Spring 3-19-2018

How Teachers Experience Change: A Case Study of the Merger Between Two Catholic Schools

Anika J. Logan
loganani@shu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons, and the Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/2519
HOW TEACHERS EXPERIENCE CHANGE:
A CASE STUDY OF THE MERGER BETWEEN TWO CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Submitted by
Anika J. Logan

Dissertation Committee
Dr. Elaine Walker, Ph.D. (Mentor)
Dr. Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj, Ph.D.
Dr. Cherry Sprague Ed.D.

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education
Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy

Seton Hall University

2018
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Anika J. Logan, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Spring Semester 2018.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE
(please sign and date beside your name)

Mentor:
Dr. Elaine M. Walker

[Signature] 3/19/18

Committee Member:
Dr. Carolyn Sattin-Baj

[Signature] 3/19/18

Committee Member:
Dr. Cherry Sprague

[Signature] 3/19/18

The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate's file and submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.
Abstract

This single, qualitative case study seeks to evaluate how teachers experience changes associated with the merger of two Catholic schools. Using the multiple perspective approach to case studies, this study explores the experiences of middle school teachers and the school leaders involved in establishing a merged K–12 Catholic School. Thirteen semi-structured, personal interviews were conducted, and relevant school documents were reviewed. The results from this study support previous literature on leading through change. The findings show that teachers experience various emotions while transitioning in a merger. Additionally, the analysis reveals that how communication is handled directly affects teacher morale. The participants recommend that school leaders be more inclusive of teachers in decision-making and provide sufficient opportunities for collegial interactions, allowing teachers to collaborate on policies and procedures that unify both schools.
DEDICATION

This research paper is dedicated to three influential people in my life:

my mother, Angela Harris;

Jean Allen;

and

my daughter, Alexia-Jade Allen.

Thank you for being there all the time, and I am thankful for your patience and support during my pursuit of this doctoral degree. Without your help, I would never have been able to complete this journey.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This level of academic accomplishment would not have been possible without the support of others. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Elaine Walker (Chair), Dr. Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj, and Dr. Cherry Sprague. I appreciate your time and guidance during this journey.

A special thank you to the members of staff at the St. Francis and Holy Cross Catholic schools for facilitating me. You have been instrumental in helping me achieve my educational goals.

I would also like to acknowledge my dear friends, from those who made the journey with me from the beginning to those who joined along the way. Some called to check up on my progress and listened to me complain about the challenges of writing this paper, working full-time, and being a single mom. Others helped me from near and afar, editing my writing and even cheering me on from my homeland (Jamaica). Thank you all for your encouragement and the countless hours of your time spent convincing me that I can do this.

I want to thank my family for supporting my aspirations. My most profound gratitude to you for selflessly assisting me at home with my chores and taking care of Alexia-Jade. Guess what? I no longer have to spend my weekends in the library. We can do more fun things together now. I love you all so much!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ...........................................................................................................iv
DEDICATION.................................................................................................v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..................................................................................vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS...................................................................................vii

Chapter One......................................................................................................1
  Introduction.....................................................................................................1
  Statement of the Problem.............................................................................3
  Purpose of the Study...................................................................................9
  Research Questions.....................................................................................10
  Significance of the Study..........................................................................10
  Conceptual Framework of Catholic School Merger.................................11
  Limitations..................................................................................................14
  Definitions of Terms..................................................................................14

Chapter Two...................................................................................................15
  REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE..........................................................15
  Introduction................................................................................................15
  Overview of Chapter.................................................................................16
  CATHOLIC EDUCATION.............................................................................16
  History of Catholic Schools......................................................................16
  Impact of Catholic Schools......................................................................18
  Catholic School Leadership..................................................................19
  Decline of Catholic Schools..................................................................20
Notes……………………………………………………………………………………..48
Data Analysis…………………………………………………………………………….48
Reliability and Validity…………………………………………………………………..49
Role of the Researcher……………………………………………………………………49
Credibility…………………………………………………………………………………50
Transferability……………………………………………………………………………50
Reliability…………………………………………………………………………………51
Conformability……………………………………………………………………………51

Chapter Four……………………………………………………………………………………..52
FINDINGS……………………………………………………………………………….52
Introduction………………………………………………………………………………52
Emerging themes for Research Question 1……………………………………………52
Emerging themes for Research Question 2……………………………………………61
Emerging themes for Research Question 3……………………………………………68
Summary…………………………………………………………………………………80

Chapter Five…………………………………………………………………………………...…82
Introduction……………………………………………………………………………...82
Connection to Practice…………………………………………………………………82
Discussion of Findings…………………………………………………………………84
Communication………………………………………………………………………...84
Include the Experts……………………………………………………………………...85
Dealing with Emotions During Change………………………………………………...86
Leadership and Change…………………………………………………………………87
Chapter One

Introduction

Catholic education in the United States developed during the mid-1800s at a time when many Catholics were newly arrived immigrants. Almost every parish was compelled to establish a school following the migration. As a result, Catholic schools began to grow rapidly across the country. Catholic education reached its peak enrollment in the 1960s, with 5.2 million students enrolled in almost 13,000 schools (McDonald & Schultz, 2016). Unfortunately, much has changed since then.

The next few decades brought profound challenges with enrollment, financial resources, and rising operational costs for Catholic schools. In the past 60 years, a decline in enrollment at Catholic elementary schools caused the number of Catholic schools to dwindle. According to the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), between 1960 and 2016 the number of Catholic schools fell from 12,893 to 6,525. These schools, located in the Midwestern region of the United States have experienced sharp declines in enrollment because of demographic shifts and downturned economic trends (McDonald & Schultz, 2016). Additionally, the twelve large urban dioceses, which include Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Los Angeles, Brooklyn, Cleveland, St. Louis, Newark, Boston, Cincinnati, New Orleans, and Detroit, have seen the highest decline in enrollment at elementary schools (27.6%) compared to 20.1% in the rest of the country (McDonald & Schultz, 2016). Since 2006, 338 elementary schools in the twelve large
urban dioceses have closed. As of 2018, less than 2 million students are enrolled in Catholic schools in the United States.

With the continuous decline of Catholic school enrollment, many dioceses have taken initiatives to respond to the crisis by creating plans to preserve the number of Catholic schools. One approach to this preservation involves merging or consolidating Catholic elementary and secondary schools. A “merger” involves combining two or three schools with the intent of eliminating an administrative group, while “consolidation” refers to the reduction of the number of schools to create a regional education system. For this study, the terms merger and consolidation are used interchangeably.

Mergers have become a reality for many troubled Catholic schools. Current literature on the effects of school mergers suggests the existence of conflicting perspectives. According to Mudd (1989), mergers provide opportunities for shared resources and reduce the number of facilities and personnel, providing a better financial situation for the parishes and schools. Opponents of the merger approach argue the adverse effects of school mergers, citing increased teacher stress, teacher anxieties, less parent involvement, and the breakdown of the school-community relationship.

As Ballin (2007) notes, a school district merger is an event with a human dimension. While a merger can sustain an organization, failure may occur when the importance of the human resource is overlooked (Milton-Kelly, 2006). As noted by Bolman and Deal (2013), organizations cannot function without people; likewise, people benefit from organizations. Stakeholders on both ends of the merger transaction must be entirely aware of the processes and understand what is going on in other areas of the school. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) encourage leaders to expand their focus beyond the people in the room, to include the players
involved in the change. In this case, the teachers are the ones enacting the merger and may have a different perspective on this kind of organizational change.

As teachers transition through the process of a merger between religious schools established and operated by two different religious congregations, they may experience anxieties, tensions, and losses of confidence. Mergers can have profound impact on even the most committed teachers by increasing their fears and uncertainties about job security. Some teachers may have trouble trusting the changes happening during a merger and may not recover from this loss of confidence. How do leaders communicate about an impending merger and help teachers navigate through such organizational changes? As noted by Donaldson (2016), it is important to ensure that teachers are happy, motivated, and positive, as this will have a positive influence on students, parents, and the wider community.

Few studies on school mergers have been conducted in the United States. A gap exists in the current educational literature on the perspective of teachers experiencing the merging of two religious schools. This research, specifically, concerns the experiences of teachers going through a Catholic school merger.

Statement of the Problem

Catholic education is an important private sector of the American education system. According to a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), Catholic schools educate at least one-third of all private school students. Walch (2003) noted that for decades Catholic schools operated at a minimal cost to reach a broad section of students, especially in the inner-city communities. According to the NCEA, the average per pupil tuition in parish elementary schools is $3,880, which is approximately 68.1% of the actual cost per pupil, at $5,847 (McDonald & Schultz, 2016). About 93.9% of elementary schools provide some form of
tuition assistance. As such, the difference between the per pupil cost and the tuition charged is obtained in many ways, including through direct subsidies from the parish, diocesan or religious congregation resources, and from development programs and fundraising activities. However, in recent years, Catholic schools have experienced declining enrollment and, consequently, rising tuition costs.

Across the United States, many dioceses have been struggling financially, which has resulted in thousands of school closures. According to the NCEA, the number of Catholic schools in the United States declined from 13,000 in the 1960s to 6,525 in 2016 (McDonald & Schultz, 2016). Additionally, McDonald and Schultz (2016) noted that a significant decrease in the number of Catholic schools occurred in large urban areas of the United States, which have closed a total of 338 elementary schools since 2006. Public schools in the Northeast region have seen an increase in student enrollment during the 2013–2014 school year (Digest of Education Statistics, 2014). A total of 86 Catholic elementary, middle, and secondary schools across the United States closed or merged during the 2015–2016 school year.

Given the rate of these closures, Catholic school leaders have been exploring alternatives to the traditional model of one parish, one school to ease the decline and sustain the mission of Catholic education (Haney & O’Keefe, 2009). According to researchers Goldschmidt and Walsh (2011), the leaders of Catholic schools have come to recognize that, for reasons of both governance and finance, in urban settings the parish school model is the least viable model. In their study of urban Catholic elementary schools, Goldschmidt and Walsh examined seven major models of governance to include parish schools, private schools, inter-parish schools, diocesan schools, consortium schools, private network schools, P–12 school systems, university partnership schools, and faith-inspired charter schools. Goldschmidt and Walsh identified
common themes across the governance approaches, including strategic data-supported models that contribute to increased efficiency, improved cost effectiveness, and improved quality for urban Catholic elementary schools. According to Goldschmidt and Walsh, the consortium model is utilized in low-income urban areas, where individual parishes are not able to support a school. Their study identified twelve Catholic schools across the United States utilizing this model. They also noted that individual schools, clusters of schools, dioceses, and foundations are increasingly using data to track their efforts, inform their decisions, and measure outcomes. They concluded that a multi-school approach could assist school leaders in obtaining the necessary resources from a variety of sources and taking advantage of economies of scale (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011).

Despite widespread changes in their organization, Catholic schools continue to provide students with a high academic education rooted in Christian values. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that, on average, students from Catholic schools outperform students from public schools, especially in mathematics and reading achievement (2013). Catholic schools, it should be noted, predominantly serve urban minority students (Latino and African-American). In fact, 22% of Catholic schools serve communities with a population comprising 50% or more minority students (NCES, 2007). This means that students with multiple disadvantages are more likely to benefit from Catholic schools (Neal, 1997).

For several decades, one of the largest archdioceses in the state of New Jersey has experienced financial challenges and a decline in enrollment. According to data from the NCEA, a little over a decade ago, the archdiocese contained 176 schools with a total of 52,603 enrolled students (McDonald & Schultz, 2016). This included 139 elementary schools. A local newspaper
cited the 2013 Gallop poll, noting that this Northeastern state has the second highest Catholic population in the country (about 44%). However, the number of students in Catholic schools in this archdiocese has declined more than 40% since 1999. Demographic shifts, parish and school mergers, scandals in the church, and alternative school options (Convey & Schuttlhoffel, 2009) have contributed to declining enrollment in Catholic schools. According to the NCEA, there are currently 67 elementary schools and 29 high schools in the archdiocese. 64% of the remaining Catholic elementary schools are in suburban settings, while 36% are in urban/inner-city areas.

To address the challenges faced by schools, the archdiocese launched a commission to assess the situations in schools and strengthen the parish-school relationship. This program will essentially pool financial resources across the archdiocese. Although the Archdiocese is considering other sustainable approaches to Catholic education, school mergers have been a significant approach for the archdiocese. In 2009, the Roman Catholic archdiocese targeted eleven schools through mergers and attrition. As of 2014, the archdiocese has had to close four more of its 70 elementary schools. Other Catholic dioceses in this Northeastern state have faced similar problems. Collectively, they have closed more than 20 schools.

Like thousands of Catholic schools across the United States, Holy Cross Elementary School faced the threat of closure under the findings from the commission. Instead, in April 2015, the Archbishop of the diocese made a proposal to the Board of Trustees of St. Francis Preparatory, suggesting a merger with Holy Cross Elementary School. St. Francis Preparatory is a private all-boys college preparatory school located in New Jersey. With an enrollment of over 500 boys, St. Francis Preparatory has been serving students in this urban community and neighboring communities since 1868. Established in 1843, Holy Cross Elementary School was the first Catholic elementary school in the state. Holy Cross Elementary School is a parochial,
co-educational K–8 Catholic school with an enrollment of under 200 students and only one class per grade level. Holy Cross Elementary School has shared the same property as St. Francis Preparatory since 1868. In May 2015, the Board of Trustees accepted the proposal. The merger took effect for the 2015–2016 school year. The announcement of the merger allowed only a very short timeframe for a thorough review of the facilities, curriculum development, the development of new policies, and transition procedures. Therefore, both schools continued to operate as before the merger, with the understanding that some changes would take place gradually over time.

Fr. Thomas, the headmaster of St. Francis Preparatory, addressed specific ways that this merger would produce a financially sustainable educational institution without sacrificing the identity and academic mission of both schools, while also securing faculty and staff jobs. Furthermore, the merger approach was intended to blend the faculty and extend the use of school facilities to Holy Cross Elementary staff and students, improving their overall educational experience. This effort was intended to bring the first K–12 Catholic school to this inner-city community in New Jersey, providing hope and greater opportunities to the area. With a combined enrollment of almost 700 students, the new structure consisted of a K through 5th grade co-ed elementary, a co-ed middle school for Holy Cross, an all-boys middle school for St. Francis Preparatory, and an all-boys high school for St. Francis Preparatory. The teachers at Holy Cross Elementary School agreed with the merger, knowing that the number of faculty and staff would remain the same, with no immediate structural changes. Some teachers, however, assumed additional responsibilities during the first year of the merger. Also, both schools came under the leadership of headmaster Fr. Thomas.

There was limited time for planning, as the merger was proposed in June 2015 and took effect at the beginning of the 2015–2016 school year. It may be assumed that merging two
schools in a very short time might not allow for planning, communication, and adequate involvement in decision-making from all the stakeholders. Given these circumstances, and the increasing number of mergers of Catholic schools in many other dioceses, it is important to understand the extent to which mergers transform teachers’ lives.

Studies conducted in the past have noted that school mergers can be strenuous to everyone, especially teachers. According to McHugh and Kyle (1993), the threat of a merger may lead to teacher stress and turnover related to their fears and uncertainties. A 1993 study conducted by Kyriacou and Harriman on teacher stress and school mergers in Britain confirmed the stressful nature of school mergers. Their research found that teachers desired more information on the merger as its planning and execution took place:

Perhaps the most acute stress reported here simply concerned the uncertainty and lack of information provided, coupled with the very real consequences for those involved (such as the threat of losing their job and the likelihood of major changes in their working practice) (p. 301).

For some teachers, a merger is the greatest organizational change they will ever experience in their professional life. According to Seo and Hill (2005), changes associated with a merger can cause anxiety to manifest in different ways and during different stages of the consolidation process. Teachers worry about disruption to their routines, future, school ethos, job security, and even school leadership.

Generally, teachers are not part of the decision-making process as it relates to school mergers. However, school leaders must remain cognizant of teachers’ perspectives during the decision-making process. As noted by Ingersoll (2011), teacher morale is likely to be negatively affected if they have little input and perceive low levels of support from their administrators.
While much has been studied and written about Catholic schools, there is minimal research on school mergers, and fewer still on how mergers affect faculty. For example, the most recent studies on consolidation have focused on aspects of the viability of K–12 consolidated Catholic school systems (Britt, 2011). Additionally, research concerning teachers has investigated issues such as job satisfaction and retention. A 2010 study by John Convey examined the relationship between the factors that motivate teachers to teach in Catholic schools and their job satisfaction. In 2013, Walter Prygocki examined research on teacher retention in Catholic schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2005), 21% of Catholic schoolteachers left the teaching profession between the 1999–2000 and 2000–2001 school years. The study also revealed that teacher turnover rates are higher in private schools than in public schools, at 21% and 15%, respectively. Empirical studies show that whenever employees are not satisfied and motivated with their jobs, performance is affected (Arora & Kumar, 2012).

