The Impact of the K-8 Reconfiguration of Three Schools on Parent Trust in a Small Urban School District in New Jersey

Frank Ayirebi Asante
dr.fasante@gmail.com

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THE IMPACT OF THE K-8 RECONFIGURATION OF THREE SCHOOLS
ON PARENT TRUST IN A SMALL URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT IN NEW JERSEY

FRANK ASANTE

Dissertation Committee
Daniel Gutmore, Ph.D., Mentor
Elaine Walker, Ph.D.
Phillip Williamson, Ph.D.
Kenneth May, Ed.D.

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, Frank Ayirebi Asante, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Fall Semester 2013.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE
(please sign and date beside your name)

Mentor:
Dr. Daniel Guitmore

Committee Member:
Dr. Elaine Walker

Committee Member:
Dr. Phillip Williamson

Committee Member:
Dr. Kenneth May

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

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the reconfiguration of three schools (from K-5 models to K-8 models) on parent trust as measured by parent perceptions in a small urban school district in New Jersey.

For this study an interview protocol was developed to elicit parent responses about the reconfigured schools’ ability to meet the middle school needs of their children and its impact on one component of the parent-school relationship: trust. The interviews were analyzed through the five-faceted lens of trust: reliability, benevolence, competence, honesty, and openness as advanced by the research of Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998).

The reader is provided with direct quotations from the interview participants which consisted of parents with mixed socioeconomic and racial backgrounds from the reconfigured schools whose children attend or attended the schools since the fifth grade. The recorded interviews were subject to a systematic procedure of data analysis based on template analysis (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Template analysis focused the analysis on data relevant to the research questions to make comparisons between the theoretical framework and the experiences of the participants as they described them.

The research questions posed at the beginning of the study include (1) Why did parents in the reconfigured schools choose to transfer their child(ren) into out-of-district schools after fifth grade (i.e., charter, private, or parochial)? (2) Why did parents choose to keep their children in the reconfigured schools after fifth grade? (3) How important was trust in the parents’ decision making?
Study findings suggested that the majority of the participants trusted the reconfigured schools. Emergent themes from this study described the schools’ principals as paramount to the development of a safe and trusting climate. Subsequently, distrust for the district high school sometimes trumped trust at the elementary level, causing parents to look for available out-of-district options as early as sixth grade.

The results of this study could assist district administrators and stakeholders to make decisions based on research when considering, planning, and implementing school redesign as an improvement strategy for the district.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with great pleasure that I take this opportunity to recognize those people that make up my “village” and thank them for the encouragement that has enabled me to persevere to the completion of this process. To my extended family and friends, even though I do not have the space to name you all individually, it is my hope that you do not underestimate the impact that your words have had upon me. If not for you, I may not have crossed the finish line. Thank you.

To Dr. Daniel Gutmore and Dr. Elaine Walker, I extend my sincere gratitude for your patience, guidance, confidence in me, and your ability to shape my grandiose ideas into a comprehensible worthwhile study.

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To Dr. Derrick Nelson, we made a promise to each other three years ago to pull and push each other through. I am happy to say the promise has been kept!
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to three specific groups of people. First of all, I humbly acknowledge and thank my parents, Ayirebi and Victoria Asante. It was my parents’ foresight, over 44 years ago, to come to the United States so that their children could be afforded a better opportunity for education that has resulted in this culmination. Your unwavering passion for education was not lost upon me, or my siblings. It is my hope that I have made you proud.

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Last, I would like to thank my wife, Javonda, and my children, Jaad, Jadea, Ayir and Jayla. Javonda, your enduring patience and support has made the completion of this journey possible. To my children, it is my hope that upon your reflection of these times you will find motivation, strength, and a belief that anything can be accomplished.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the time of the Coleman Report of 1966, when it was determined that the socioeconomic status of a student was the determining factor in students’ academic success, educators and policymakers have been hard pressed to combat the ill effects of poverty in order to improve student academic performance. This struggle is continuously being fought in the numerous urban and rural centers throughout the country, where students have been suffering for decades from the inequities presented by their economic conditions. Living in the shadow of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the era of increased accountability, educators have been put under increasing pressure to maximize resources with the hope of fostering significant change in student performance or suffer sanctions (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). This has led many districts to implement a myriad of reform and/or turnaround procedures in a federally overseen effort to meet the government standards of providing an adequate education for their students. Unfortunately, school administration and good instruction is not reduced to a few simple processes. A surface-level inquiry into the major themes of educational research suggests that there is not one strategy that is capable of finding solutions to the complex issues facing public schools. Education critics argue that although the NCLB legislation is marked as an improvement to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in improving the quality of education in schools, it may actually be harmful. The legislation has become virtually the only federal social policy meant to address wide-scale social inequities, and its policy features inevitably stigmatize both schools attended by children of the poor and children in general.
Moreover, critics further argue that the current political landscape of this country, which favors market-based solutions to social and economic problems, has eroded trust in public institutions and has undermined political support for an expansive concept of social responsibility, which will subsequently result in a disinvestment in the education of the poor and privatization of American schools (Lowe & Kantor, 2006).

