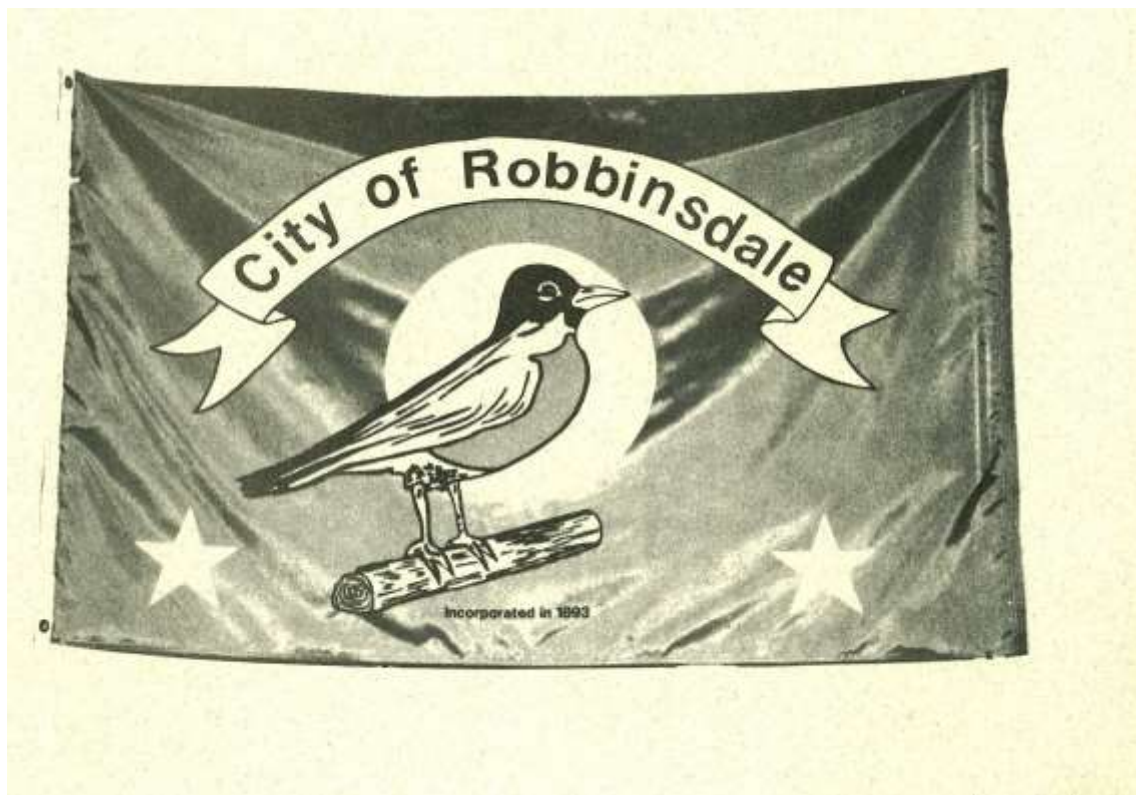
1 - Robbinsdale City Flag
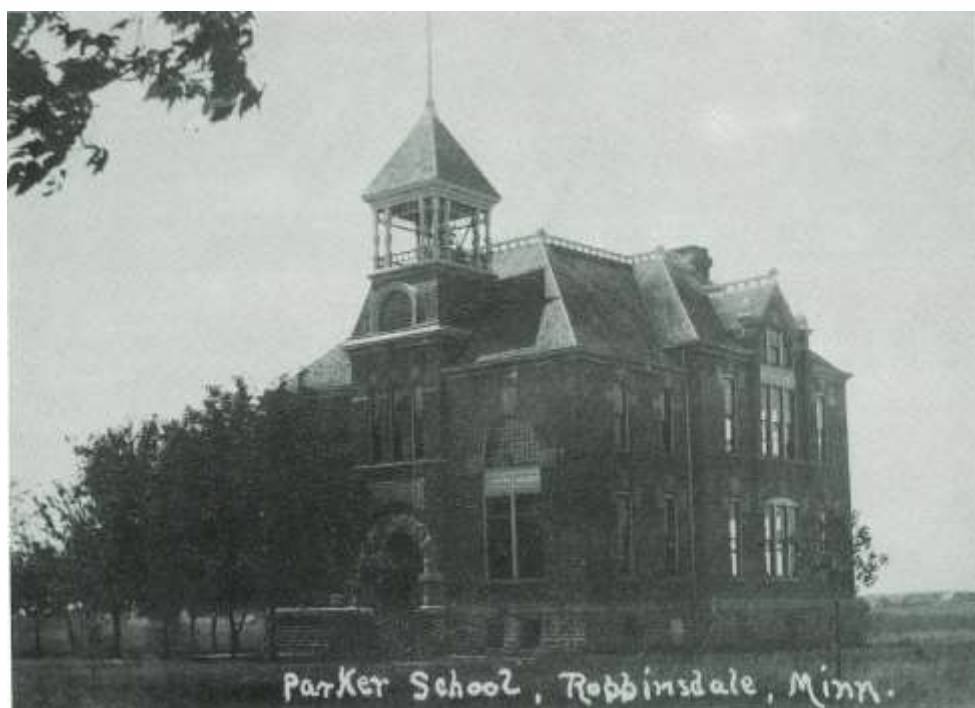
2 - Parker School