Based on the review of the literature and the gap in knowledge regarding teachers’ experiences during the consolidation process, the problem this study seeks to address is how teachers experience all phases of a merger, with a specific focus on the planning implementation and implementation stages. Given the recent consolidation trends in Catholic schools and the Church’s focus on sustaining Catholic education, understanding how faculty experience consolidation is an important part of providing the support teachers need during the transition.

**Purpose of the Study**

Although there is a new paradigm in the organization of many Catholic schools, the dynamics of a change initiative, such as a merger, have not received much attention in the literature. When the possibilities of a merger became official, the researcher was eager to
understand how teachers experienced this form of organizational change. The goal of this single case study is to offer insight into what happens in a merger situation from the teachers’ perspectives. This study also explores teachers’ expectations and challenges while going through such a significant organizational change. This investigation adds to the literature regarding the influence that mergers have on teachers.

**Research Questions**

This research’s primary question is: What are teachers’ experiences regarding the planning, implementation, and outcome stages of a merger between two Catholic schools?

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of the ways in which they were informed about the merger?
2. How do teachers experience the merger?
3. How do teachers describe the influence of the merger on their career plans, goals, and professional motivation?

**Significance of the Study**

A merger is a significant organizational change that requires significant attention among educational leaders, especially Catholic school leaders. Research has indicated that people facing the threat of major organizational change, as in the case of a merger, display the highest levels of stress (McHugh & Kyle, 1993). This research will inform current and future administrators about leadership practices impacting the human dimension of school mergers. Evaluating a merger via teachers’ experiences will assist educational leaders in finding effective ways to implement the merger process.

When it comes to educational change teachers are the gatekeepers, and that without their support, successful change is almost impossible. Several studies have examined innovations and
change within schools, but little research addresses how change affects those who will implement the change. As noted by Michael Fullan (2005), “It’s important to remember that implementation plans are not for the planners; they are for the implementers” (p. 72). Therefore, teacher cooperation is vital to the change initiative.

This merger presented an opportunity to more clearly understand how teachers deal with change, what leaders do during a change, and how leaders’ actions influence their employees (as cited in Grant, 2011, p. 6). Research topics on teachers and mergers have been focused on the public-school setting, with less research dedicated to teachers in the Catholic school system. Schreiner’s 2014 study is of particular relevance to this research. Schreiner explored the experiences of teachers as they moved through a district-wide curriculum reform. The research was an interpretive phenomenology within a single case study during the implementation of a guaranteed and viable curriculum, as viewed through the experiences of the teachers. In her study, Schreiner (2014) indicated that the implementation of change does influences teachers’ attitudes. By examining teachers’ experiences and their perceptions of a Catholic school merger, educational leaders may better understand the factors influencing teachers’ responses to change, especially in the Catholic school system. This study also contributes to the body of knowledge concerning issues faced by teachers experiencing a school merger so that educational leaders can anticipate the kinds of reactions sparked by a merger (Kyriacou & Harriman, 1993) and carefully plan a smooth merger, supporting teachers in the ways necessary for success.

The Conceptual Framework

Experiential Base

Participation during the first two years of the merger of St. Francis Preparatory and Holy Cross Elementary School enabled the researcher to actively examine and understand the
participants in the study and their related experiences. The researcher continued to work at Holy Cross School during the transition period of the merger and had access to first-hand knowledge. The researcher developed an in-depth understanding of this case using case study methods. A case study approach was selected because it was important to describe and analyze how teachers perceived the merger of these Catholic schools. The researcher utilized a qualitative approach to focus on teachers’ expectations and challenges while going through the organizational change.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework addressed the overarching theme of a K–12 Catholic school merger. Conceptually, the researcher framed the study on the experiences of the teachers involved in the merger of two Catholic schools by examining leadership practices and the change initiative. These focus areas enabled the researcher to develop themes relevant to the meaning of this research. Under the leadership practices frame, the researcher examined the leadership practices employed during mergers, the effects of communication in a merger situation, and teachers’ roles in the decision-making process. Under the change frame, the researcher considered tensions, teacher stress, and teacher morale.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Figure 1 outlines the framework used in this study. The Conceptual Framework focused on the change initiative and the importance of leadership practices in contributing to teachers’ perceptions of the changes involved in their experiences with this merger. Since leadership practices impact the outcome of mergers, the leadership practices employed in a merger are a fundamental topic of this study. As many Catholic schools across the United States continue to face the threat of closure, it is necessary to determine and articulate effective leadership practices that will lead schools in the future.
**Limitations of Study**

The study is limited to the perceptions of only the teachers and administrators of the St. Francis Preparatory and Holy Cross Elementary schools. While the researcher validly represents all relevant information, the generalizability of the findings may be hindered due to the differences in the institutional context within the levels in these two schools. Some of the participants in this study were employed during the first year of the merger and might not be able to provide a detailed comparison of the before and during processes. This study is also limited in that the views of other members of the ancillary staff are not included.

**Definitions of Terms**

*Consolidation*: The reduction of the number of schools to create a regional education system.

*Merger*: While used interchangeably with consolidation, a merger combines two or three schools with the intent of eliminating an administrative group.

*Leadership*: “Leadership is conceptualized as a moral endeavor (Sergiovanni, 2007) and occurs within the political context of the organization” (Malen & Cochran, 2008). Leadership is understood to be an activity that is twofold: establishing a common purpose and developing and guiding a plan of action (Effiom, 2014).

*Student enrollment*: The total number of students in the school system (K–12).

*Lay personnel*: Lay personnel are Catholics who are not part of the vowed religious nuns, brothers, priests, deacons, or bishops) of the church. 97% of the faculty in Catholic schools is lay personnel.
Chapter Two

Review of the Related Literature

Introduction

Chapter Two contains a description of search terms and sources relative to the topic. The literature review discusses the history and trends in Catholic schools, including Catholic school mergers. Chapter Two also contains an examination of leadership and the change process. Peer-reviewed articles were obtained from the ProQuest database, SAGES, and ERIC which were accessed through the Walsh Library at Seton Hall University. The following search terms supplied useful articles, studies, and reports: (a) Catholic school enrollment, (b) Catholic school mergers, (c) school district mergers, (d) change process, (e) leadership and change, and (f) people and change.

Since the inception of Catholic education in the United States, Catholic schools have endeavored to be “a place of an integral formation through a systematic and critical assimilation of culture” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977) in various communities. Today, the educative mission of Catholic schools remains the same, but much has changed in the communities these schools serve. The presence of Catholic schools has slowly disappeared in many communities. Catholic education leaders are more compelled than ever to develop and adapt new approaches to respond to the crisis of Catholic school decline. Many dioceses throughout the United States have been addressing these declines by utilizing school consolidation as an alternative to closure. According to Balcolm (2013), consolidation involves a reduction in the number of schools and the closure of buildings, including eliminating duplicate programs and reducing the overall number of staff. A merger refers to combining two or three schools with the intent of eliminating an administrative group and duplicate programs (Balcom,
2013; Bard et al., 2006). Therefore, what St. Francis and Holy Cross experienced would be defined as a merger. Since 2006, over 1,511 Catholic schools across the United States have been reported closed or consolidated (NCEA, 2016).

This study focuses on one school merger involving two Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Newark during the 2015–2016 academic year. Catholic school leaders could benefit from understanding the experiences of teachers employed at St. Francis Preparatory and Holy Cross Elementary School, who were involved in the merger process.

**Overview of Chapter**

This chapter provides an overview of the current literature on Catholic school mergers and change theory. The first section includes a brief history of Catholic education, the effects of Catholic school, and Catholic school leadership. The second section describes the historical trends and reasons mergers have become a more common approach in sustaining the future of Catholic education. The final part of this review explores the literature on the change process, resistance to change, and change theory.

**Catholic Education**

**History of Catholic Schools**

Since their inception, Catholic schools have existed to fulfill their religious mission to the Church. Their educational goal is to interweave reason and faith, bringing forth a Christian vision of the world, of life, culture, and history through what is learned in school (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997). The Church’s principal legislative document, as expressed in the Canon Law 794, states the responsibilities of the Church to Catholic education. The document stipulates:
The duty and right of educating belong in a unique way to the Church, which has been divinely entrusted with the mission to assist men and women so that they can arrive at the fullness of the Christian life. Pastors of souls have the duty to arrange all things so that all the faithful may enjoy a Catholic education.

The story of American Catholic education began as an effort to integrate the offspring of immigrants into American society, while at the same time helping them remain Catholic (Buetow, 1988). Catholic immigrants from Europe laid the foundations for the expansion of Catholic schools that would serve as faith formation and prepare their children for the real world. In 1782, St. Mary’s Church in Philadelphia established the first parochial school (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). Parish schools developed as parishes multiplied during the 19th century. Through the vision of Elizabeth Ann Seton, the growth of Catholic schools expanded to cities across the United States. Providing a quality education alongside teaching the Catholic doctrine are still two of the significant tenets of Catholic schooling in the United States today (Britt, 2011).

During the 1800s, Catholic schools in New York and other states received public aid (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). Government funding came to an end as the influx of immigrants during the 1800s sparked anti-Catholic movements. Subsequently, the “common school” developed to combat the growing diversity and threats of mass immigration. The idea of a diverse sectarian education system, run by Catholics and various Protestant denominations, was dismissed as incapable of providing the necessary covering influence for American society (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). These conditions led to the passing of the Maclay Bill, which prohibited Catholic and other private, denominational schools from receiving revenue from the common school fund (Buetow, 1985). By the 1900s, other issues began to affect Catholic
education. Sputnik’s launch caused a national focus on improving public education by emphasizing mathematics, science, and technology skills, as well as improvements to reading education (Britt, 2011; Hiatt, 1986). It became difficult for Catholic schools to compete with this advanced curriculum in their limited-revenue/low-cost environment (Britt, 2011).

**Impact of Catholic Schools**

Historically, Catholic schools have served students from low socio-economic backgrounds, proving their success in inner-city schools beyond dispute. Urban families saw Catholic schools as the only alternative to the public education system. Andrew Greely provides evidence showing, for example, that minority students from the lowest income levels, with the poorest academic records, and at the greatest level of risk had the highest relative rates of achievement when placed in Catholic schools (Irvine & Foster, 1996, p. 18). Studies have found that students in parish schools outperform their peers in public schools on virtually all standardized tests (WATCH, 2003). Hoffer’s 1980 High School and Beyond research shows that the difference between test scores in Catholic and public schools is greater for disadvantaged students than for their peers with greater advantages relating to family structure and functioning. In 1990, a study published by Rand Corporation confirmed that Catholic high schools serving low-income, minority students graduated 95% of their students each year, while the public schools graduated slightly over 50% of their senior class (Shokraii, 1997).

Numerous studies show that Catholic schools, by design, foster the academic, religious, and moral development of their children (Shokraii, 1997). For example, extensive work conducted by Anthony Bryk, Valerie Lee, and Peter Holland in 1993 found the Catholic school sector contained a focused curriculum and high standards. These researchers further highlighted the presence of codes of conduct regarding dress and behavior for both students and faculty, and
a list of prohibited practices compared with public and other private schools. Bryk et.al, (1993) argued these codes and practices contribute to an increase in academic performance and less incidences of indiscipline in Catholic schools. It must be noted that high performing Charter schools have adopted many Catholic schools practices, including strict discipline, high academic expectations, a uniform, and standards focused on high expectations for social behavior.

Moreover, children trapped in inner-city ghettos succeed in Catholic schools because these schools offer quality education in a safe and caring environment (Shokraii, 1997). With this educational record of accomplishment in the inner-city, the matter of preserving Catholic schools requires immediate attention. The future of Catholic schools is now dependent on those who care about American Catholic education. Therefore, Catholic school leaders must double their efforts and take adequate steps to sustain the future of Catholic schools.

**Catholic School Leadership**

Over time, Catholic schools have experienced various changes, including leadership. Traditionally, many of the teachers and administrators in Catholic schools were religious sisters, brothers, and priests. These men and women contributed profoundly to the Catholic education system through their selfless devotion and the very low salaries they accepted (Jacobs, 1998a, b, c; Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). The decline in vocations to the priesthood and religious life has limited the flow of sisters, brothers, and priests required to fill leadership positions in Catholic schools (Youniss, Convey, & Mclellan, 2000). As the number of vowed religious individuals in Catholic schools began to dwindle, the need increased for laypersons to serve in leadership roles. In their 1992 study, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, Anthony Bryk, Valerie Lee, and Peter Holland reported that, in 1967, religious sisters, brothers, and priests constituted 58% of the
teachers in Catholic elementary and secondary schools. They further said that, by 1983, this number had dropped to 24%, and by 1990, it was down to less than 15%.

The NCEA data indicates that the decline continues today, as 97.2% of the professional staff in schools are laypersons, while the remaining 2.8% are religious and clergy (2015). Consequently, schools’ operational expenses became more evident and strenuous for many dioceses. The decline of religious-affiliated teaching in schools, along with the major reduction in student enrollment, prompted many schools to charge parents tuition to cover the costs of an increasingly lay-teaching staff (Hocevar & Sheehan, 1991; Hunt, 2000; Britt, 2011).

**Decline of Catholic Schools**

Catholic schools have faced significant challenges, bringing uncertainty to the future of American Catholic education. Changing social values, changes in family structure, changes in public education with the establishment of Charters, improved content of public education, and the rising cost of private education and other living expenses have contributed to the crisis in Catholic education. When public schools began to integrate after the Brown v. Board of Education decision, Catholic parents began to move to the suburbs, abandoning urban and inner-city Catholic schools to minority students (Irvine & Foster, 1996).

During the 1970s and 1980s, Catholic schools struggled to maintain their existence as the number of schools and students plunged. In 1970, there were 9640 Catholic schools. By 1990, there were approximately 8,719 Catholic schools compared to 13,292 schools in 1965 (NCEA, 2013). By 1994, the survival of Catholic schools came into question as enrollment slipped to less than 2.5 million, a plunge of 56% (Walch, 2003). The NCEA (2000) reported that, since 2000, elementary school enrollment has dropped nationwide by around 35% in the nation’s 12 urban dioceses, noting that 1,755 schools merged or closed. In 2011, there were 6847 Catholic schools.
Today, the struggle has the greatest impact on elementary schools. During the 2015 school year, enrollment stood at about 1.9 million students in both elementary and secondary in 6,568 Catholic schools. The data on kindergarten through eighth-grade enrollment in the Archdiocese of Newark in the 1960s revealed 132,000 students. By 2012, that number plunged to 16,613. Counting all grades, Newark’s archdiocese had roughly 33,000 students in 2012, down from 58,000 in 2000 (Brody, 2013). Due to the drastic decline in enrollment, the Archdiocese of Newark has proposed closing or merging some of its 176 Catholic schools.

To reduce costs, actions by the archdiocese led to some closures. Duncombe and Yinger (2010) explain that cost savings occur when the value of teaching, characterized by economies of size, results in the cost of education per student declining as the number of students increases. Fiscal strains worsen as many Catholic schools’ tuitions do not nearly cover the annual cost of educating each student. In recent years, the Archdiocese of Newark and parishes spent $15 million annually to help schools make ends meet (Brody, 2013).

**Catholic School Finances**

The financial crisis began with the leaving of devoted religious sisters, brothers, and priests from Catholic schools. The declining number of vowed religious men and women working at minimal or no cost in Catholic schools depleted the school finances as schools began hiring salaried laymen and women of the church. Traditionally, a significant percentage of the operating cost of Catholic schools was offset by the contributed services of the vowed religious. In fact, in 1967, religious sisters, brothers, and priests comprised 58% of the teachers in elementary and secondary schools (Gere, 1998). Today, lay teachers make up 97.2% of teaching staff in Catholic school. At present, 2.8% of the professional staff in Catholic schools is religious
and clergy (NCEA, 2016). The employment of lay personnel to replace religious personnel resulted in dramatically increased tuition costs (Gere, 1998).

The rising costs of instructional materials, maintenance on aging buildings, and new technology, along with rising tuition, place inner-city schools at risk for closure. Based on their income, many families cannot afford the tuition. Neither can the local parish support their Catholic elementary schools, particularly considering the change in the demographics of their members. Many inner-city schools have closed, some schools continue to raise tuition, and others have consolidated to remain open (Youniss & Convey, 2000). According to the NCEA, schools in these areas retain a significant presence: four decades ago, 47.9% of Catholic schools were in urban and inner-city areas. Today 41.3% of the schools are still in urban communities, despite population losses and great financial difficulties in maintaining them.