Adams and Forsyth (2009) posit that school administrators are beginning to shift the educational reform efforts away from hurried structural solutions to more systemic strategies that address the social and contextual sources of many problems. A wide lens focused on the entire social system and not just on what transpires in a classroom is a significant departure from the myopic lens of more accountability, increased testing, and stronger evidence-based curricula: The former lens adjusts to the complexity of teaching and learning, whereas the latter prescribes remedies for symptoms that have often been misdiagnosed.

Trust plays a pivotal role in the process of community building in the public education arena. Since researchers Hoy and Kupersmith (1985) initially conceptualized trust in schools, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) later found that the nature of the construct had evolved from a unidimensional and generalized belief of teachers to a social condition dependent on open, honest, competent, reliable and benevolent interactions.

Sergiovanni (2005) used the “trust first” idea, noting that trust must come before goals, strategies, or plans. He questioned schools with poor academic performance on issues of ability and concern and suggested that the schools and the faculty were not trusted. He argued that including teachers, community members, and students in decision
making created relationships of trust that enabled schools to weather storms of any kind. Sergiovanni added that hope and faith combined with action allow others to see the possibilities. Stakeholders such as community members, school board members, teachers, and students have expectations of their schools, whether spoken or unspoken.

The researcher is of the belief that the five facets that Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) identified as being the core of a trusting relationship are also at the core of why schools are successful or not. The facets of benevolence, honesty, competence, reliability, and openness are aligned with the expectations and hopes that parents have when making the decision to place the educational future of their children under the tutelage of a school system. With that being said, careful consideration must be given to the various forms of communications between home and school, as well as the day-to-day interactions between staff, students, and parents with the emphasis on maintaining a communal spirit of student well being. When this is achieved and trust has developed and is maintained, other positive variables are generated that lead to school success. The research deems this the “lubricant effect” (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). When there is a break in the link between the facets, distrust emerges and the corresponding negative variables emerge that contribute to school decline. Therefore, the study of trust as an important construct to emerge from the reconfiguration of schools is aligned with the broader research of Hoy (2006) and colleagues and their research of academic optimism, which includes trust in schools as one part of a triad of interactions that have been empirically proven to increase student performance even after being adjusted for SES.

Varied and extensive research on trust has provided insight on the affective, behavioral, and cognitive mechanisms that generate trust in schools, the different forms
of trust found within schools (Adams 2008), and the school level consequences of trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Forsyth, 2008).

The dominant approach of the measurement of trust in schools is a unilateral approach; i.e., studying teacher perceptions but neglecting trust perceptions of parents and students (Adams & Forsyth, 2009). It was Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), however, in their development of a reliable and valid trust instrument, who were surprised to find that trust in students and trust in parents were items loaded together as a single factor. Teachers surveyed did not distinguish between trusting parents and trusting students. The two sets of items combined to form a single factor, which they called “trust in clients.” The clients were both the parents and the students who were recipients of services offered by schools. Therefore, it was the intention of the researcher for this study to use the research of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran as a foundation for examining trust in clients as a latent construct, with the observable indicator being parent trust perceptions.

**Statement of the Problem**

Recent district trend data (Board Agenda, 2005-2007) showed that in a small urban school district in New Jersey, a number of elementary school students scheduled to transition from fifth grade (elementary school) to sixth grade (middle school) were not enrolling at either of the district middle schools. Parents of these students were enrolling their children in local charter schools or leaving the district entirely and enrolling their children in private schools. Even though parents seemed to be somewhat satisfied with the educational experiences their children received at the elementary level, they were not confident in what the district middle schools could provide. Parents held the perceptions
that the district middle schools were not safe and did not meet state academic standards. Consequently, losing these students to charter and/or private schools weakened the school district fiscally, due to the state funding “following the child” to whatever school he or she attended. This loss of state funding created a “domino effect,” causing the district to cut staff and eliminate programs, further adding to the overall perception that the school district wasn’t able to provide appropriate educational resources for its constituents.