3 - The Old Robbinsdale High School

4 - Construction of the New Robbinsdale High School
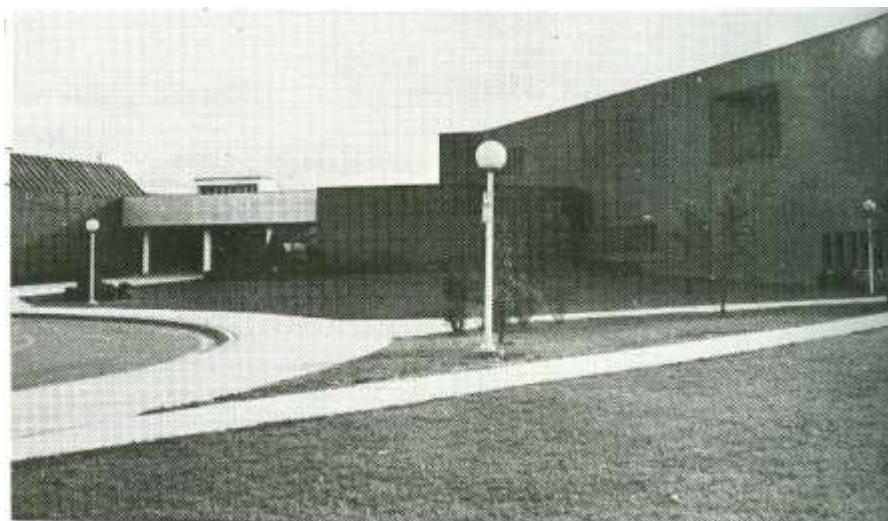
5 - E. J. Cooper, First Superintendent

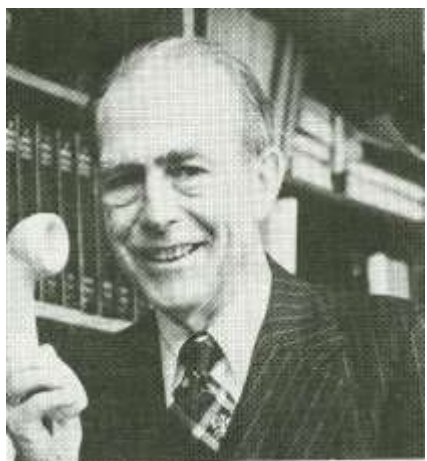6 - Robbinsdale High Pep Band
at State Basketball Tournament

7 - Robbinsdale High School

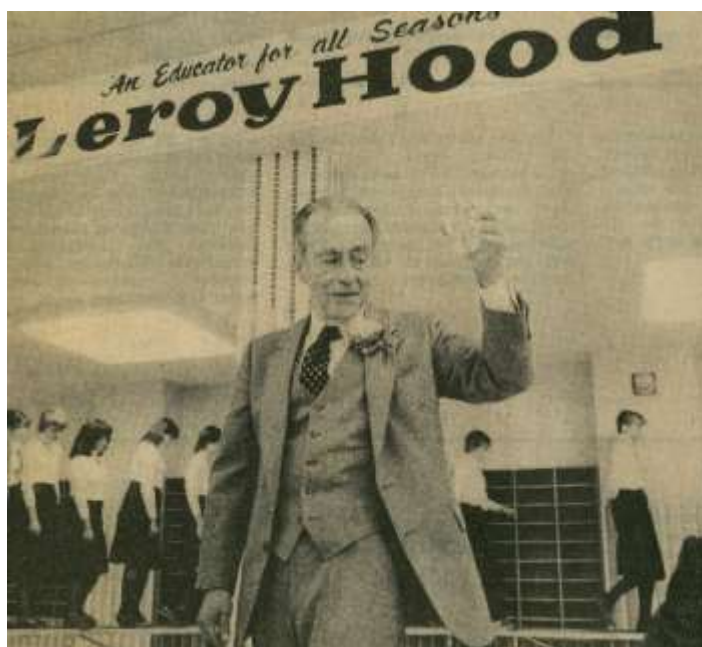8 - Cooper High School

9 - Armstrong High School

10

Superintendent Leroy Hood

11

12

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

13 - Fred Webber, Chair

14 - Pastor David Olson

15 - Dr. Gary Joselyn

16 - Bill Bergquist

17 - Myrna Marofsky

18- Bill Fuhrmann

19 - Superintendent Hood Declines to Make Firm Recommendation on High School Closure