Tuition has never been the primary source of revenue for Catholic schools. The tuition fees paid by families constitute a portion of the actual cost of educating the pupil in a Catholic school. The NCEA reports that the average per pupil tuition in parish elementary schools is $3,880, which is approximately 68.1% of the actual cost per pupil of $5,847. Other sources of revenue include contributions from the parish, religious subsidies, fundraisers, and development, which are used to offset the difference between the cost per pupil and the tuition charged. In secondary schools, the mean freshman tuition is $9,622, which is approximately 81.6% of the actual cost per pupil of $11,790 (NCEA, 2016).

Nationally, the loss would be greater if Catholic schools ceased operations when the average public school, including both elementary and secondary schools, per pupil cost is $11,770, as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics.
contribution is surmountable. Based on the cost of public schools, Catholic schools provide savings of almost $22 billion a year for the nation.

**Policies and Practices that Lead to School Mergers**

The discourse between the Catholic Church officials regarding federal and state court rulings in the United States started as early as the 1800s. In many states, voters continue to object to lobbies for federal and state funds for church schools (Doerr, 1993). This decision to deny Catholic school parents tax aid is an unjust and almost unbearable burden, keeping parents choosing a school for their children in keeping with their faith (Doerr, 1993; McDermott, 1997). Church documents, as expressed in the code of Canon Law 793, declare, “This seems to be a very simple yet difficult commodity to acquire for families who desire to access Catholic schools.”

Decisions by the Federal Government have contributed to the financial crisis plaguing Catholic Schools making it difficult for parents to maintain equal financial access to non-government schools. For example, in 1947, the Supreme Court Everson decision stated, “No tax in any amount large or small can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions that teach or practice religion” (Doerr, 1993). Such a motion does not support the ideals of democracy. In promoting democracy in the United States, all Americans should have access to high-quality education options; providing tax dollars to education systems meets these needs. Currently, Catholic schools receive support in the form of transportation, textbook loans, tuition credits, remedial instruction, and testing services, which are by no means comparative to the aid public schools receive from the government. The Supreme Court rulings denying the provision of “a steady income for Catholic schools from taxes” have impacted the existence and the future of Catholic schools (Doerr, 1993).
In response to these issues, Catholic school leaders have engaged in tough decision-making, applying tuition and fees to maintain schools and offset the cost of schooling. At first glance, tuition, fees, and an annual increase would appear to solve the problem. However, this presented another crisis for American Catholic education. Enrollment declines, along with financial concerns, were identified to have a direct impact on whether schools are likely to remain open (Britt, 2015; James, Tichy, Collins, & Schwob, 2008). This effect is more pronounced in Catholic schools.

**Decisions to Merge Catholic Schools**

Increased tuition has diminished the number of Catholics willing to send their children to Catholic schools (Harris, 1996). Tuition covers approximately 62% of the costs at the elementary level and 80% at the high school level (McDonald & Schultz, 2010). The Catholic community began to recover its pride and passion by recommitting its efforts to sustaining Catholic education. Dioceses across the country have been experimenting with alternative structures to maintain Catholic schools (Haney & O’Keefe, 2007; Walch, 2000). Options include closing Catholic schools and reopening them as Charters, closing schools with hopes and plans to open in the future, closing schools that don’t meet minimum population requirements and renting the buildings for revenue to larger schools in the diocese, and consolidation.

Many public schools face similar challenges regarding tight finances and declining student enrollment. In fact, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that a total of 117,108 school districts provided elementary and secondary education for students during 1939–40. By 2006–07, the number of school districts declined to 13,862. The rate of consolidation has slowed in recent years. However, a few districts consolidate every year in many states. In fact,
New York, Maine, Indiana, New Jersey, and Vermont still provide incentives to merge
(Duncombe & Yinger, 2010).

**Mergers**

Catholic schools must examine the advantages and disadvantages to consolidation. One of the benefits of consolidation is that it provides the opportunity to continue offering a Catholic education (Britt, 2011; Burdick, 1996; Mudd, 1989). The rationale for school consolidation often includes improving fiscal conditions by eliminating redundancy and creating greater economies of scale. Economies of scale exist if the spending on education per pupil declines as the number of students goes up, controlling for the school district level of performance, as measured by test scores, graduation rates, and other output means (Duncombe & Yinger, 2010). Consolidation offers Catholic schools better utilization of resources, such as sharing school administration and some faculty, along with reducing the number of classrooms and teachers, providing a better financial position for the parishes and school (Britt, 2011; Burdick, 1996; Mudd, 1989).

In recent years, some states have promoted consolidation by offering State funds to build new, consolidated schools that meet minimum size requirements (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011). For example, Arkansas enforced legislation that eliminated all districts with enrollments below the arbitrary number of 350 students, forcing voluntary mergers or forced annexations (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011).

In studies of public school districts, some of the advantages of consolidation evidenced in research include a broader curriculum, increased teacher salaries, specialized concentration on teachers’ fields of interest, and a more efficient system (Britt, 2011; Hall & Arnold, 1993). Duncombe and Yinger conducted a study examining a rural district in New York between 1985 and 1997. Their study revealed substantial economies of size when district enrollment doubled;
administrative costs per pupil were reduced by more than 40%. They also concluded that consolidation is a viable approach, especially in small rural communities. Similarly, Hall and Arnold (1993) revealed that mergers provide a broader curriculum, specialized teachers concentrating on their fields of interest, and a more efficient system. Critiques of school mergers point out that the central administration of large districts may not be as responsive to local interests and may also have trouble managing schools separated by large distances (Peters & Freeman, 2007).

Catholic schools are not the only organizations utilizing mergers. Private sector mergers occur often. The merger between Exxon and Mobil to form ExxonMobil is a prominent example. The merger of Walt Disney and Pixar was a match made in cartoon heaven. In 2014, Apple, the manufacturer of consumer electronics and software products, acquired Beats Electronics for US$3 billion. Harvard University began a merger with Radcliffe College in 1977 and completed this merger in 1999. In 2011, West Roxbury High School, located in the Boston public school district, was renamed West Roxbury Education Complex. Formerly, West Roxbury High was divided into four schools: Media Communications Technology High School, Parkway Academy of Technology and Health, Urban Science Academy, and Brook Farm Business & Service Career Academy. Brook Farm Academy & Media Communications Technology High School became one school, while Urban Science Academy and Parkway Academy of Technology and Health merged into another. Trinity Health and Catholic Health East amalgamated to create an 82-hospital system in 21 states.

Unfortunately, mergers are not voluntary and come from a reactive approach to challenges facing many organizations. A merger within the Catholic education system should never be a forced approach, and consideration must be given to the hierarchical model of
administration and the development of funding allocations from supporting parishes (Theis, 1996). When deciding whether to encourage a merger, Catholic school leaders may want to be sure the net benefits outweigh the costs.

**Challenges with Mergers**

No matter what reasons schools and other organizations have for merging, criticism is inevitable. In a 2005 study, Alsbury and Shaw reported that opponents of the system expressed concerns that included the elimination of administrative positions, a lingering sense of animosity within the community, and fear of the marginalization of local values or identity because of the consolidation. Other studies have shown that consolidating districts reduces the sense of community and has negative impacts on students’ social interactions and behavior (CEP, 2009). Another factor to consider during consolidation is parental involvement. According to the U.S. Department of Education, as schools grow, parents became 12% less likely to respond to school questionnaires, 10% less likely to attend an open house, 5% less likely to check their children’s homework, and 10% less likely to take part in Parent Teacher Organizations. In larger school settings as in merger cases, parents are more likely to experience a disconnect with the school, and their participation in school life diminishes.

In educational mergers, the school with better academic performance or the more affluent community often tries to be perceived as the dominant partner (Effiom, 2014). In this context, dominance is defined as the power and influence a merged partner has in the post-merger organization (van Knippenberg, Monden, & de Lima, 2002; Marks & Mirvis, 2001; Meyer, 2001). The dominant partner often determines equity during the pre-merger and post-merger experiences. For example, keeping or losing positions, personnel, buildings, programs, and
cultural symbols might identify which pre-merger school has higher status after the merger and which has lower status (Citera & Rentsch, 1993).

**Leadership Practices**

Leadership is understood to be a twofold activity: establishing a common purpose and setting up and guiding a plan of action (Effiom, 2014). Researchers like Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) identified the four core practices of an effective school leader. These practices include setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching program. In organizational leadership, Kouzes and Posner (2002) have identified “Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.” The first approach recognizes leaders who model the way. These leaders create standards of excellence and then set an example for others to follow. The second method is to inspire a shared vision. This practice is described as leaders who passionately breathe life into their ideas and get people to see exciting possibilities for the future. The third method identifies with the leaders who challenge the process by looking for innovative ways to improve the organization. The fourth practice enables others to act by strengthening others, making each person feel capable and powerful. Leaders encourage the human heart. This means they help keep hope and determination alive; leaders recognize the contributions that individuals make. The Kouzes and Posner leadership model involves practices that help leaders transform their organizations.

James Burns (1978) presents two types of leadership: transactional and transformational. Transactional leadership occurs when leaders aim and outcome is maintaining stability and the status quo (Effiom, 2014; Blase & Anderson, 1995). According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation, where leaders and followers help each other advance to a higher level of morale and motivation. Transformational leadership
is an ongoing process that appeals to the higher ideals and values of members. Transformational leadership brings about a change in organizational culture, while transactional leaders usually work within the existing culture. Transformational leadership is focused on change; specifically, the change that must be embraced in a consolidation experience (Efiom, 2014).

In 1985, Bernard Bass further expanded on Burns’ theory to describe the specific behaviors that comprise each leadership style. Bass articulated that the followers of a transformational leader feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect for the leader, and have a drive to work harder than initially expected. Also, this leader encourages followers to come up with new and unique ways to challenge the status quo and alter the environment to support success.

Fullan (2001) asserted in Leading in a Culture of Change that strong institutions have many leaders at all levels. Thus, the ultimate leadership contribution is to develop internal leaders who can move the organization even further after you have left it. From the perspective of the change leader, collaboration means that the circle of leadership should always be expanding to incorporate the meaning and motivation of the full group. Collaboration is not an end; rather, it involves purposeful, focused cooperation that gets results precisely because it motivates the masses to innovate and commit to improvement (Fullan, 2008). Elmore (2000) agrees:

The job of administrative leaders is primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result. (p. 15)
During the consolidation process, students, parents, teachers, and community members look to their educational and spiritual leaders for direction and guidance (Brown, 2006). Being agents of change, therefore, Catholic school leaders must empower the members of the school community to join in the partnership for the success of a merger. Catholic school leadership will benefit from leaders who are willing to create a shared vision, implement innovative ideas, and maintain our identity as a school for the human person.

**Leadership and Mergers**

It is important to understand the role leadership plays during an organizational change. The leaders within a K–12 consolidated Catholic school system must maintain a balanced approach while adopting the structures of consolidation. Leading through change necessitates a clear understanding of the nature of change and how the approach to leadership differs based on that change (Britt, 2011). Since the improvement of a school’s performance frequently involves doing things differently from how they have been done in the past, such leadership often requires managing a process of change (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2001). Michael Fullan suggests that leaders use the six secrets of change to guide and monitor their leadership and organization. The litmus test of all leadership is whether it mobilizes people’s commitment to putting their energy into actions designed to improve things. Commitment may be individual, but, above all, mobilization is collective (Fullan, 2001, p. 9).

**Educational Change**

School district consolidation happens every year. Since 1938, mergers account for 90% of the reduction in the number of school districts in the United States. Merging is one of the most dramatic trends in American education (Duncombe & Yinger, 2005). Public schools are not the
only schools prone to merging. Catholic school leaders have had to make tough decisions about which schools to keep open and which schools to close.

**People and Change**

Much has been studied on how change impacts people. Still, the transition process is never easy for people, especially during a merger. The top management team usually guides organizational change, but other members of the organization can initiate or influence its success (Yukl, 2013). As described by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), when change requires you to challenge people’s familiar reality, it can be difficult, dangerous work. According to Yukl (2013), one reason for resistance is that the proposed change appears inconsistent with an individual’s values and ideals. A merger is a significant organizational change that often brings about a sense of old identities and potential loss, sometimes resulting in denial and resistance to change (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009).

Successful organizational change requires leadership with a clear understanding of what is changed, how and when the change is implemented, who participates in the process, and how much influence each participant has (Yukl, 2013). Organizations cannot rely only on the people who agree with the process. According to Fullan (2001), individuals can learn from those in the organization that challenge or resist change. Rather than viewing resistance only as an obstacle, it can be considered as energy that can be redirected to improve change (Ford, Ford, & D’Amelio, 2008; and Maurer, 1996). Kiefer (2002) suggests that understanding the emotional experience of the individuals affected by the organizational change can control resistance.

**Teachers and Change**

Teachers tend to experience many changes in their professional environment. Despite a teacher’s ability to cope with frequent changes, there are essential components that must not be
overlooked when implementing change. A qualitative case study research conducted by Sherry Schreiner (2014) explored the experiences of the teachers during the implementation of a guaranteed and viable curriculum reform. Thirteen teachers were interviewed multiple grade levels, and different disciplines, from a cross-section of the district. The findings of the study showed although most teachers understood the need for unifying the curriculum and appreciated the content, they were also concerned with specific aspects of the implementation, including the speed of the implementation, the lack of resources to support the change, and losing the “art” of teaching. The findings of this same study revealed resilience and a sense of mission among teachers that carried them through the reform and the multitude of other changes they experienced. Conversely, there were some instances where the continuous change did affect their motivation. Every new change that came along was one more area where teachers felt they were once more beginners, novices, or struggling to gain mastery, and that eventually took a toll.

According to Bridges (1991), the best way to deal with the transition process is to bring any real or perceived losses felt by staff out into the open because ignoring situations only results in heightened frustration and attention. Such negative experiences of consolidation can be alleviated when leaders attempt to understand community cultures and actively seek to involve key stakeholders in the process (Yukl, 2006).

**Change Theories**

The change process, as identified by Kurt Lewin’s (1951) force-field model, includes three phases: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. To unfreeze means to disturb the quasi-stationary equilibrium that all individuals and organizations seek to maintain (Lewin, 1947). During the disruption, people come to realize that the old ways of doing things are no longer adequate. Unfreezing is an essential step when preparing to adopt new behaviors. In the
changing/moving phase, people look for new ways of doing things on a trial-and-error basis. The moving stage relates to the equation for the quasi-stationary equilibrium. It is important to evaluate all the forces because the equilibrium only moves if the restraining forces are removed. Once the change is complete, it becomes established in the organizational culture. This is referred to as the freezing phase.

Michael Fullan (2001) presents a framework for leaders who are implementing change. He suggested six “secrets” which include love your employees, connect peers with purpose, capacity building prevails, learning is the work, transparency rules, and systems learn. In secret one, Fullan describes loving your employees as creating the conditions necessary for them to succeed, helping them find meaning, developing their skills, and making contributions that simultaneously achieve their goals and the goals of the organization. Fullan explains that by ensuring employees are motivated and fulfilled while completing the work of the organization, a leader can instill the loyalty necessary for making an organization efficient and effective. Fullan’s second secret emphasizes the need to connect peers with purpose. He stresses that peer interaction must be purposeful and that individuals interact not to outperform one another but to work as groups to exceed themselves. The leader connects the people in the organization through a common purpose, with a clear sense of direction for achieving the goals of the organization. Secret three addresses the need for building capacity in employees. Fullan asserts that employees are more valuable and feel more useful if they possess and continue to develop knowledge and skills, if they attract and use resources wisely, and if they are committed to putting in the energy necessary to perform the functions of their job. Secret four addresses the importance of learning. Fullan highlights that continuous learning on the job allows leaders to build capacity in employees and promote purposeful peer interaction. Secret five states that transparency rules.
According to Fullan, transparency is described as openness about results and practices that might produce favorable outcomes. Transparency can lead to a culture that continuously evaluates methods and searches for solutions. Systems learn is the final secret in this framework. Fullan indicates that when the first fives secrets are all put into play, the system can and often does learn. The organization learn from itself when time is spent reflecting on the first five secrets of change. Fullan’s six secrets are synergistic and can be used to guide and monitor leadership and the organization.