A shift had taken place in the parents’ perception of the overall effectiveness of the schools within this district. Parents did not trust the school system as they once did. Enrollment data from previous years (2005-2007) showed an overall decline in district student enrollment, and the majority of the loss came from parents refusing to enroll their children in the district middle and high schools. In two of the ten elementary schools, as much as 90% of the fifth grade students enrolled in out-of-district schools for sixth grade. This contrasted sharply with the state student mobility rate of 11-12% (NJDOE, 2007).

Parents held concerns about instruction and student performance at the middle schools. The middle school students in this particular small urban school district had consistently underperformed on the state assessments and have remained on the state’s needs improvement list for the past six years (NJDOE, 2007). Another cause of concern for parents was the high turnover rate of administrators at the district’s middle schools. Since 2005, there had been nineteen different administrators at the two middle schools. High administrative turnover in the district had been the direct result of the frequent changes in the chief school administrator (CSA). Since 2005, there had been five different individuals to fill the chief school administrator position. Finally, the continuing
loss of district students to an increasing charter school presence within the city was an ongoing disruption of district efforts that required regular intervention.

The challenge for any community is to make sure that its schools share its goals and priorities. When lines of communication are open and trust is maintained, then this is not an issue. When parents believe that one thing is happening in the schools and then discover, to their dismay, that the reality is very different from their expectation, the stage is set for conflict (Yecke, 2005).

After reviewing the antecedent events through the lens of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran’s (1999) five facets of trust (benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness), one could conceptualize how the events and actions taken by the district directly impacted each facet as seen through the parents’ perspectives; for example, the voiced concerns by various community stakeholders on the reliability and competence of district administrators, based on the unusually high turnover rate, especially at the middle schools. The researcher, working as an administrator in the district at the time before the reconfiguration, knows personally and anecdotally the parents’ sense of “it’s not about the kids” (benevolence), as well as the frustrations that arose from parents trying to figure out where to send their children to middle school because of their dissatisfaction with the district options. These examples, combined with others, ultimately undermined parent stakeholders’ sense of openness and honesty from the district, on behalf of their children.

In 2008, the CSA implemented his strategic plan to reconfigure three schools from K-5 models to K-8 models. The three schools to be reconfigured were selected based upon school leadership, staffing, physical facilities, and their capacity to sustain student and staff increases, as one grade level was to be added each year. The
reconfiguration of these schools was part of the CSA’s district strategic plan to capture and build upon parent trust and confidence, with the intention of eliminating the flight of students from the district after fifth grade. Simply put, the plan was to offer an alternative to the district middle schools (Board Minutes, April-May, 2008).

Two years after the reconfiguration (2009-2010), student data revealed that the middle school aged students in the reconfigured schools were outperforming their counterparts in the traditional middle schools as evidenced by the standardized state test scores (NJDOE District Report Card, 2010). There was no special staffing afforded these schools, as veteran teachers from within the district staffed the expanding reconfigured schools. The curriculum was the same as offered throughout the district for its elementary and middle schools. Additionally, the students in the reconfigured schools were zoned for their respective schools with no unique admission requirements other than the requisite residential requirements.

Researchers have provided empirical evidence that supports the concept that “trust in schools” has a direct effect on student academic performance (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Hoy, 2002). Using this research as a foundation, this researcher examined whether the reconfiguration of the three elementary schools in this small urban district from K-5 models to K-8 models regenerated a sense of trust in schools based on parent perceptions.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this non-experimental cross sectional study was to investigate the impact of the reconfiguration of three schools, from K-5 models to K-8 models, on parent trust, as measured by parent perceptions in a small urban school district in New Jersey.
There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that increasing levels of trust were present in the reconfigured schools and may require further investigation. The results of this study could assist administrators and district stakeholders to make informed decisions based on research when considering, planning, and implementing school redesign as an improvement strategy.

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Why did parents in the reconfigured schools choose to transfer their child(ren) into out-of-district schools after fifth grade (i.e., charter, private, or parochial)?