20 - Residents Pack Board Meetings as Board
Debates Whether to Close Armstrong or Cooper

21 - Cooper Supporters Protest Closure Proposal

22 - School Board Holds Work Session in Attempt to Break Deadlock

23 - Robbinsdale Federation of Teachers President Sandy Peterson
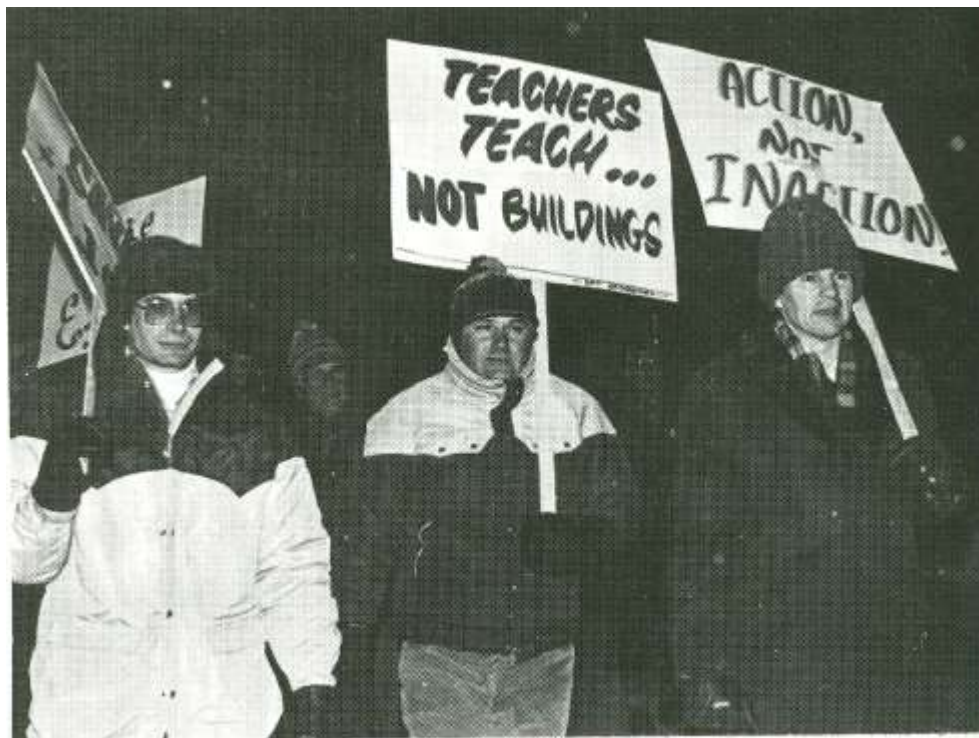
24 - Teachers Picket the School Board Impasse Outside Board Meetings