Those involved in a merger experience significant changes in their lives. From a behavioral science perspective, Seo and Hill examined six theories that impact change on people in a merger. According to Seo and Hill (2005), changes associated with a merger can cause anxiety to manifest itself in individuals in different ways and during different stages in the consolidation process. This is referred to as Anxiety Theory. The Social Identity Theory suggests that persons or groups experience a sense of loss by abandoning an old identity and adapting to a new organizational identity. Acculturation Theory posits that the individuals or groups within the organization possess cultural identities that vary between people and between subgroups within the organization. Adjusting to a different organization culture may be challenging for people, resulting in stress. Acculturative stress may lead to resistance and other serious inter-organizational conflicts. The Role Conflict Theory occurs when people have ambiguous roles. The Job Characteristics Theory changes the perception and behavior of core job characteristics in the post-merger environment, which in turn influences job satisfaction and motivation. The Organizational Justice Theory deals with the fair treatment of employees as it relates to selecting and displacing employees. Organizational justice impacts employee support of the change, even under conditions of adversity and loss.
Summary

This chapter provided an outline of the literature that guides this study. The research included studies on Catholic education, educational leadership, Catholic school consolidation, and the decisions that lead to mergers. The literature is replete with the history of Catholic education in the United States, highlighting its commitment to living the mission of the Church. Catholic schools have a particularly strong effect on students with the lowest probability of graduation: inner-city black pupils, students in urban areas, and students with low test scores (Evans & Schwab, 1995). Recent school closures have affected the Catholic elementary school system. An abundance of research on Catholic education shows that, despite the decline in the number of students and schools, these schools offer a quality education, especially to minority students, in a safe and caring environment.

The literature review revealed that few studies have been conducted focusing on Catholic school leadership as it relates to consolidation. No research exists on the leadership practices employed in a K–12 Catholic school merger. This study will contribute to filling that gap in the literature.

The research on educational leadership is focused on leadership that moves institutions forward in innovative and collaborative ways. By being fully and practically engaged within the organization, leaders always trust the process and their ability to influence it (Fullan, 2011). Examining the leadership practices employed in a consolidation is a fundamental topic that supports this study's conceptual framework. However, literature on Catholic school consolidation is very limited and needs continual investigation.
Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Introduction

In qualitative research, the researcher constructs an understanding of the meaning an experience has for those involved (Merriam, 2006). In the context of this study, the researcher was interested in capturing the experiences of teachers involved in a merger. These experiences might not be quantifiable but are best illuminated through a rich description answering how and why change influences teachers (Creswell, 2005; Yin, 2003). According to Yin (2009), a case study approach is the best choice for understanding and explaining an event over time, rather than performing a study using quantifiable data. A qualitative study was highly appropriate for this research, as it allows readers to understand how teachers experience and describe a merger. According to Haunschild (2009), qualitative research provides a degree of openness and can produce surprising results. Yin (2002) defines qualitative research design as “the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions” (p. 20).

Research Design

This study explored the experiences of teachers involved in the merger of one Catholic elementary school and one Catholic high school in the Archdiocese of Newark. To encapsulate teachers’ experiences, this study utilized a single qualitative case study approach in which the researcher developed an in-depth analysis of a unique case (Yin, 1994; Creswell, 2014). Single-case design requires careful investigation of the potential case to minimize the chances of misinterpretation and to maximize the access needed to collect the evidence necessary to support
the case study (Yin, 1994). A case study approach was appropriate for answering questions and offering readers new perceptions about the people or program under investigation (Stake, 1995).

This study involved a single case bounded by time and by a particular school setting, as it occurred during the first two years of the implementation of a school merger. As such, this study meets the criteria for a case, where a case study is contained in a bounded system (i.e., a single entity; a unit around which there are boundaries) (Merriam, 2009). The researcher conducted interviews as a primary source of data collection. The researcher utilized open-ended questions at the beginning of interviews, allowing participants to provide insights on their perceptions, opinions, values, and emotions surrounding this organizational change (Merriam, 2009).

**Research Questions**

The primary question this research sought to answer was: What are the teachers’ experiences regarding the planning, implementation, and outcomes of the merger between two Catholic schools? To answer this, the following questions were addressed:

1. What are the teachers’ perceptions of the ways they were informed about the impending merger?
2. How do teachers experience the merger?
3. How do teachers describe the influence of the merger on their career plans, goals, and professional motivation?

**Participant Selection**

In this single qualitative case study, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling to narrow down the selection of the participants. Creswell (2005) described purposeful sampling as the intentional selection of a variety of participants’ to acquire precious information. Purposeful sampling provided an understanding of teachers’ experiences in the merger between St. Francis
Preparatory and Holy Cross Elementary School. The research sample for this study included administrators and middle grade teachers, from different departments, with at least three years of instructional experience in this urban, K–12 Catholic school. This study also included faculty members in other roles or with responsibilities other than teaching. All participants worked in each of the two schools and were working during the merger.

The interview participants include one novice (less than four years), nine seasoned (five to nine years), and four veteran (more than ten years) teachers combined from the two middle schools, as this provided the necessary balance of representation regarding the changes before and after the merger. Lay teachers accounted for majority of the full-time teaching staff in this study. During the 2016–2017 school year, approximately ten lay teachers between the two middle schools met the criterion. The 13 participants represent the full population of the faculty in both middle schools. More than 95% of the full-time teachers are lay people. The remainder is religious men (brothers and priests) and women (nuns). Creswell (2007) described this strategy as criterion sampling (i.e., when all the participants studied met the standard of having experienced the phenomenon).

After receiving final Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher contacted the human resource (HR) officer and outlined the criteria for the interview participants. The HR officer, in turn, provided the researcher with a list of participants from both schools who met the following criteria: participation in various grade levels and academic departments, a minimum three years of teaching experience in the precursor school, other roles, and cross-functional responsibility. The researcher also asked that potential participants include administrators from the two middle schools.
The thirteen participants included six middle school teachers and one administrator from Holy Cross Elementary School (one male and six females); and three teachers, two administrators, and one professional staff from St. Francis Preparatory School (three males and three females). The selection of the thirteen participants involved looking at various grade levels, academic departments, cross-functional responsibilities, and required teaching levels of experience to find out more about the same issues from different angles (Willig, 2001).

The researcher invited the participants via email to participate in this study. The initial email included an explanation of the nature of this research. After agreeing to participate, a follow-up email was provided with the description of the process, the location of the interview, and any other clarifying details. The researcher chose participants based on meeting the criteria for sampling and their ability to provide full descriptions of the merger experience (Moustakes, 1994). The researcher assured each participant of complete confidentiality. The names of the schools and participants were all pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

**Sampling and Key Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Holy Cross Middle School Participants</th>
<th>St. Francis Middle School Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>4 to 9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Robert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cherry</td>
<td>Toni-Ann</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. Illustration of how purposive sampling was done to select research participants.*
Participant Profiles

**Toni-Ann**

Toni-Ann has been teaching for over 20 years, and has taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels throughout her career. She believes in the idea of the merger but didn’t agree with the process, and felt that even if teachers were not part of the planning process, they should have been made aware of how the process was being done so they could understand how the decisions were being made. She was concerned that many changes were happening and, at the same time, they “seemed to be happening without a plan.”

**Robert**

Robert has been in education for less than 10 years. He feels that the merger was a positive move and that both schools will benefit, especially as it relates to sustainability.
However, he feels that some of the faculty lacked enthusiasm for the change. Robert believes that it will take a lot more effort on the parts of both the administration and the faculty to maximize the benefits of this merger.

**Sam**

Sam has been in education for less than 5 years. His current position has enabled him to work with students at all three levels (elementary, middle, and high) of this merged school. He has embraced the concept of the merger because he believes that programs will be more effective now that both schools are “considered one.” Sam commented on the difference between colleagues involved in this merger and another school he worked at, saying, “The people here really want to see the kids do well. Whatever’s in the best interest of the kids, they’re willing to do.” He described teachers in other school setting as being less committed, saying, “I don’t want to do this, and I don’t want to do that.”

**Mary**

Mary has been in education for over 10 years. She believes that this merger will help teachers reconnect with the school’s mission because some teachers had become complacent over the years. She also believes that “it is important to engage in the work that other people are doing and practice what you preach.” Mary believes getting involved as a leader is one way to understand the needs of the people—in this case, the teachers who must implement the changes. She also supports the notion of teacher leadership at every level of the organization. She especially thinks that teachers should be advocates for not just their needs but for the needs of their classrooms, their department, and the students. She suggested that many people feel calmer about and are less resistant to change when they know it’s coming ahead of time, have had a chance to offer input, and have a decision delivered to them in a timely manner.
Sue

Sue has been teaching at Holy Cross for five years. Sue recognizes that people tend to worry when there is a genuine fear of the unknown, suggesting people would be less agitated if leaders thought in advance about the changes teachers face and answered questions before teachers started asking them. She feels the merger process moved too quickly, without adequate time to figure everything out. Sue believes that if more time had been allotted to the planning of this merger, teachers would not have been so anxious.

Cherry

Cherry has been teaching for more than twenty years. She has worked under several principals and has discovered that her mission as a teacher has enabled her to adapt to changes over time. She strongly feels that there is a need for more consistency regarding the planning and implementation of the merger. She admits it was difficult to accept the concept of merger, but she chooses to trust that the changes will provide more opportunities to serve the educational needs of students in this community.

Trixie

Trixie has been teaching for almost nine years. Trixie’s experiences serving under other principals made her realize that there should be consistency across the school as it relates to discipline. She feels that a clear policy, along with increased vigilance and administrative support, will restore discipline school wide. Her advice for school leaders is to “be more supportive to your teaching staff.” She also urges teachers to “know and understand what to do, how to do it, and who to go to” when a change is introduced.

Roy
Roy has been in education for almost nine years. He endorses the implementation of the merger and offers a unique perspective on the merger process. He believes that this merger presents an opportunity for students to be molded at a younger age into the mission of the school, which makes “us” stronger. He also believes that the biggest thing-keeping teachers committed to this school, despite the numerous changes, are the fact that they are mentally and emotionally invested in the school’s mission. For him, it’s not about the money; it’s not about anything else other than the mission. He also highlights the importance of transition as a vital part of the change process.

Paul

Paul has been in education for four years. He had another career before taking on teaching. He has embraced the merger with a pragmatic attitude. He says, “I look at it with the mentality that, do what it takes, get the job done. By the way, it’s that type of mentality that keeps this place moving.” He predicts that the reorganization will allow for more consistency and structure, not just for the middle school students, but for the teachers as well. Specifically, he believes that the teachers who felt they were “left in the trenches a little bit” will now have consistent leadership figures to offer them the support they need.

Jill

Jill has been teaching at Holy Cross for three years. She expresses her desire to have a better understanding of some of the changes involved and be given enough time to transition. She mentions that the changes have been huge and they seem to happen often. She also encourages teachers to pay attention and expect more changes. She believes teachers can figure out a way to make things work so the merger won’t affect their teaching or their experiences as teachers.
Alice

Alice has been teaching for over four years. She has experienced three different principals within the last three years. She welcomed the merger, saying, “I expect things will be better, especially on an administrative level. I am just going to be positive about the outcomes.” She is happy that she will continue to work with the same teachers that are “exceptionally outstanding” in this school. She believes that teachers should be included in the decision-making process because they are the backbone of the school. She also believes most of the changes occurring will eventually affect the teachers.

Pam

Pam has been teaching for less than ten years. She is hopeful that there will be more opportunities for teachers to collaborate on projects. She believes that her experiences as a teacher have enabled her to embrace the changes associated with this merger in an optimistic way: “I just think it’s going to be a change in the better direction. I would expect the structural changes in the middle school will see a lot of improvement. Our middle school students will be with their own kind, their own peers, which is what they need. They will be a close-knit and we will be able to be on top of them.” She insists that teachers should always have a plan and advises school leaders to be present not only for teachers but for the students as well.

Bonnie

Bonnie has been teaching for over ten years. She is hopeful that this merger will increase her ability to achieve her goals with her curriculum.

A total of 13 staff members directly affected by the merger participated in this research. The participants’ years of employment ranged from 3 to 20+ years. The research sample represents many seasoned school employees. 46% of the people interviewed had working
experiences in only the boys middle school and 54% of the people had experiences working in the co-ed middle school.

**Data Collection**

**Interviews**

Interviewing is a predominant form of data collection used in qualitative studies (Merriam, 2009). This case study utilized face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with teachers having day-to-day experiences with the merger. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to probe for a better understanding of the situation. This approach also enabled the teachers to tell their stories personally (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007). The interview questions provided a framework for participants to share their story. Interviews with the teachers of St. Francis Preparatory and Holy Cross Elementary School provided a rich description of teachers’ experiences of change during this merger. Biklen and Bogdan (2007) advise the interviewer to “treat every word as having the potential to unlock the mystery of the subject’s way of viewing the world” (p. 105). Therefore, the researcher asked participants to give examples and explanations that provided clarity (Merriam, 2009). The interviews conducted with the teachers and the other members of the faculty provided detailed information regarding how teachers in these schools experienced the process of the merger. Each individual interview was conducted by the researcher in a private setting in the school building.

Since the teachers who participated in this study were all located on the same site, the researcher was able to meet with them in person to conduct the interviews. Each meeting lasted no more than 60 minutes and was digitally recorded using the SONY IC recorder. Before each interview, participants read and signed the informed consent letter. The researcher used pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.
The interviews with the teachers were slightly different from the interviews with the administrators. The teacher interview questions were formulated to gain insight into the teachers’ thoughts, expectations, fears, and reactions to the changes they experienced during the school merger. School administrators were asked questions regarding prior merger experience and the leadership practices that were employed during the merger. Additionally, the proposed questions provided insight on teachers’ outlooks on their experience compared with the administrative explanation of the process. Both teachers and administrators were asked to provide suggestions for helping others better prepare for and implement mergers.

After each interview, the researcher transcribed and summarized the findings, analyzing them for relevant themes regarding the teachers’ experiences during this organizational change. Quotations from transcripts have been used in this research to illuminate the perspectives of each participant. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher grouped participant responses into broad categories and similar themes for further analysis. The interview transcripts were emailed to each participant to allow for accuracy checks and the clarification of any misrepresented statements. The participants returned the edited copy of transcription within five days. The researcher acknowledged the changes and suggestions in the final analysis.

**Document Analysis**

In addition to the interviews, documents were used as supplementary sources of data to provide a better understanding of teachers’ experiences in the merger process. According to Merriam (2009), documents provide the researcher with ready-made information that is easily accessible. The researcher requested access to written documents that further illuminated the merger process and experience. The researcher analyzed documents such as memos/emails sent to teachers, correspondences between and among teachers, formal policy statements, bulletin
boards, media coverage featuring teachers and administrators, minutes from faculty meetings, the school calendar of events, faculty team building events, the student handbook, planning meetings, and teacher walk-through observations. According to Patton (2002), documents increase the scale and validity of any single study. The researcher requested permission to access documents using a Data Use Agreement for research and analysis after IRB approval for data collection. Names and other identification were voided from all documents used for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correspondences Sent to Teachers</td>
<td>Evidence of leadership, communication, collaboration, effects on school community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Policy Statements</td>
<td>Signs of leadership, access to policy changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletins</td>
<td>Communication and access to school community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Coverage/School Website</td>
<td>Signs of collaboration and access to school information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>Proof of communication, cooperation, and leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Calendar of Events</td>
<td>Evidence of collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Team Building Events</td>
<td>Evidence of collaboration and leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Handbook</td>
<td>Accessibility to school policy and school community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planning Meetings | Verification of cooperation, decision-making, and the effects on the school community.

*Figure 4.* Documents analyzed.

**Notes**

Notes were kept during the interview process and used as a source of reflective material for the researcher. Biklen and Bogan (2007) define field notes as a written description of activities, experiences, and thoughts while collecting information and reflecting on the process. During and after each interview with a participant, the researcher wrote notes capturing any non-verbal cues that provided context to the responses or led to other probing questions.

**Data Analysis**

Yin (2009) stated, “Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence, to draw empirically based conclusions” (p. 126). The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using cross-case analysis. Cross-case analysis allowed the researcher to search for patterns and prevented the researcher from drawing premature conclusions by requiring the researcher to examine the data from many angles (Yin, 2008). The researcher divided the data by type. The researcher then examined pairs of data, categorizing the similarities and differences in each pair. For example, the researcher compared the interview responses of teachers in the co-ed middle school with those of the teachers in the all-boys middle school and compared the responses of female teachers to those of the male teachers in both schools. The researcher then examined similar pairs of data for differences and contrasting pairs for similarities. The analysis helped determine the patterns and themes relating to how the teachers in the co-ed middle school viewed the merger process compared to their counterparts in the all-boys middle school. These themes developed into categories and subcategories, evolving into an understanding about teachers’ overall experiences with the
changes inherent in a Catholic school merger. The data were coded to identify trends in reporting. Creswell (2005) described data analysis as taking data apart and putting it back together to summarize the findings. The researcher interpreted the results of important categories and described how they were connected. These findings were used in the discussion section of the study.