2. Why did parents choose to keep their children in the reconfigured schools after fifth grade?

3. How important was trust in the parents’ decision making?

**Significance of the Study**

Within a small urban school district in New Jersey, three reconfigured schools have shown increased parental involvement, an alignment of expectations between home and school, and support for the children. This is in contrast to most of their district counterparts. This study identified and investigated a particular school characteristic that could influence and support student academic performance. The body of research that speaks to student academic performance discusses certain characteristics that make schools successful (Hoy, 2006). Schools that have demonstrated evidence of collective efficacy, parent/faculty trust, and academic press have also shown increased student academic performance. This construct has come to be known as academic optimism.
(Hoy, 2006). The components of academic optimism hold great promise in understanding which specific variables educators can influence, manipulate, or control to improve the achievement of their students (Beard & Brown, 2008).

One particular characteristic, parent trust in schools, was examined as the focus of this study because research has shown that trust has a stronger effect on conditions under which higher levels of school achievement can occur. This influence has been termed the “lubricant effect” (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). According to McGuigan & Hoy (2006), parent/faculty trust has been defined as a shared belief that high academic performance is important, that faculty has the ability to help students perform, and that students and parents can be trusted to be collaborative partners; in brief, a school-wide confidence that students will succeed academically. Pairing that definition with the conceptualization that trust has also been found to attenuate the negative relationship between poverty and school achievement (Adams & Forsyth, 2009), it was the hope of this researcher that through this study, parent/faculty trust or trust in schools could be empirically determined and documented within the three reconfigured schools and give cause for further research into conditions and constructs that help students and schools succeed in spite of low student SES.

**Theoretical Framework**

Trust, as theorized by Hoy (2002), is a fundamental aspect of human learning because learning is a cooperative process, and distrust makes cooperation virtually impossible. Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that trust and cooperation among students, teachers, and parents influenced regular student attendance, persistent learning, and faculty experimentation with new practices. They concluded that relational trust was a
prime source of school improvement. Parties involved in trusting relationships are dependent on and receive beneficial reinforcement from one another. For teachers of students that have been historically and systemically excluded from high academic gains, there is an inherent need of understanding and a respect of perspective in order to build trusting relationships (Beard & Brown, 2008). If families are to trust teachers and administrators, they must believe that school personnel are qualified, fair, dependable, and have their children’s best interests at heart (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Bryk and Schneider’s (2002) analysis of the relationship between trust and student achievement provide the first evidence directly linking the development of relational trust in a school community and long-term improvements in academic learning. Being careful in clarifying that trust alone does not guarantee success, they found that trust “fosters a set of organizational conditions, that make it more conducive for individuals to initiate and sustain the kinds of activities necessary to affect productivity improvements” (p. 116).

It is primarily the research of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, who have published extensively on the issue of trust in schools, that serves as the conceptual foundation for this study. They found that faculty trust in parents predicts a strong degree of parent-teacher collaboration. Also, an increased sense of trust in schools indicated an increased sense in teachers’ belief in their ability to affect actions leading to success. Teachers who trust their colleagues and administrators feel less vulnerable and are more inclined to try new educational approaches. Trust promotes internal accountability and a shared attachment to the school and its mission (Beard & Brown, 2008).
Conversely, Tschannen-Moran (2004) states that when distrust prevails, people minimize their vulnerability to one another and the result is disengagement from the educational process. Furthermore, it makes cooperation virtually impossible and negatively impacts the learning process.

Beard & Brown (2008) summarized the psychological underpinnings of trust when they conveyed that there are two sides to a trusting relationship: a symbiotic relationship exists between the trustee and the truster. The trustee serves as steward and the truster is the “willing, vulnerable” party. In order to promote “willing vulnerability,” the trustee must demonstrate competence in his or her ability to care for, protect, and do what is in the best interests of the truster. The truster can only be “willingly vulnerable” when there is some confidence in the trustee’s competence. In the case of schools, teachers and administrators serve as stewards or trustees, the trusters are the parents, and the trust is the children they serve. In reality, faculty, students, and parents are interdependent in their shared goal and are therefore vulnerable to one another.

Even with the complexity of the research, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) were able to compile recurring themes in the literature to form this definition of trust: Trust is a person’s inclination to become vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other person is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent. This definition of trust served as a template for this study.