25 - School Board Reads Aloud Panel's Report and Votes to Close Robbinsdale High

26 - Robbinsdale High Students React to Board's Surprise Last-Minute Decision

27 - Lawn Signs Following Board's Decision

28 - Community Sentiment in Local Newspaper

29 - Community Sentiment Outside Front Doors

30 - Robbinsdale Supporters Picket Administration Building

31 - School Board Election Campaign
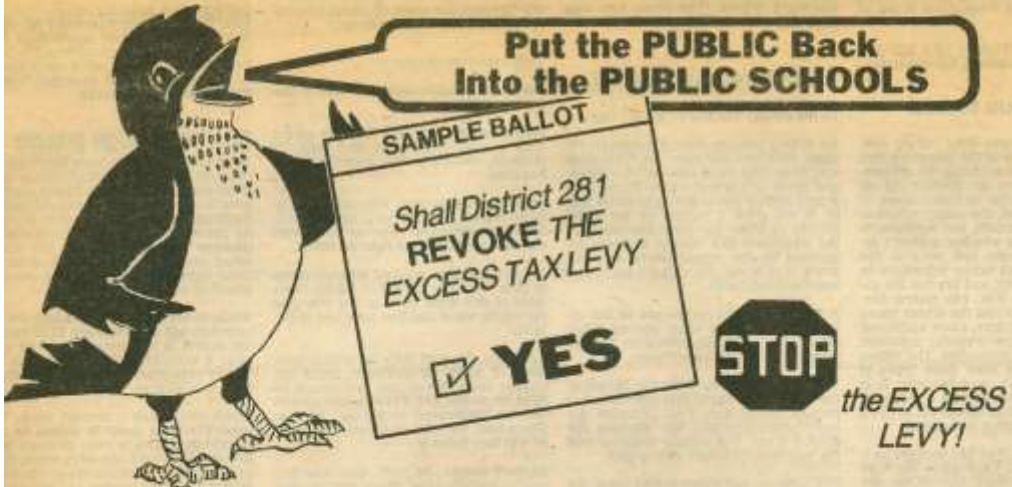
32 - Parade by School and Through Downtown Robbinsdale in Support of Reopening Robbinsdale High
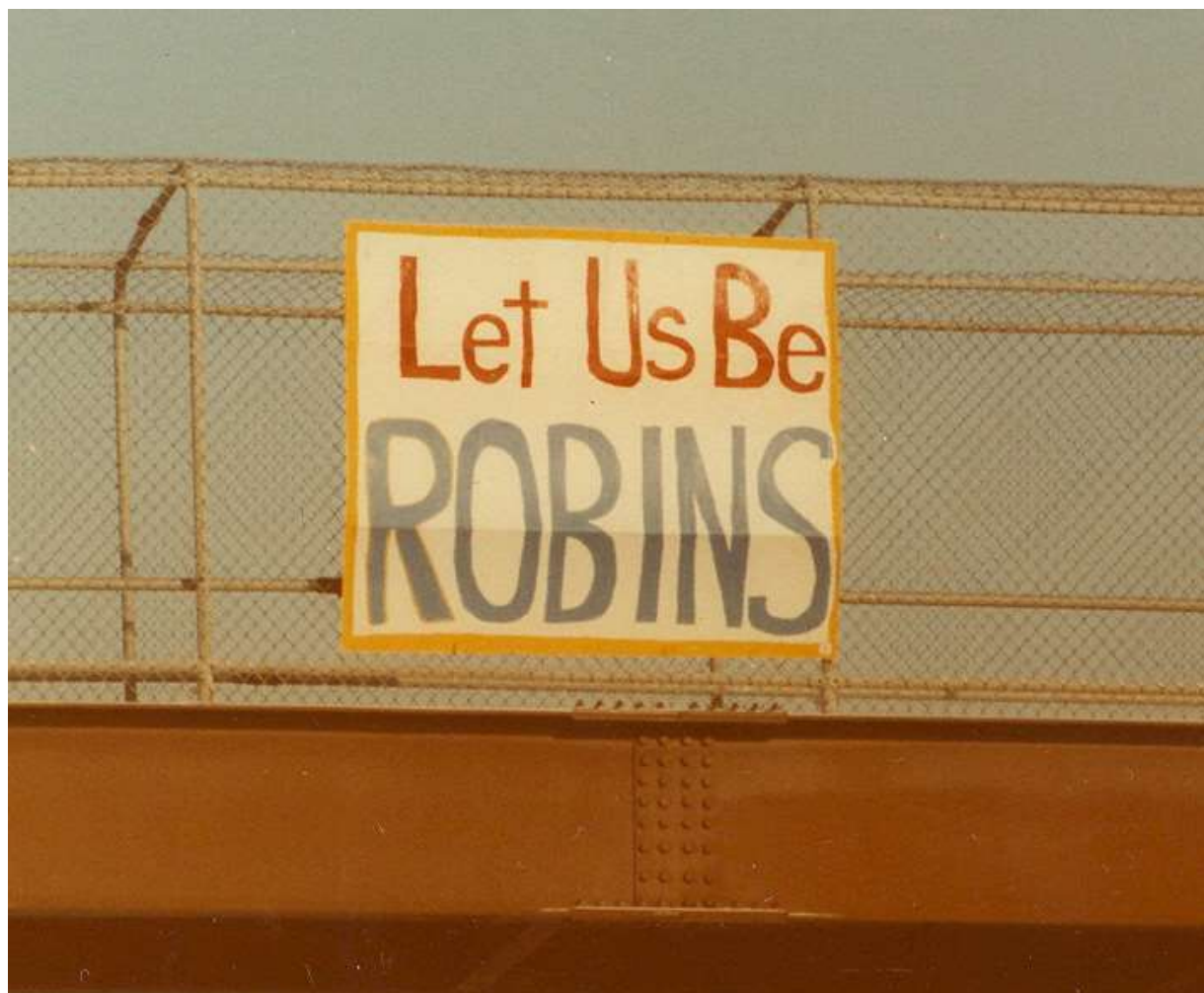
33 - Reverse Referendum

34 - Keith Moberg

35 - Joy Robb

36 – Next School Year