**Reliability and Validity**

**Role of the Researcher**

As an employee at the elementary level of the newly merged school, the researcher had the opportunity to experience the early years of the merger. This topic caught the researcher’s attention when the operations of the precursor schools began to reflect in the changes that came with the merger. The researcher recognizes that change is disruptive and has seen the impact of the merger initiative on those who must implement the change accurately: the teachers in the least dominant school.

Having taught for three years in the precursor school and currently experiencing the second year of the merger gives the researcher the credibility to conduct research in the field of educational change. However, this credibility may also lead to potential bias and subjectivity. The researcher countered potential bias and subjectivity by adhering to an interview protocol, which restricted verbal comments and nonverbal responses from the researcher that could influence the way in which participants responded to questions. The researcher remained silent during the face-to-face interviews, except when probing for clarity and more precise responses. To further authenticate this research, it must be noted that the researcher did not work within the middle school from which participants were selected; neither did the researcher directly supervise the volunteers for this study, which served to reduce potential researcher influence.
From the researcher’s perspective, several issues emerged during the implementation of the merger. First, the teachers had questions. They wondered who would lose their jobs and what the structural changes would be? Second, the previous elementary principal, who was at the announcement of the merger, did not get asked back for the next school year. Teachers faced the challenge of getting to know a new leadership structure. Third, the teachers began to show frustration and resentment as they compared the new policies and practices with those from the precursor school. This was especially prevalent with policies related to student discipline.

The researcher collected data to understand better how other teachers experienced these issues. The researcher wanted to understand teachers’ experiences during this particular merger, believing that this research will be a guide for other educational leaders in the future.

Credibility

As a strategy to enhance credibility after each interview, the researcher electronically returned the transcribed interviews to the participant for a member check. Through member checks, participants can review and edit interview transcripts for accuracy. Concerns and misconceptions are addressed to establish trustworthiness. Merriam (2009) described member checking as an important way to acquire participant feedback and precision of the researcher’s interpretation.

The researcher adhered to the guidelines established by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board. The use of pseudonyms guaranteed participants’ confidentiality in this study. All information gathered was stored securely and kept in locked files, which only the researcher has access to for at least the next three years.

Transferability
Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined transferability as showing that the findings of the study can be applied in other contexts. To ensure transferability, Merriam (2009) suggested maximum variation in the sample, allowing for a greater application of the findings by readers of this study. The differences among the sample selection (grade levels, academic departments, years of experience) accounted for transferability in another educational context. No two-school mergers are the same. However, the researcher hopes the findings from this study will transfer to other Catholic schools experiencing or planning mergers.

**Reliability**

According to Merriam (2009), reliability refers to the extent to which findings of a qualitative research can be replicated. In short, reliability depends on keeping an audit trail to provide a detailed account of the data collection procedures, decision-making while carrying out the research, and other processes involved while conducting the study (Merriam, 2009).

**Conformability**

To ensure conformability, the researcher’s mentor at Seton Hall University and the teachers at St. Francis Preparatory and Holy Cross Elementary School who participated in the study evaluated the findings of this study.
Chapter Four

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this single case study is to understand how teachers experienced the merger of two Catholic schools. Using the multiple perspective approach to case studies, the researcher explored the experiences of middle school teachers and the school leaders involved in establishing a merged K–12 Catholic school. During semi-structured interviews, participants shared their experiences and feelings about the realignment of the middle schools, which resulted in a unified K–12 Catholic school. This case study included semi-structured interviews and document analysis as the main forms of data collection. It is important to note that the interviews were conducted in May 2017 before the implementation of the new school structure in July 2017. The data were analyzed using Dedoose qualitative data analytic software, which enabled the researcher to code data, retrieve coded excerpts, and identify emergent themes based on participants’ responses. These data were analyzed to address the research questions.

This chapter presents the findings organized into the following sections: staff perspectives on communication, teachers’ reactions to their merger experiences, and the influence of the merger on teachers’ career plans.

Research Question 1: What are the teachers’ perceptions of how they were informed about the merger?

Communication: How Were Teachers Informed and What Were They Told?

With respect to research question one, communication emerged as a dominant theme with three major sub-themes, including when and how the participants found out about the merger, the information they received, and the teachers’ reactions to the information they received about the
changes. Two of the most significant concerns raised by the participants were the inadequate amount of time allotted to ensure a smooth transition and the lack of effective communication at the administrative level.

**How Teachers Were Informed**

As the participants reflected on their merger experiences, they all remembered how they learned about the merger. Several respondents mentioned they had an intuitive sense about the merger but were not informed until a year before the merger took place. For example, Pam, a seasoned St. Francis math teacher, shared, “I had a feeling that eventually this was going to happen. I actually thought it would have happened sooner.” Others noted they had suspicions about the merger due to ongoing changes they observed, although they were not specific in their descriptions of what these changes were. One participant, Jill, a Holy Cross teacher noted, “I knew based on just how things seemed to be. I observed and had a feeling that the merger was going to happen.” Another participant, Cherry, who worked at Holy Cross for over 15 years stated, “I had clues ahead of time; I kind of knew that something was happening.”

However, for most of the teachers, news about the merger was obtained through multiple sources, including both formal and informal channels. The formal channels consisted of meetings, emails, and letters, while the informal sources were colleagues and their observations of the changes taking place. Teachers from both schools recalled attending a face-to-face joint faculty meeting at the end of the 2015–2016 academic year. There, they were officially informed of the pending merger between the Holy Cross and St. Francis schools, which would create one K–12 Catholic school. Toni-Ann, a veteran teacher recalled, “I was informed about the merger at a meeting with the faculty.” A seasoned administrator, Roy, who was directly involved in the planning of the merger, confirmed Toni-Ann's recollection, noting, “There were two different
meetings with our entire staff. The first one was held in May 2016 to say that the merger was happening.” During that meeting, school leaders informed the faculty and staff that the merger would become effective at the beginning of the following academic year (2016–2017). To some respondents, the official announcement was very precise. Jill noted, “I remember he was straight to the point. I don’t remember the actual words.” Participants also indicated that they learned about the merger through informal channels, which they described as shared information between themselves and their colleagues. One participant, Cherry, disclosed, “This possibility of a merger has been talked about for years. I’m talking 10, 12, 14 years.” Toni-Ann said, “I believed that this should have been made public earlier before the speculations started.” Despite the ways in which respondents found out about the merger, they all believed the information they received was inadequate.

There was only one follow-up meeting between the first and second general meetings. This was held with the teachers of Holy Cross in June 2016. One Holy Cross teacher, Trixie, described this event, stating:

There was a follow-up meeting in their building with the headmaster, principal, and teachers in attendance. Some of the most persistent concerns raised by teachers were payroll, job security, and health benefits. However, they were assured that no changes would be made to staff. We were also told to direct our concerns regarding payroll and employee benefits to the business office.

Participants noted that after a few months of silence, the leadership team called a second general meeting with all faculty and staff to announce the structure of the newly formed K–12 Catholic school. The announcements about these structural changes came during the middle of the 2016–2017 academic year. Once again, participants recalled attending a meeting with the
faculty and staff from both schools, where they were informed what the new structure of the middle schools would be. Toni-Ann reported:

   We were informed that there was going to be a reorganization of the entire organization and that there was going to be a merger of the middle schools. He also announced a new Leadership team. We were all going to be under the umbrella of St. Francis.

Although the contents of this meeting were not elaborated on extensively, Bonnie, one of the middle school teachers from St. Francis, was seemingly pleased by the results of the meeting. She was in favor of the initiative and acknowledged, “I’m always in favor of keeping Catholic schools open, being a Catholic myself.”

**Perception of the Timing**

   This new structure was designed to merge the two middle schools—St. Francis, the all-boys middle school with an academic year beginning at the end of July, and Holy Cross, a co-ed middle school that starts in September. Sue, a seasoned teacher from Holy Cross, said she felt like the challenge with the timing regarding the implementation of the new structure would not have been an issue if there had been more discussions and planning time. She said, “I just don’t understand how things are going to work. I still don’t know what time school will begin or end for us. What our classes are going to be like because they’re on a block schedule.”

   Toni-Ann, who worked in both schools over the years, said another issue for Holy Cross school teachers is that they will undergo a major adjustment with this new structure, as they will begin the 2017–2018 school year a month earlier than before. She lamented:

   I was really enthusiastic about starting the next school year in September but now we have a completely new plan. We are accustomed to a school year, which is from September to June. It’s now May, almost June, and St. Francis begins the end of July,
which is pretty close. No one has talked to me or talked to anyone yet about the plans or schedule.

Most participants desired to have more follow-up meetings once the merger news became official. Participants from both schools, like Sue, expressed, “It’s still kind of nice to know what’s going on.” Research has indicated that including teachers in discussions and decision-making leads to higher staff morale (as cited in Campbell, 2013).

Another issue with the timing of the information was the unexpected organizational changes experienced by study subjects. The participants of both schools felt the timing of the release of information and the period for the structural implementation was significant concerns. This could be because the initial announcement that teachers received at the end of the 2015–2016 academic year stated they should expect minor changes over the next two years, yet the new structure was announced only a little over a year after that initial announcement.

There was a sense of urgency among teachers from both schools regarding planning for the next school year, which began at the end of July. Most teachers were eager to begin planning their courses. Others indicated the need to understand and familiarize themselves with the new schedule. Sue agonized, “It’s May, and this new structure will have us begin school on July 31st. I don’t even know what I’m doing on July 31st. Is there a schedule? Like, how does that work?”

Toni-Ann expressed, “I would like a plan in place. But the fact that there is no plan and the date is coming up, the more nervous I feel going forward without some sort of plan.” Roy agreed and added that teachers would need information to help make decisions about their jobs. He noted, “It’s about job security. Teachers will need to ask themselves, ‘Am I really going to be here? How long am I going to be here? Am I going to have enough notice to find something else?’” If the timing of information with teachers is essential, so is the content of that message.
How Teachers Reacted to Communication During the Merger

Reactions to the merger were influenced by when the information was shared and the content of what was told. For some participants, the announcements about structural changes came as a surprise. Trixie, a seasoned Holy Cross Science teacher, recalled, “They assured us that not many changes would happen in the next few years and now we are expected to move.” Consequently, when the restructuring announcement was made, teachers were more likely to lose trust in school leaders and become anxious about the imminent changes than to trust the process. Jill mentioned feeling a lack of trust in leadership and confusion about how the administration handled communication:

I just find this to be a school that is so secretive in so many ways that I don't know what to think sometimes, and I can’t always rely on what it is that might be going on because I don’t know what’s going on and then I don’t know what to expect.

According to the views of several teachers, although school leaders encouraged them to have faith and trust the process, there were problems evident in how the merger was being handled. For example, several interviewees mentioned that they received very few updates about the merger process between the first general faculty meeting in May 2015 and the second meeting held in October 2016, and then afterward. Others felt they were left in the dark, noting the lapses in communication between May 2015 and October 2016. Cherry shared, “I think we’re in the middle of not knowing what’s going on. I mean there was no official sharing of information, especially after they announced the new structure.”

Several respondents described the content of the information received regarding the restructure as insufficient, which sparked several questions about how the process would work. Sue commented, “He hasn’t given us specifics.” Jill remembered, “He was straight to the point,
but nothing was clear.” Most participants were not pleased with the depth of the information communicated to them during the transition.

Teachers from both schools wanted to know more about the changes. This included how decisions were being made, what their schedules would look like, potential curriculum changes, classroom locations, and small but consequential matters like whether they would still have recess. Sue explained, “I have asked a lot of questions. I wrote down questions. I even asked about salaries.” There was a general sense of insecurity. Cherry expressed, “Where am I in the merger? Where are we in this merger?” Trixie was also interested in knowing the channels of command with the new structure. She explained, “There is no clear identity or direction when we have a problem. Like, in some cases who to go to in case of this or this person to go to in case of that.”

Bonnie admitted that while she was in favor of sustaining Catholic schools, the announcement did not provide adequate information, which was very frightening to her and others. She noted, “I was a little hesitant to say I’m in favor because I was afraid of my curriculum being changed.”

**How the Merger Announcement Influenced Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy**

How the communication process was handled influenced teachers’ morale, feelings of being left out of the process, and not feeling valued. Toni-Ann noted, “Even if we weren’t a part of it—the decision making—we should be made aware of how the process was, so we could have all been aware of how the decision was being made.” Another important implication of the poor timing and inadequate information was teachers’ perceptions that the leaders failed to listen to them and value their experiences. Jill noted:
I think that particular things were done at Holy Cross. That was our process, which was eradicated without much warning. So, I guess where teachers wanted to have a say about certain things or tried to have a say about specific works, they weren’t being heard. It was more a matter of we listen to you, but it doesn’t matter. I think some things seem to be anyway a part of Holy Cross that the people wanted to maintain. It was just you weren’t listened to well…

Feelings that school leaders failed to provide them with sufficient information about the process or include them in the process caused undue tension and anxiety about the changes. Jill commented on her observations:

I haven’t talked to a St. Francis teacher and asked but based on the meetings and how people were reacting to things it seems that half were upset about how certain things were done and how things were changed. It’s not that I don’t think they needed to make the changes; it’s the way the changes were made. It was more announced than a collaboration.

Teachers believed they had a wealth of experience and information that would have been helpful to the process. Paul stated, “We have a lot of smart and bright faculty members. I don’t think it would be too wise not to take their feedback.” With teachers not being actively involved in the merger process, many participants experienced feelings of anxiety. Alice, a language teacher, complained, “Although we knew it was coming, I didn’t know that the merger would be like that. I was worried.” Obviously fearful and not knowing what she should expect, Alice recalled, “The first thing I did after the announcement was to approach the head of the middle school and let him explain things in more detail to me. I told him my expectations, anxieties, and fears.”
Another participant, Roy, a seasoned administrator, stated, “It would help if the headmaster would say to the teachers, we have a vision, we want you here, we want to incorporate you into this St. Francis’ family.” Not only did the lack of communication impact how teachers felt they were viewed by their administrators, it also affected how teachers felt about their ability to plan for the new school year.

Since the details and logistics surrounding the transition were restricted or unclear, teachers were unable to simply follow the concept of the restructure. Bonnie expressed that it would have been more effective if the logistics were thoroughly assessed and clearly communicated at the initial announcement. This approach would have provided a useful plan for teachers, allowing them to be sufficiently prepared. Bonnie expressed, “They told us that the logistics and everything from it would be given to us over the summer and then hopefully at the beginning of the next school year it would take effect.”

Some administrators also believed that the teachers’ ability to plan was hampered by how the communication process was handled. Mary, a veteran administrator who also has teaching responsibilities, stated in her interview:

When I think of the middle school, I feel like those conversations should be much further along than they are. Not just because they affect other things, but for the sake of those individuals who will be undergoing those changes. I think about a classroom teacher who may have to relocate her room or just the difference in the daily schedule. If teachers are teaching the same things but you’re going to be doing it at different times, they need to be able to process that ahead of time.
Roy expressed, “I do think there still needs to be more conversations with the faculty and staff, so everyone is on the same page. I don’t think everybody is of the same understanding right now.”

**Research Question 2: How do teachers experience mergers?**

**The Emotional Dimension of Change**

Research question two aimed to discover how these middle school teachers experienced the merger. For some—especially teachers—continuous change can be disturbing. According to the literature, changes in schools can create heightened levels of emotions before teachers embrace them. Hargreaves’ 2004 work found that teachers display negative emotions, such as fear, frustration, anger and cynicism, when faced with educational reform. The findings concerning the experiences of participants in this study highlight myriad emotions that surfaced following the merger announcement and that intensified as the process unfolded.

Although the merger brought together teachers from two different organizations, the teachers from both schools had similar reactions to the merger. Consistently, all the teachers felt strong emotions about how the changes associated with the merger were made. The following subsection presents a major theme that emerged after analyzing the data: emotional experiences caused by change. Concerning the area of emotional experience, several sub-themes emerged from the data: the positive and negative emotional experiences of change. Teachers from both schools who were reassigned to new classrooms, and even those who had to welcome another group of teachers into their building, felt the merger evoked negative emotions for them. These negative emotions, as described by the teachers, included tension, anxiety, and frustration. Alternatively, other teachers expressed feelings of hope, optimism, and relief. These teachers welcomed the idea of having the middle school in the same building.
Negative Emotional Responses to the Changes Associated with the Merger

Although many teachers anticipated the merger, they still experienced various emotions in response to their understanding of the changes involved. Veteran teachers tended to provide descriptions of negative emotional responses.