**Limitations**

As with any research, there are several limitations associated with this non-experimental cross-sectional case study. The location of the study, a small urban school district in New Jersey in which the researcher is currently employed as a school principal,
could pose a limitation because of the potential of the researcher’s influence. Also limiting this study is the fact that the schools used in this study are all reconfigured elementary schools from one district; therefore, having a small focused sample could make the generalizability of the results difficult to be applied to middle or high schools. Another limitation is that the participants interviewed for this study may or may not have responded honestly to the questions asked. Last, this study did not seek to determine whether the reconfiguration of three schools from K-5 models to K-8 models caused a change in student academic performance.

**Delimitations**

The researcher delimited the population by selecting for inclusion only the parents from the three reconfigured elementary schools whose children have been attending or attended the schools since the fifth grade. From this population, 28 parents were solicited and ultimately agreed to be interviewed. From this candidate pool, 12 parents were selected to be interviewed by using purposeful random sampling. Six interviewees were parents of children that currently attended one of the reconfigured schools in Grade 6 or higher. Six interviewees were parents of children that had been transferred out of the reconfigured schools by parent authorization after the fifth grade.

**Definition of Terms**

**Academic Optimism** - the collective belief that school faculty can make a difference, students can learn, and academic performance can be achieved.

**Parent** - caregiver of a child/young adult who attends and is studying at a school.

**Teacher** - a member of a school district’s staff who holds appropriate certification to provide instruction and/or provide a direct educational service to students.
Trust - a person’s inclination to become vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other person is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent.

Trust in Clients - faculty trust in students and parents identified and measured as a single construct. Trust in clients is reciprocal.

Socioeconomic Status (SES) - one’s position in relation to or concerned with the interaction of social and economic factors.

Summary

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter presents an overview of the background of the study and states the problem, the purpose, and the significance of the study. For the purpose of this study, a comprehensive review of the literature was conducted and presented in Chapter 2. Information reviewed pertained to parental involvement in schools in general and explored parental involvement in schools with high minority populations and low SES in particular. Research relating to school reconfiguration was also examined. The bulk of the literature review investigated the extensive research concerning the conceptualization of trust in schools. Chapter 3 details the research design and methods used for data collection and analysis, as well as the participants and scope of the study. Chapter 4 presents the results and findings of the research. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the findings, presents conclusions, and offers recommendations for school decision makers and those interested in conducting further research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of the literature related to the main constructs under consideration in this study. The first section of this chapter explores a succinct review of the literature concerning parental involvement in schools, its strengths and limitations, as well as considerations for race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, providing a conceptual background for the study. This is followed by a review of the literature concerning school reconfiguration and its relationship to student academic performance. The next section reviews the extensive literature concerning how parent/faculty trust, otherwise known as “trust in clients,” has been defined, investigated, and analyzed in educational research. The final section provides a conclusion to the review of literature.

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

There is a substantial amount of literature related to the constructs of parent involvement, school reconfiguration, and trust in clients. I chose to include in my review studies, both qualitative and quantitative, that were either aligned to my particular study or related to it through a historical context.

As an educational practitioner, the literature served me well, as the researched data directly impact my current work. Working in a district that has sought to develop effective improvement strategies, I was curious to find out what effect, if any, does school reconfiguration have on parent trust in schools?

Several types of sources were accessed in order to provide a comprehensive review. ProQuest and Sage publications are only two examples of the varied resources
used to search for peer-reviewed journal articles related to this study. Journals such as *The Journal of Education Research, Elementary School Journal, and the Journal of School Leadership* proved to be valuable resources of pertinent information. I sought peer reviewed journals because the peer-review process ensures that the published articles are of high quality, that they reflect solid scholarship in their fields, and that the information contained therein is accurate and based on sound research.

For the largest part of the review, the “trust” component of the research, articles, books, and studies by researchers such as Bryk and Schneider, Hoy, and Tschannen-Moran were referenced often, as their research set the foundation for much of the current literature on organizational trust, relational trust, trust in schools, and, by default, the theoretical framework of this study.

**Parental Involvement**

The overarching benefit of increased academic performance suggests parent involvement as an effective strategy to ensure student success, as evidenced by several correlational studies. (Bernard, 2004; Desimone, 1999; Hill & Craft, 2003). There are other beneficial effects that have been identified in the literature. For example, researchers have found that students develop early social competence and realize academic success as a result of increased parental involvement (Hill & Craft, 2003). The need to improve and increase current parent involvement in children's education, due to the promise of increased student performance, has now been placed in a position of paramount importance in this era of increased accountability. Parent involvement used as a strategy to increase student academic performance transfers some of the responsibility for student success from schools to families (Graue & Benson,
This strategy, however, increases the disconnect between the espoused parent involvement strategies and the lack of parental involvement.