**Tension between teachers.** The participants’ descriptions of their interactions during the change process suggested some feelings of tension between the teachers from the two middle schools. Teachers believed that failure on the part of school leaders to actively integrate the faculty and create a sense of family contributed to the divide among the teachers. Holy Cross teachers felt there was a “need for cohesion with both schools.” Alice, a seasoned Holy Cross teacher, described, “We didn't know the teachers from across there, from the other school.” During the interviews, it was noted that both groups of participants referred to the schools as “the other school.” Trixie, another teacher from Holy Cross, described the relationship this way: “It’s still like, you over there, we’re over here.” The participants felt that the decisions made during the process caused a division in the relationship between the two staffs. Toni-Ann, a Holy Cross teacher, stated:

I think they could have been aware that Holy Cross staff has responsibilities after school, so that when they were scheduling social events or meetings many of our teachers could not get away to attend. So, it wasn’t that the Holy Cross teachers were not being gracious to attend, but simply could not because we had had scheduled, required things to do with the students.

Toni-Ann’s comments suggested that a lack of awareness regarding how each institution functioned prior to the merger created situations involving misperceptions of each other’s
behavior. Administrators were aware of these tensions as well. One second-year, Holy Cross administrator, Robert, stated:

I didn’t feel that there was enough buy-in from the staff. We’re not all in this together. I think there’s probably a particular group of people who are not with it yet. I think they want to see how things progress, and maybe they’ll have a change of heart.

The division noted by Robert captured the lack buy-in from teachers across both schools. Cherry’s recollection of an unpleasant exchange with a teacher from the St. Francis Middle School illuminates the tension that existed. She described the encounter as follows:

I know one of the girls… She was downstairs talking to another member of staff, and she was not happy about the change… I said, “You and me both.” I just had to say it because it was like she was resentful, which I don’t blame her, but there was a tone in her voice which seems to mean that it was our fault somehow. I don’t know, and maybe that wasn’t what she meant, but that’s how it came across, so I said, “Yeah, if this is a hard move?”

So, she looked at me and then left. I thought okay now she knows it’s a hard move for us too.

This encounter demonstrates a common theme in much of the literature, which reveals that the threat of change can bring about feelings of loss of control, causing people to feel resentful (Kanter, 1983). Some of the teachers in this study needed help to understand the changes and engage in healthy dialogue to work through this tension.

Anxiety. As noted by Bridges and Bridges (2009), change triggers other smaller changes, all of which require people to adapt new ways of doing things. During such an experience, people tend to worry or ask questions, such as: “What elements are essential and must be preserved into the future, or will we lose precious values, core competencies, and lose who we
are?” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 23). Some participants in this study experienced “anxiety” about the impending changes like those noted by Heifetz et al. (2009). There were obvious differences with the two institutions, but for Holy Cross, this merger resulted in them being the least dominant school. Even after the merger announcement, teachers from Holy Cross viewed the merger as a threat to the existence of Holy Cross School. Cherry said, “I think they’re going to close the school or something. They are doing something, but I don’t know what exactly.” Once again, the lack of information affected the teachers’ abilities to understand and believe the decision to merge was legitimate. Additionally, all the teachers from Holy Cross School seemed worried about losing their identity as a school. Holy Cross teachers worried about losing their school’s history, mission, tradition, procedures, and reputation. Teachers groaned about changes in classroom locations, schedules, and materials. Sue, a math teacher, mentioned that she would have to change her mathematics textbook series, since “now that we’re a part of the same thing, we have to be teaching the same thing and using the same books because I know they’re not going to change for us.” Similarly, Toni-Ann from Holy Cross noted:

I think people are going to need to say we have a vision, we want you here, we want to incorporate you in the St. Francis family. But Holy Cross has also this wonderful history as well. So, let’s be inclusive, and not swallow up something and also stay respectful of that.

Toni-Ann’s statement reflects how individuals experiencing change worry about losing their sense of identity, especially in an institution with the rich and long culture Holy Cross has.

Like Toni-Ann, Jill felt they were being absorbed into St. Francis: “It’s a matter of us becoming like them.” Bridges and Bridges (2009) noted that it is not so much change that people fear, but the loss that comes with change. Some veteran teachers from both schools did not want
to relinquish old practices or schedules to become part of the other school. Specifically, the teachers who had to relocate their classrooms and transition between buildings noted that the changes left them feeling very displaced.

An additional concern voiced by the participants in this study was the feeling of anxiety caused by losing colleagues they had worked with for many years. Toni-Ann, who has taught at Holy Cross for more than a decade, said, “This change made me feel unsure about my position and the position of the teachers that I grew to love working and being with.” This helps explain why teachers had difficulty embracing each other, and why they displayed feelings of tension toward each other. Through this study, it is evident that interpersonal relationships are quite important in shaping the professional setting. As such, Heifets et al. (2009) urge leaders to connect to the values, beliefs, and anxieties of the people experiencing change. They believe that if school leaders acknowledge the loss that comes with change, they can better help with the attitudes and reactions among the teachers.

**Frustration.** Both groups of teachers expressed feelings of frustration when faced with relocation issues. Bonnie, from St. Francis, described how emotionally attached she was to her classroom. When faced with the relocation issue, initially she felt displaced: “This was the classroom I taught in since I started working in the school.” Both groups of teachers in the study expressed significant frustrations with the nature of the changes and how their daily functions would be impacted. Sue added that she was “worried,” “wary,” and “unsettled” during the implementation process.

It was clear that the changes had a strong influence on individuals. Sue reflected on her trepidation, “Life got easier, and now I’ve got this, like a wrench is thrown in where I don’t
know what’s going on. I’m just wary of the whole thing because again, not one of my twenty questions have been answered.”

Having to make changes to their regular structure during the implementation challenged participants’ familiar realities, leaving them feeling uncomfortable. Toni-Ann lamented:

The schedule that I have learned to love and grown fond of myself… now the merger would change all of that. I am not feeling too secure about any of the things going forward…. Having these crazy possible changes that may not be to my liking.

Some felt disconnected from friends and colleagues and others felt frustrated about having to learn new ways of doing things.

**Hope, Optimism, and Relief**

As the merger process began to take effect, different feelings emerged. The St. Francis middle school teachers who worked in the main building shared with the high school boys responded positively to the restructuring news. Kanter (1983) emphasized the upside to change, stating that change can renew and provide chances for new beginnings. Some teachers shared how, over time, they began to embrace the changes and thought of the possibilities inherent in such an adventure.

**Hope and optimism.** In contrast to the first set of emotional responses discussed, it is crucial to point out that some participants took an optimistic approach toward the merger. Although Holy Cross teachers were not excited that they had to relocate classrooms and St. Francis teachers expressed disparate views about the relocation, nevertheless some teachers were enthusiastic that both middle schools would now be in the same building. The teachers thought the move would give the middle school students a chance to develop in their own learning environment. A St. Francis teacher, Pam, explained:
The middle school needs a little bit more routine, more regiment. You know, they still need to be walked to places. With the new structure we’ll be more contained. That makes me feel a little bit better.

Pam was hopeful about the relocation announcement. The St. Francis teachers believe that having the middle school relocated to a separate building could be an advantage for both the teachers and the students. Bonnie described her experience after the announcement as a decisive moment, explaining that she realized:

The announcement of the merger did help me as a teacher not to be frustrated. Not to leave but just regain the love that I had for teaching my students. I started to feel something spark up again inside. I didn’t even have to go on vacation. I could just start again. A few days would be okay to take off. Even though I have to relocate, I’m looking forward to this new school year coming. This cleaning and packing is a form of cleansing for me too. This year has gone by, new students coming in, a new building, new format, and the administration itself give me hope that this coming school year will be better.

For Bonnie, embracing the changes affirmed her sense of identity as a teacher as she regained the love she had for teaching her students. Bonnie believed that this “cleansing” was a key reason for her feeling optimistic about the merger concept.

Paul, who is also a teacher at St. Francis, added that he initially embraced the concept of the merger for reasons like Bonnie’s. He noted:

Doing the same thing year after year could be a little monotonous. I know for myself, I like new opportunities and new challenges to keep me motivated and keep me in my game. So, I think it could bring a breath of fresh air having, really, not being so separate, but realizing that this is one thing.
Both Bonnie and Paul spoke of their personal beliefs, which were instrumental in supporting the implementation of the restructure. Their comments indicated that teachers perceived this experience as a way for them to improve their outlook and navigate their way through the process. Making a conscious decision to remain positive about change was essential to keeping the teachers going.

**Relief.** For Pam, a change in location was instrumental in giving her relief. She mentioned, “Now that we were told that we’re moving seventh and eighth grade over to Holy Cross building, I feel a little bit more at ease. Pam strongly believed there was good in having all the middle school students contained in the same building, as she thought it could help limit disciplinary issues.

Alice and Bonnie also felt that the merger might yield exciting results and positive changes in the school. Alice, who teaches at Holy Cross, expressed that, with the announcement of the new leadership structure, she looked toward a better administration. The Holy Cross participants noted that they welcomed the changes because they had difficulties with leadership in the previous two years. Holy Cross experienced a high turnover in leadership, with four principals in five years. Alice expressed that the long service of the veteran headmaster leading St. Francis made her feel confident moving forward: “Now there is somebody that has our back.” Bonnie, who teaches at St. Francis explained, “I first used to think that the administration didn’t have us, the teaching faculty, in mind or didn’t value our opinions, our input. But then I can’t go on teaching and thinking like that.” This approach enabled these participants to manage the impact of the insurmountable challenges during the merger process.

**Research Question 3:** How do teachers describe the influence of the merger on their career plans, goals, and professional motivation?
The purpose of research question three was understanding how the teachers described the influence of the merger on their career plans, goals, and professional motivation. However, the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that most participants spoke less about their goals and career plans and more about their new roles and the additional responsibilities placed on them because of the organizational changes. Some teachers appeared to be more focused on their new roles than on spending the time necessary for interpreting what the merger meant for their careers. The teachers also discussed the challenges they faced in their daily work life under the merger but hadn’t yet developed ideas about what the merger meant in the long term.

Leading researchers in organizational theory, Bridges and Bridges noted that organizational change challenges people to let go of the old ways and do things differently (2009). Teachers in this study focused on the challenges they experienced with the merger, which they believed were due to a lack of support from administrators and a breakdown in student behavior both inside and outside the classroom. The teachers believed that those responsible for leading the merger process (i.e., the headmaster and administrators) lacked the experience for embarking on such an undertaking. As such, the teachers believed the breakdown in student behavior was not solely because of issues with classroom management, believing that leadership also plays a critical role in fostering a positive system of support for teachers and students. Another constraint mentioned by the participants is the effect of the new responsibilities associated with the merger changes. New instructional challenges and responsibilities had a significant effect on teachers. It was also reported that some teachers had more opportunities to advance to leadership roles.
Furthermore, McHugh and Kyle (1993), who study the field of school consolidation, noted that uncertainties tend to accompany organizational changes in schools, which in turn tends to have a negative effect upon teacher morale and job satisfaction. The following section describes how the organizational changes affected the work life of both the administrators and teachers, as well as the morale of the academic staff. The researcher begins by discussing issues regarding the organizational management of the two schools as seen through the lens of the administrators, highlighting the administrators’ descriptions of how the changes impacted their workload. The teachers’ descriptions of how the merger affected their work and how the workload of the administrators influenced what they had to do as classroom teachers are then discussed.

**How the merger affected the administrators.** This merger consolidated two Catholic schools, Holy Cross and St. Francis, with different organizational structures. Holy Cross, a small, co-ed, K–8 School had one administrator, a principal. In contrast, St. Francis was an all-boys high school with a middle school division. St. Francis also had a larger administrative team: one headmaster, supported by a second level of about eight administrators; a larger faculty; and a larger student body. Merging the schools meant that one organizational structure was created, where the headmaster and the administrative team of St. Francis were responsible for the newly merged schools. Both schools continued operations in their own buildings, which have been located on the same premises for over a century. As a function of the merger, the principal of Holy Cross was relieved of her position at the end of the 2014–2015 school year.

Under the merger, the school administrators’ workload increased, as some administrators had to assume either new roles or an expansion of their previous ones. This is not an unusual outcome in school mergers and consolidation, as noted by Kyriacou and Harrison (1993).
However, increased workload can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed. In this study, the researcher found this to be the case. For example, the administrator at St. Francis who was in charge of St. Francis Middle School before the merger, including supervising the students and staff of the middle school division, was appointed to a post that made him responsible for the day-to-day operations of the entire K–8 Holy Cross school, as well. This appointment meant he had to supervise more students and staff. While explaining the overwhelming duties this administrator had, Mary, another administrator, noted, “He had ‘too much on his plate’ with the responsibilities of leading the middle school of St. Francis along with leading the entire Holy Cross school.” Although there was much to be done, according to the administrators, there was not enough staff to get everything done or to carry out the responsibilities efficiently.

Brodbeck (2012) asserts that leaders during organizational change tend to stretch the rubber band as far as possible without snapping it. In this study, however, the researcher found this was not so. The participants felt that, with a relatively heavy workload, some things were neglected. In their assessments of the administration, some teachers shared the views of the administrators, noting the limited personnel available to supervise and support essential areas.

The teachers perceived that the administrators were unable to provide adequate support for them, while also not being able to provide a visible presence of authority for the students. Trixie, commenting on the supervision of the middle schools, stated, “Those kids need a lot of attention, a lot of structure, a lot of consistency. Not having a visible and accessible leader around might have affected them a little bit more.” Teachers considered the lack of a visible authority figure as a factor that impacted student behavior.

Although, according to Fernandez, Knowles and Erickson (2009), leaders should have conversations with employees about their potential new roles, and support them, as much as
possible, in acquiring the skills and knowledge relevant to those new roles, it is not clear whether this happened in the St. Francis/Holy Cross merger. Several participants reported not having a clear understanding of their new roles and responsibilities. Administrators reported that they were committed to their work, but that it became increasingly “burdensome when other people got moved to another position.” Several administrators noted that this was an additional pressure, which is exemplified by Mary’s response: “Regarding systems, some of that needs to be looked at. If somebody’s been removed from an area in the school, who is coming up to do it who isn’t already doing X, Y, and Z?” Participants in this study would have benefited from a revised organizational chart.

The school leaders tried to address shortages and instability by seeking support for themselves. One St. Francis administrator, Sam, said, “We have interns that come in and make up the testing to kind of ease the stress of being too overworked.” The use of supportive personnel helped the school leaders overcome some issues with workload.

**Positive Outcomes for Teachers in a Merger**

The merger also allowed some teachers to assume new leadership positions, bringing their classroom experiences to aid the process. Mary, for example, described a case where a first-grade classroom teacher in Holy Cross was appointed the principal of that school in the school year after this study was done. Mary stated:

I knew that somebody would be there who understood an elementary classroom, and what an excellent primary class looks like from the teaching to the curriculum to the classroom management and all those pieces.... You’ve got somebody who is going to be leading the charge who’s an experienced teacher, experienced in the school, and elementary is an entirely different animal.
This assignment allowed the classroom teacher the opportunity to display her expertise in the elementary grades, help bridge the gap between the schools, and further develop the relationship between Holy Cross and St. Francis School. It was unclear whether the teachers at St. Francis had the same opportunities for promotion to administrative positions. However, their responsibilities as classroom teachers expanded.

**Challenges to teachers’ work.** The merger brought changes to the teachers’ workloads. Some teachers talked about their experiences when one administrator was pulled from one area to work in another, and when administrators were assigned additional responsibilities, creating a vacuum in the leadership. Trixie explained, “When we had a problem we didn’t know who to go to.” The participants believed this lack of administrative team visibility was detrimental to the support the day-to-day activities in the schools required. As a result, some teachers reported that they had to involuntarily assume non-teaching roles in addition to their already scheduled classroom duties. These non-teaching duties included managing extra-curricular activities, attendance, parent conferences, daily routines, and student behavior both inside and outside of the classroom. Both the Holy Cross and St. Francis teachers were quite vocal in describing the challenges with student behavior. The Holy Cross teachers, for example noted that the expanded workload for administrators resulted in other supportive roles, like student discipline, being unmanned, “which was a major challenge.” Trixie noted, “The discipline load increased because you, as the classroom teacher, had to deal with everything on your own.” Another teacher, Jill, expressed:

Again, behavior, which is I had to step in and you know to see a child misbehaving often and if you know that behavior is not to be tolerated do more than talk to them all the time. Talking to them isn’t going to do anything. Talk to them at home. Do more than talking.
I’m not saying suspend, but I am saying don’t patronize. Don’t sit there and talk to them and say bring them to class and have the same problem all over again. It’s not fixing anything. Be more proactive behaviorally.