The ever-present changes in modern day family structures, marked by an increase in parental working hours and mobility, greater numbers of families in which both parents work, accompanied by an increased number of divorces and separations, result in an increase in sole parenting and in the number of re-partnered families. Concurrently, there are fewer extended family arrangements, a decrease in religious practice, and increased community fragmentation, as well as greater individualism and competition (David et al. 1993). The combined effect of these factors is that significant numbers of parents are operating with higher stress levels, less money, and less time, which makes it difficult to develop optimal involvement in the education of their children.

According to Freeman (2010), families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds spend considerable effort, including more informal conversations and unscheduled visits, to demonstrate their involvement to teachers and to the school at large. These less structured approaches, however, are sometimes viewed as obtrusive by the very same schools and teachers (Fields–Smith, 2007). Schools are cautioned against defining specific behaviors as parental involvement because their own definition often results in families feeling disenfranchised and their efforts being unrecognized. For families in poverty, the school’s control of time and “appropriate” communications retains its power in parental involvement practices (Freeman, 2010).

At a fundamental level, parents and teachers may differ in their understanding of the relationship between schooling and education. If education is largely about schooling, then logically it is teachers that possess the greatest knowledge, skills, power, and
expertise. If, however, schooling is merely a part of education, then there is a clear shift in power and expertise towards parents, who are intimately involved in the other 85% of children's education, which occurs outside of school (Munn, 1993).

The Epstein Model (2009) continues to be one of the most widely referenced frameworks for parental involvement as well as being the model that many schools choose to use. The Epstein Model outlines six concrete types of family involvement behaviors: positive home conditions, communication, involvement at school, home learning activities, shared decision-making within the school, and community partnerships (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, & Van Voorhis, 2009). The positive aspects of the Epstein Model are that it encompasses the traditional definitions of parental involvement and recognizes the role of parents in the home, including the providing of an environment where educational activities are supported and encouraged (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Furthermore, Epstein shifts some of the onus from the parents to the school by acknowledging communication as a bidirectional endeavor and encouraging schools to create a place for parental ownership within the school through shared decision-making. Studies have found connections between the use of this model and increased student achievement (Barnard, 2004; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007; Lopez & Donovan, 2009).

One must be cautioned that limitations do exist with this model. The Epstein model works to give parents a voice within the school but still expects the school to inform parents of effective strategies to use within the home. This model also fails to address forms of advocacy demonstrated by African-American families and their church involvement. (Fields–Smith, 2009). Other forms of advocacy that tend to be overlooked
are found in studies specifically with African-American parents. These include setting clear and consistent behavior rules for the children, engaging in frequent and meaningful conversations with their children, encouraging independence, providing assistance with homework, and expressing graduation expectations (Abdul–Adil & Farmer, 2006; Jackson & Remillard, 2005). Studies have found that parental involvement strategies are based on school cultures that are formed from European-American middle-class cultural norms (Fields–Smith, 2007; Freeman, 2010; Phil & Craft, 2003). Schools need to consider differences in cultural norms by ethnicity and socioeconomic status in order to use parental involvement effectively as a strategy for student success. As an example, Latino families tend to respect the role of the school and the teacher and are therefore less likely to contact the school regarding potential problems, especially when English is not their first language (Gaetano, 2007).

Clark (1983) found in his research on high achieving students from low-income Black families, that what distinguished the parents of these students from others at the school was that they believed that they should be involved in their children's education, by both supporting their learning at home and interacting constructively with schools. Clark found that parents of high-achieving students had a greater belief than the other parents that they could effectively help their children to do better at school.

Culturally relevant strategies and practices should include components of relationship building, advocacy, and parental efficacy, as these have been shown to be effective in working with African-American, Latino, and low-income populations (Desimone, 1999; Martinez–Cosio, 2010).
Young (1998) found that the existence or absence of trust between the home and the school affects the development and sustenance of meaningful parental involvement. Young found that cultural roles expectations and values play a pivotal part in how trust is perceived and developed. This is further evidence of the need for decision makers to be aware of the context of culture and ethnicity. Failure to understand the impact of ethnicity on parental involvement is another reason why involving parents in schools is typically less effective than it could be.