An administrator would usually deal with these situations, but some teachers, like Jill, felt they had no choice but to “step up” to some of the demands and address the behavioral issues they saw. Trixie added:

We wanted to send a student out of the class to the principal’s office because you think this issue should be dealt with the principal. You would send the student down, and in a minute or two, the student would be back upstairs in the classroom. With nothing being done. No consequences.

All the interruptions related to students’ behavior affected the teachers’ ability to perform their instructional duties effectively. Bonnie described her frustrations with not being able to achieve her instructional goals as a science teacher “because of the behavior problems. And [because] we didn’t have much support from administration to correct those behavior problems, I did not get to fulfill what I am, a teacher.”

A sentiment shared by Bonnie and the other St. Francis teachers highlighted concerns with the increase in students’ disruptive behavior, which they attributed to the failure on the part of the school administration to address disciplinary issues consistently. Bonnie noted, “If the leaders tell the students and us teachers the consequences of a certain action, then follow through with it. Follow-up, be faithful to that. That gives us teachers the support.” Similarly, Trixie mentioned, “There was no support, no one to follow-through with what we’re doing. Or someone at a higher-level dealing with what they should have dealt with. Like student discipline.” These teachers felt that the lack of consistency led to unnecessary stress.
Almost all the teachers described their workload as “challenging.” A significant number said that, at certain times, the issues with student behavior exceeded their capacity to manage it. Maslach and Jackson (1981) noted that when teachers experience high levels of burnout or feel emotionally exhausted, their relationships with the students and the quality of their teaching suffer. Paul’s perspective summed up how the teachers in this study felt:

A lot of people are stretched to the max around here… Pretty much sacrificing their lives, and then to be asked to do more, that can be difficult. Teachers may feel used or unappreciated, so it’s tough asking people who do a lot to do more, especially if they feel like they are not involved in the process at all.

The teachers were unhappy with the increasing responsibilities—“sacrificing their lives”—while feeling unappreciated. Paul’s statement aligned with Dewe’s (1986) study, where he found that workload was cited consistently as the most frequent, anxiety-inducing, and fatiguing problem experienced when schools undergo changes.

While some participants talked about the non-instructional challenges they experienced, others talked about the instructional challenges they faced when an all-boys school merged with a co-ed school. Participants noted they had no choice but to expand their range to work with a group of unfamiliar students. Specifically, some teachers from Holy Cross spoke about having the responsibility to teach in a single-sex classroom, which required them to move outside their comfort zones. Sue, a teacher from Holy Cross accustomed to teaching co-ed classes, mentioned, “I’m not sure how I feel about a single-sex classroom because I’ve never worked with it before.” One teacher, Paul, in elaborating on this, raised the question as to whether faculty from the all-male St. Francis school would now be able to teach females. He wondered if it would this pose a conflict and of there would there be support to assist teachers with this new student body:
Seeing that St. Francis faculty had never had the experience of teaching female students, that can be a conflict… The question is, “Can St. Francis faculty teach females?” You have to change your dynamic a little bit, your approach to that. Being able to have that support, regarding do they have the right people in that?

All nine teachers talked about the need for stability. During her interview, Bonnie discussed the professional struggles she personally had to deal with, as well as the struggles of her colleagues, because of the instability of the changes:

It’s been a struggle for my colleagues and myself; it’s been up and down. The changes have been frustrating; as a teacher, I haven’t had the opportunity this past year to implement and do as much as I wanted to.

If training and support had been given to the teachers regarding how the merger would affect their work, then perhaps they would not have experienced the struggles Bonnie alluded to. Fullan (2003) argues that, during organizational change, school leaders can build the capacity of teachers by providing them with the knowledge and skills they need to work as competent professionals.

**Teacher morale.** As noted by McHugh and Kyle, who study the field of school consolidation, uncertainties tend to accompany organizational changes in schools, which in turn tends to have a negative effect upon teacher morale and job satisfaction (McHugh & Kyle, 1993). Bentley and Rempel (1970) defined teacher morale as a teacher’s wellbeing as it relates to their levels of enthusiasm, stress, and involvement in the job. For the teachers in this study, changes in leadership styles, classroom locations, responsibilities, curriculum, teaching single-sex classes, and integrating into a new school culture affected their feelings about the job.
Moreover, according to the literature, continual work-related stress factors can weaken teacher morale (Senechal, Sober, & Hope, 2016).

School leaders in this study did not fully understand that some of the organizational changes associated with the merger had the potential to weaken teacher morale. For example, a major change involved having both the middle and high schools on the same calendar. This meant that both schools would begin the school year in July. This was different from what happened in Holy Cross before the merger, where teachers were accustomed to a school year starting in September. Alice groaned:

They start earlier and end earlier. This was a major challenge for the Holy Cross middle school teachers, who perceived it as a disadvantage, especially when some had already made summer vacation plans with their families. If I end school June 15th now and come back on July 31st, that will be too much. That is a disadvantage for me because from June 15th to July, that’s a little over a month break.

This eroded teacher morale in Holy Cross, as these teachers felt the new calendar was forced upon them. For some teachers, like Sue, the reality of the merger experience created some distress and had her questioning her commitment to the school: “For me, it was like, am I staying? Or am I going to find a job that starts on September 6th?” Trixie also indicated that the merger motivated her to examine her next steps:

It is pushing me to seek better, to move on with my career because you do not see any scope for upward mobility, for anything for the teachers. This merger, I think it is telling me that I need to find somewhere more stable.

Participants like Jill, who worked in both middle schools, felt substantial threats to her job security. Jill, a novice teacher, stated:
I don’t know what I see because I don’t know what they are going to do and I’m still observing how they do certain things. I’m not sure. I don’t know that everything feels so shaky. I don’t know that I can rely on this as a long-term career… I don’t know what’s happening, so I’m still looking at it day by day, year by year, and I will decide as needed when I need to leave; if and when.

Most Holy Cross teachers felt uncertain about making plans and feared there were more surprises to come. Seo and Hill (2005) spoke about the negative impact of uncertainty on teachers, which can result in high turnover, absenteeism, and lower self-efficacy. Trixie said, “This is how I support my children.” Sue mentioned that, at her age, it would be difficult for her to find a new job, so she decided to return for the next school year. Cherry stated, “I don’t know how long I’m going to be in this career. I haven’t given that much thought. I will stay in the sense of transition. I don’t know if I could stay much longer than that.”

For Mary, an administrator who has been sympathetic to the plight of the teachers, these feelings about their work and job security were not unsurprising. In her reflections on the teachers with whom she interacted, she noted:

I feel like there’s some degree of burnout with some teachers. They’ve really kind of checked out, which I’ve brought to their attention and say, “If there is something going on that I can help remove an impediment for you, let me know what that is.”

Understanding how dispirited the teachers were, she appeared willing to assist them navigate the barriers that they faced. Roy, another administrator aware of the teachers’ concerns, took a different approach. For him, the goals of the school needed to be the priority:

I think it has to be made clear quickly so that teachers can decide whether they want to be part of it or not. It’s about security. Am I going to be here? How long am I going to be
here? Am I going to have enough notice to find something else? So, I think it as to be made clear what everybody’s role is. Then obviously that would give us a chance if somebody decided they want to leave to be able to fill a spot that’s no longer going to be there. At the end of the day, business has to continue. We have to continue educating kids.

**Professionalism.** The researcher concludes this section of the findings by discussing how the merger might have impacted teachers’ motivation toward their work. Some veteran teachers did not seem perturbed about the influence of this merger on their professional motivation, but others expressed concerns about the possibility of having to teach another subject or a new curriculum. Seasoned teachers like Bonnie and Sue made statements such as, “I don't want to start all over.” Sue mentioned that when she began teaching, she did not know anything about the content and she made sure she learned it. She further added that she did not want to learn any subject material other than what she currently teaches. Similarly, Cherry, a veteran teacher, added:

> Things could change even in the subject materials. You would have to adjust to that and prepare yourself. You do something one way for a long time, then you have to switch off; it’s probably very good. Uncomfortable but good.

Cherry seemed willing to adapt to the changes during the transition. Others looked forward to continuing working with the students and pursuing avenues for professional growth. Pam mentioned, “Well, I’m currently working toward my 40 hours to become a registered behavioral therapist. I do behavioral therapy on the side. So, a lot of that transfers over to here.”

Some viewed change as a necessary part of life despite the difficulties they experienced during the transition. Paul noted, “So, things are always evolving and changing, and I think it’s
important just to challenge yourself.” Bonnie looked forward to working with the students at all levels of this merger, stating:

I’m going to graduate school for exercise science, Physical Ed, sports administration, and coaching, so kind of like the athletic spectrum. So, I’m working, like I said, if I’m in it right now, I want to grow in this to help the kids. So, I’ve decided to do grad school and that while I’m in it right now. And really maximize my efforts here to be able to help the kids as much.

Several teachers remained committed to their professional development. As Alice said, “We do professional development a lot of times to keep ourselves abreast with innovations, educational innovations.”

**Summary**

This chapter has added depth and rigor to the discourse on educational mergers. The findings have captured the views of participants who experienced the dynamics of the merger between two schools, examining the implications on their overall performances as teachers. The findings indicate that the participants were desirous for more discussions about the changes. They had a myriad of unaddressed concerns, as was evident throughout the analyses of the responses to the first research question, which directly affected their ability to adapt to the inevitable consolidation. The participants have provided detailed information about the initial announcement, their knowledge of and reactions to the merger, and the involvement of the teachers in the process. The consensus throughout the findings highlighted significant lapses in the communication processes between the teachers and administrators, as details regarding the merger were not adequately communicated to the teachers. This issue undoubtedly created tensions among the teachers and evoked feelings of perplexity about the precariousness of the
merger. It was not uncommon for the participants to express emotions such as fear, anxiety, and uncertainty as they grappled with being relegated to the periphery of the decision-making process. It also appears the lack of communication had significant implications for various aspects of the participants’ roles as teachers. This emerged from the findings as an even more critical issue related to the potential success of the newly merged school. Although these teachers are predominantly Catholic and understood the importance of the merger, they were focused on maintaining a strong relationship with their professional peers and wanted to continue working together after the merger.

Despite the many challenges regarding the leadership practices during the early stages of the merger, overall, the teachers believed in the strategic vision of having a united school. The teachers were optimistic that the merger could yield positive results, given enough participation amongst their colleagues and the administrators. The study’s findings revealed that there were new demands, which resulted in additional responsibilities for both teachers and administrators. Some teachers saw this an opportunity to reinvent their careers, while others believed the merger had negative implications on their major duties.
Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The study was designed to fill the gap in the existing literature on Catholic school mergers by investigating a merger that took place in New Jersey. Specifically, the study sought to understand the perceptions of the faculty who were affected by the consolidation of two schools. This chapter presents a summary of the findings gleaned from answers to the research questions. It connects these findings to current practices in Catholic education, as well as to the existing literature. This chapter concludes with recommendations for policy and practice, and implications for future research.

The purpose of this single case study was to understand how teachers experienced the merger of two Catholic schools. The primary question was: What are teachers’ experiences regarding the planning, implementation, and outcomes of the consolidation of the two Catholic schools? To address the research question, the researcher collected data through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with nine teachers and four administrators, and conducted document analysis. The findings from this study reveal that communication was of major concern to teachers; that teachers exhibited various emotional responses to the experience; and that the merger gave rise to new roles and additional responsibilities, which led to feelings of being overwhelmed.

Connection to Current Practice

If Catholic schools continue to experience enrollment decline, higher per-pupil costs, and rising tuition costs, school leaders will be faced with having to make tough decisions regarding which schools to close or keep open. Such trends would make it difficult to maintain a Catholic
education presence in the communities they serve. Subsequently, Catholic school leaders must adopt meaningful approaches to sustain the future of Catholic education. To meet these demands, Catholic school leaders have explored various governance structure models as possible options to continue Catholic school education. One of the newest approaches is the K–12 consolidation model, which involves the merging and collaboration of multiple schools (Haney & O’Keefe, 2009).

Those involved in a merger tend to experience significant change. However, it is essential to recognize that any change in the organization of a school can impact the lives of the people involved. As noted by Fullan (2001), educational change can be difficult to achieve, as it consists of modifying teachers’ established ways of doing things. School mergers can be stressful for everyone involved, but especially for the teachers who are charged with implementing the changes (Kyriacou & Harriman, 1993; Hargreaves, 2004). Providing support for teachers through professional development and timely communication can help relieve many of the anxieties teachers experience. Sims (2002) noted that, when an organization proposes the change, those affected begin to worry about changes in their job, expectations, responsibilities, and working relationships. These worries can raise resistance levels, divide people into cliques, and delay the merger process. Lewin’s (1951) theory of change suggests that people will unconsciously resist change. Therefore, leaders must help employees understand that the old practices present hindrances to the organization, and communicate how necessary the change is for the institution.

Ideally, the stakeholders propose a merger after years of collaboration and deliberation. Unfortunately, this was not the case in this merger, which was carried out within a matter of months. Helping people understand the importance of merging schools as an alternative to
closure can be very challenging for school leadership. Many of the challenges teachers experience during mergers happen because school leaders tend to decide to merge very quickly. Unfortunately, when teachers are not given enough time to understand the change that is required during mergers, they experience significant grief (Kyriacou & Harriman, 1993). To lessen such experiences, time must be allotted to celebrate the endings, to acknowledge the losses, and to ensure that teachers have meaningful contributions to the process going forward. Additionally, particular attention and care must be given to honest and open communication. The participants in this study believed that the overall lack of communication contributed to the emotional disturbances teachers experienced, hindering the transition process. This is in line with Hargreaves (2004), which purports, “Poorly conceived and badly managed change can inflict excessive and unnecessary emotional suffering” (p. 288). Keifer (2002) stated that understanding the emotional experience of the individuals affected by the organizational change could control such experiences.

**Discussion of Findings**

This section discusses the findings that have implications related to teachers’ experiences with organizational change. The participants in this study experienced many challenges during the consolidation, which impacted the overall perceptions of the teachers involved. The findings indicate that communication, or lack thereof, played a vital role in teachers’ experiences.

**Communication.** The lack of communication regarding the changes was a significant concern for many teachers. That the discussions about the restructuring were not extensive resulted in many teachers feeling uncertain about the next steps in their careers, schedules, classrooms. Seo and Hill (2005) highlight the adverse effects of risk, which sometimes results in employee turnover, absenteeism, and lower productivity. The participants in this study believed
that poor communication limited teachers’ ability to plan, which was a significant challenge for them. Marks (2006) suggested that effective communication strategies be utilized to assist with the reduction of difficulties related to uncertainty when implementing change. Stroh and Jaatinen (2001) support this, indicating that school leaders should be aware that when extreme changes are involved, increased communication is required. In contrast, John P. Kotter (1995) argues that communication is never sufficient by itself and that employees fail to understand based on their mindset. He also noted that it could be challenging for school leaders to convince teachers there are no external obstacles. Kotter believes the blockages exist in the employee’s head.

**Include the experts.** From an organizational perspective, teachers are the ones implementing change initiatives, and as stakeholders in the organization of schools, it is understandable that teachers wanted their voices to be included in the decision-making process. Zimmerman (2006) suggests, “By providing opportunities for teacher collaboration and participation in decision-making, principals and other school leaders can develop a supportive culture of change” (p. 242). Most teachers in this study felt that their experience could have been positive had they been given the opportunity to utilize their expertise during the discussions. Fullan (1994) acknowledges that when a teacher has some control of the change process, their emotional responses are usually more positive. This study provides evidence that a merging staff would benefit from being part of discussions, as it would reduce their anxieties and fears of the unknown. Including teachers, who are experts in their fields, in collegial discussions and encouraging them to help solve some of the problems they experienced with policy and planning would be beneficial. Several teachers spoke about the need to collaborate on policies that would unify both schools. Also, the teachers indicated that if the school leaders had listened to, respected, and supported their concerns, it could have made the transition less stressful.
Therefore, it is critical that attention is given to creating opportunities for teachers to engage in dialogue and work collaboratively to support each other and the change initiative. The teachers expressed the desire to collaborate on all levels to limit conflicts with schedules and to establish more collegial relationships. According to Reynolds, Murrill, and Whitt (2006):

To be successful, educators need to feel that they are on the team and that they are an integral part of the team. By giving them a voice, giving them a power of control and creating an environment, which welcomes their opinions and understanding of their practice (p. 130).

Lewin’s (1997) work in organizational change postulates: “To break open the shell of complacency and self-righteousness, it is sometimes necessary to bring about an emotional stir up” (p. 330). One participant reported this exact view, noting that the old practices of one school could hinder the success of the merger. In disturbing the equilibrium, the teachers felt that nonparticipation in the changes would result in their failure and, ultimately, in personal loss (Schein, 1999).

**Dealing with emotions during a change.** The findings in this study support the findings of other research by confirming that teachers experience a range of emotions when undergoing work-related change. Teachers tend to experience feelings such as doubt, fear, loss, insecurity, and uncertainty during a transition. This study highlights the need for providing avenues that facilitate conversations, especially related to the emotional experiences of those individuals undergoing organizational change. Hargreaves (1998) refers to the need to help teachers understand and control their emotions. As described by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), when change requires a challenge to people’s familiar reality, it can be difficult, dangerous work. However, giving teachers opportunities to openly share and explore the impact of their
experiences and emotions will help school leaders successfully manage educational change. According to Schmidt and Datnow (2005), it is essential to assure those who are changing that the emotions they are experiencing are a natural part of the process. It is critical to protect the emotional safety of the teachers involved in a merger situation.

This school merger required some members of the faculty to assume new or additional responsibilities. Most teachers in this study mentioned that they had to adapt to new practices and even assume new and additional responsibilities. Teachers who reacted negatively to this merger did so due to the losses the merger produced. Teachers grieved the loss of their classrooms, schedules, behavior policies, and former leaders. These negative emotions were especially evident in the teachers experiencing an increase in disciplinary issues. These teachers felt frustrated at their loss of efficacy as classroom teachers. Kanter (1983) suggested that people suffer the loss of change when there are no resources available to help with the transition. Some participants revealed that the discipline load increased because of the absence of a visible and accessible leader to support the teachers and foster an active and collaborative school community.

**Leadership and change.** Another finding that emerged from this study was the effect of leadership practices on teacher morale. Some of the problems teachers encountered during the merger were because of the unclear leadership that caused a plunge in teacher morale. Teachers believed some of the challenges they experienced were unnecessary and could have been prevented had the school leaders (i.e., the headmaster and administrators) been more strategic during the change process and more responsive to the internal constraints. Evans (2008) asserts that school leaders are responsible for the implementation of the policies that structure the work of teachers. According to the participants’ perceptions, the researcher determined that school
leaders should develop an effective transition plan for those assuming new roles and additional responsibilities. The plan should include approaches to address and minimize any work-related stress factors, which tend to weaken teacher morale. Specifically, any problems within the professional culture of the school that would interfere with teachers’ abilities to fulfill their academic roles must be addressed. An effective leadership practice includes school leaders paying close attention to role fulfillment. Sims (2002) also suggests that leaders be available to take suggestions or answer any questions that their employees might have by creating opportunities for employees to give feedback regarding their ability to perform and fulfill their roles. Such practices help teachers overcome work-related issues and boost their morale, which are essential elements that lead to teachers working effectively.

**Conclusions**

This study focused on Catholic schoolteachers’ perceptions of the changes associated with their merger experience. The perceptions of the teachers highlight the challenges people face when schools merge. Notably, these teachers created strong relationships over the years, which were affected with the relocation. Teachers had a strong desire to continue working together after the merger. In addition to their administrative roles, some Catholic school leaders today may find themselves with the added responsibility of leading their staff through a merger process. The analyses of this study indicate that school leaders need to carefully consider their teaching staff at every step of the planning and implementation process of educational change. Therefore, it is vital that Catholic school leaders receive ongoing training to prepare them to meet the responsibilities of leading schools through intense organizational change. This study provides evidence that the merging staff would benefit if given clear and timely information about the process and ample time to embrace the changes involved. Also, the administration
must provide support to the teachers from the school that will experience the most changes. Specifically, school leaders must help the teachers understand the change process, while providing them with strategies to cope with their grief, frustrations, and apprehensions.

Recommendations for Policy

The consolidation model could be a viable approach for struggling Catholic schools faced with financial challenges. The researcher offers the following recommendations for policies to assist Catholic school leaders in successfully implementing the K–12 consolidation model:

1. A school’s merger plan should include detailed action steps that incorporate support for teachers through professional development. This plan will initiate team-building activities for teachers from merger schools to experience a strong sense of welcome and collegiality in the newly merged Catholic school.

2. Consolidation leaders must develop ways to be inclusive of all stakeholders affected by the change initiative. More importantly, Catholic school leaders should create opportunities for teachers to contribute to the decision-making and to provide feedback throughout the change process.

Recommendations for Practice

Given the trends in the Catholic school system, the findings of this study imply a need for a new preparation for Catholic school leaders; specifically, those leaders who may be faced with a merger situation. The researcher makes the following recommendations for practitioners:

1. At the diocesan level, steps should be taken to provide leadership preparation focusing on helping Catholic school leaders integrate school cultures while maintaining the uniqueness of Catholic identity.
2. Ongoing leadership formation should contain hypothetical scenarios explaining teachers’ experiences with major organizational change. This will give school leaders opportunities to reflect on the implementation of change from teachers’ perspectives.

3. Each diocese should develop a manual for the school merger process published by the Catholic Education Office. The document should provide guidance and direction for the establishment of school mergers. These guidelines should be equally applicable to elementary and secondary school boards, and to school boards for merged or consolidated schools.

4. Consideration should also be given to helping leaders have a deep understanding of the change process. This will, subsequently, enable school leaders to guide their school communities in coping with the changes before, during, and after a merger.

5. Educators should receive appropriate, research-based professional development training on efficiently managing significant change, which includes the teachers and leaders involved in implementing change.

At the diocesan level, the Catholic Schools Office must provide more support for teachers involved in mergers to help them identify and deal with the perceived loss and grief they feel when faced with a major organizational change.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study is limited to the views of Catholic school teachers and administrators in two urban schools. The following are some potential research questions and topics for future inquiry involving teachers and Catholic School mergers:

1. Researchers may want to conduct a mixed method approach to produce a deeper understanding of teachers and change.
2. Researchers may also perform a comparative analysis of Catholic school mergers in urban, inner-city, and rural areas to identify the differences that could deepen the understanding of best practices in Catholic school mergers.

3. An analysis of the potential impacts on teacher performance resulting from a school merger should be done.

4. Future studies may investigate what other factors besides change/communication affect teacher perceptions during a merger?

5. How do school leaders experience change?

6. Is there a relationship between teacher anxiety and mergers?

7. How do teachers’ perceptions of change differ from the school leaders’ perceptions of change?

8. What are the lived experiences of those teachers who were part of a school merger that eventually resulted in a closed school?

9. The relationship between Catholic identity and Catholic school mergers could be examined.

10. An analysis of the potential impacts on teacher performance resulting from a school merger.
References


https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law_faculty_scholarship/596


Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

http://cara.georgetown.edu/Publications/Primary_Trends.pdf


National Assessment of Educational Progress (2013). Results for Private Schools - Retrieved from:

https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/about/schools/PrivateSchoolResultsBrochureForNAEP2013.pdf


http://www.nea.org/home/38465.htm


National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1972). To teach as Jesus did. Washington, DC:
United States Catholic Conference


http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/merc_pubs/56


103


Appendix A
Letter to Participants

April 1, 2017

Dear colleagues,

My name is Anika Logan and I have been a teacher here at [redacted] for almost five years. I am a Graduate student at Seton Hall University, working on a Doctor of Education (Ed. D.) in Educational Leadership.

I have been given permission to conduct research work in fulfillment of my Doctorate. My dissertation is studying how teachers experience change in the case of a merger and I am asking for your help. The purpose of this single qualitative case study is to explore how change affects teachers involved in the merger of these two schools.

I would like to interview up to 13 teachers who have been teaching here for at least four years. My goal is to have a good representation from both middle schools. Each interview would be about an hour long, and I might need to have some follow-up conversations to clarify data. The follow up may be in person, by phone, or email. I would like to begin by setting interviews as soon as possible. The interviews will take place wherever you are comfortable - a coffee shop, park, public library. I will ensure complete confidentiality, both through using pseudonyms in my final report, and masking any identifiable information in all my transcripts.

I hope that you will be willing to share your experiences in organizational change, particularly the merger. If you are interested in participating in this study, or would just like more information, please respond to this email with the best number to reach you, so we can further discuss this study.

Thank you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Anika Logan
Doctoral Student
Seton Hall University

Telephone: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]
Appendix B

Approval from IRB to Conduct Research

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: How Teachers Experience Organizational Change: A Case Study in the Merger of Two Catholic Schools

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making this application, I (we) certify that I (we) have read and understand the University's policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. I (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of these policies. I (we) further acknowledge my (our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

[Signature]  March 29, 2017
RESEARCHER(S)  DATE

**Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature.
Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary.**

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials of my student advisee and consider them to meet IRB standards.

[Signature]  [Date]
RESEARCHER'S FACULTY ADVISOR  [for student researchers only]  DATE

**Please print or type out name below signature**

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the _____ meeting.

The application was approved  not approved  by the Committee. Special conditions were  were not  set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

[Signature]  [Date]
DIRECTOR  SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

Seton Hall University
3/2005

106
Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

TITLE OF STUDY: How Teachers Experience Organizational Change: A Case Study in the Merger of Two Catholic Schools.

RESEARCHER: Anika Logan, Student in the Executive Leadership Doctoral (Ed. D.) Program

FACULTY ADVISOR: Dr. Elaine Walker

Purpose and Duration of the Research
The purpose of this research is to understand how teachers experience a merger involving two Catholic schools. This study will also offer insight into what are teachers’ expectations and challenges while going through such an organizational change. The expected duration of participation in this research will be approximately one hour.

Description of Procedures
The methods for this research involve a face-to-face interview. This will take place wherever subjects are most comfortable - a coffee shop, park, public library, classroom, or office. Interviews will be digitally recorded, and transcribed by the researcher.

Before the interview session begins, the study will be explained. Participants will be assigned a coded name that will be used when transcribing the audio recording. Participants will complete an information sheet. The information sheet includes questions about contact information, years of experience, and grade level. The researcher will then ask questions that seek to answer the following research questions:

What are teachers’ experiences of the planning, implementation, and outcomes of the merger of two Catholic schools?

1) What are teachers’ perceptions of the ways in which they were informed about the impending merger?

2) How did teachers experience the process of a merger?

3) How do teachers describe the influence of the merger on their career plans, goals and professional motivation? How do teachers experiences with the merger and their reactions to it differ, if at all, based on the precursor school?

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board

MAY 10 2017

Approval Date

Expiry Date

MAY 10 2018

College of Education and Human Services
Executive Ed.D. Program
Tel: 973.275.2305 • Fax: 973.275.2498
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-7689

A HOME FOR THE MIND. THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT
Interview transcripts will be emailed to each participant to check for accuracy. Subjects might be contacted for a follow-up conversation to clarify data. This can be done in person, by phone, or email.

**Instruments**
The information sheet will consist of questions about contact information, years of experience, grade level, and preferred time to contact participants.

The interview protocol will include semi-structured questions which seek to determine teachers experiences of a merger along with their expectations and challenges while going through such an organizational change. The interview protocol will focus on the following areas: communication, leadership, change, decision-making, and institutional context. The interview questions will be designed to frame the answer to the research questions.

**Voluntary Nature**
Participation in this interview is voluntary. Subjects may decide to skip any question or discontinue participation at any time - there will be no negative consequences for that decision.

**Confidentiality**
This interview is solely for the purpose of this research. Each participant will be assigned a coded name to protect identity for any quotes that will be used in the body of this study. The researcher will not disclose the names of participants to anyone.

**Confidentiality**
All information in this study will be kept confidential and will be securely stored in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher has access. No reference will be made that will link participants with individual responses to interview questions in this study.

**Records**
A digital copy of the research data will be stored on a USB memory stick in a locked cabinet. After completion of the study, all records (transcripts, tapes, notes) will be locked and stored in a secured cabinet for a minimum of three years. No information will be held on any computer or database. The researcher will be the only person to have access to research records. Data will be
stored separately from the consent forms, to ensure participant’s answers are confidential. After the storage period ends, the information will be destroyed.

**Risks or Discomforts**
There are no expected risks with this study.

**Benefits for Participating**
There are no direct benefits to you as a participant in this research.

**Compensation**
This study does not involve any payment.

**Contact Information**
If the participant has questions as to his/her rights as a participant, he/she can contact Seton Hall University IRB at (973) 313-6314 or email at irb@shu.edu.

At the conclusion of the interview, if the participant has any questions about the research, he/she can contact the Researcher/Doctoral Student Anika Logan at: telephone [redacted] or email [redacted] or her faculty advisor Dr. Elaine Walker at: telephone [redacted] or email [redacted]

**Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study, and I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this signed and dated Informed Consent will be provided to you.

Participant Name (Please Print)   Signature of Participant   Date

**Agreement to be Audio-Recorded or Not:**
Please check your preference about audio recording:

- [ ] I agree to be audio recorded.
- [ ] I do not agree to be audio recorded.

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board
MAY 10 2017

Expiration Date
MAY 10 2018

Approval Date
Appendix D

Participant Interview Protocol

1. Interviewer will arrive fifteen minutes early to prepare for the interview.

2. When beginning the interview, I will read the following script:
   a. Thank you for your time this afternoon.
   b. The purpose of this single qualitative case study is to understand how teachers experience a merger involving two Catholic schools. This research will also offer insight into teachers’ expectations and challenges while going through such an organizational change.
   c. This interview is solely for the purpose of this research and is completely anonymous and all names will be changed for reason of confidentiality. No one will know who said what.
   d. I will be asking you to describe your experiences with the merger. “Please do not stop until you feel that you have discussed your feelings as completely as possible” (Creswell, 1998, p. 279).
   e. The expected duration of participation in this research will be approximately one hour. I will use this digital voice recorder to record our discussion, which I will listen to during the transcribing process. I will also be taking notes during the process of the interview. These notes will also be transcribed.
   f. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You may skip any question or discontinue participation at any time.
   g. Please take a moment to complete the Information sheet and sign the Informed Consent Form. Do you have any questions?
h. Audio recordings will begin once the interviewee has given consent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How were you informed about the merger?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Describe how you reacted to the announcement of the merger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What role did the teachers play in decision-making during the merger?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4. What support was given to the teachers after they were informed about the merger?  
  • How did you feel about? |
| 5. Describe how teachers benefited from this merger.  
  • What changes did the teachers require as it relates to their work?  
  • How did school leaders facilitate teacher’s needs/expectations during the changes? |
| 6. Describe how you think the teachers did not benefit or were at a disadvantage by the changes in the existing relationship in each of the schools involved in the merger. |
| 7. Describe how the leaders of the schools facilitated positive interactions between the staff members of both schools.  
  • What did they do? |
| 8. What type of activities or events do you think helped the teachers work to establish collegial relationships with the newly formed staff?  
  • Please provide an example of such activity. |
| 9. How has the merger influenced your career plans?  
  • In what ways has your work/teaching been impacted by these changes?  
  • Describe how the changes associated with the merger require you to learn new concepts and skills.  
  • How do you feel about this kind of influence? |
| 10. What support did you desire from the school leadership while going through the merger?  
  • What Challenges did you experience with your job as a result of the merger? |
| 11. If you were to advise another teacher who is a part of a school merger, what advice would you give? |
| 12. What advice would you give school leaders to help teachers during the first few months of a merger? |

3. At the conclusion of the interview the researcher will say:

We have come to the end of this interview. Your interview transcripts will be emailed to you to check for accuracy. You might be contacted for a follow-up conversation to clarify
data. This can be done in person, by phone, or email. I really appreciate your time in completing this interview. Thank you for once again.

Turns off tape recording.

Administrator Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Describe how the school leaders communicated the merger to staff.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What was it like?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Please provide an example of what school leaders did?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Describe the leadership practices you employed that facilitated the merger?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How did you assist with the implementation of the merger?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who was involved in making the decision to merge (superintendent, bishop, priests, teachers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What changes were required of teachers as it relates to their work during the merger?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What support was given to the teachers by the school administration while going through the merger?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Give practical examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How would you describe your teacher’s readiness to participate cooperatively, and their involvement in making decisions regarding the school’s policies before and during the merger process?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What do you consider to be the greatest strength of the merger?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What previous experiences do you have with mergers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What observations have you made regarding the implementation of the merger process?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What thoughts or suggestions would you share to better prepare others for the responsibilities of forming a new school or establishing a merger?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>