**School Reconfiguration**

One relevant theme in the reviewed literature for school reconfiguration was the *stage-environment fit theory*. This theory states that students will experience declines in motivation and performance if their educational environment does not support their current developmental stage and promote continued cognitive and emotional developmental growth. It is the fit, then, between the developmental trajectory and the environmental change trajectory that determines the motivational consequences. For a student progressing through early adolescence, changes in the educational environment occurring as a result of the transition to junior high school may not be entirely appropriate, and students may experience academic difficulties as a result (Eccles & Midgley, 1988).

The explanation of stage-environment fit for a decline in achievement is supported by research that shows a greater decline in achievement for students who changed schools for Grade 7 as compared to those who remained in K-8 schools (Simmons et al., 1987).
Simmons and Blyth (1987) carried out longitudinal research comparing Milwaukee junior high school students with peers attending K-8 schools. When the K-8 students were contrasted with the junior high students, the K-8 students were found to be at an advantage on several social and academic indices. K-8 students showed higher GPA’s and achievement test scores (especially in mathematics), while displaying greater self-esteem, higher extra-curricular participation, greater leadership levels, and lower rates of victimization.

A study conducted by Offenberg (2001) sought to assure that the difference between K-8 school and middle school achievement was not the result of the social class of the students the schools served. The study yielded statistically significant evidence that as a group, K-8 schools are more effective than middle schools serving similar communities. Analyses of the effects of school size suggested that the number of students in a grade, not the total number in a school, contributed to but probably did not explain, the difference between the two types of schools, even though there were many schools with outcomes that did not fit the trend. The group of experiments conducted in the study suggests that it had been easier to provide effective middle grade education in a K-8 environment, though it is possible to provide it in a middle grades school. Offenberg suggests that the Carnegie Council’s *Turning Points* (1989) might hint at the reason why. The authors were influenced by a concern that large middle grades schools needed to be made functionally smaller to create better student-faculty bonds and to develop more relationships that are effective with parents. K-8 schools in Offenberg’s study served fewer students per grade than the middle grades schools; therefore, they had fewer teachers per grade. They typically served students for nine years while middle grades
schools served students for three or four. They tended to serve students who resided in a smaller feeder neighborhood than middle grades schools. These conditions offer K-8 schools more opportunities for teacher-teacher, teacher-student, and teacher-parent relations and for more supportive interpersonal environments to evolve.

Natriello, McDill, and Pallas (1990) proposed a conceptual framework for understanding how to restructure schools in ways that are relevant for students who are often at risk of school failure. Their framework considers three factors: (1) the diversity of students’ needs and the resources required to meet them, (2) the diversity of goals for schooling, and (3) the increasing levels of performance necessary for success. These factors have all strained the capacity of traditional schools, which have organizational forms that evolved under much less challenging conditions. In fact, most school reform over the past 20 years has been directed at reducing the impact of these factors, not at enhancing the capacity of schools to deal with them (Natriello et al., 1990, p.159). For schools serving disadvantaged students to become more than custodial institutions, they must develop the capacity to (1) deal with the diversity presented by disadvantaged students in contemporary society, (2) understand the prior and future conditions that affect such students, (3) realize the coexisting conditions that exist in non-school segments of the students’ lives, and (4) provide such students with the appropriate academic and nonacademic resources that are prerequisites for learning. That is, they must “attempt to improve the matching of resources with the needs of the students in working to produce desired outcomes” (Natriello et al., 1991, p. 161).

By 1998, less than a decade after Turning Points emerged, the Southern Regional Education Board turned the middle grades into “Education's Weak Link.” The phrase
“middle school reform” began to gain currency, no longer referring to the progressivist reforms touted by proponents of middle schoolism but to the need to reform the middle school movement itself to align it more effectively with the “excellence movement,” as many called the dominant strand in U.S. education in the years after *A Nation at Risk*.

There are other institutional models that have shown promise in raising the academic achievement of early adolescents. Primary among them is the traditional K–8 structure, a mainstay of American education until the late 20th century. This is still the preferred way of organizing high-achieving private school systems such as U.S. parochial schools. Parents, along with reform-minded educators and administrators, have largely driven this increasing trend away from the middle school concept. It has been reported that districts such as Baltimore and Philadelphia are abandoning both the middle school concept and middle schools, moving quickly to the K-8 model. Then there are districts like Brookline, Massachusetts, and Cincinnati, Ohio, which are now exclusively K-8 districts. The goal for all of these districts is the same: to increase academic achievement and create an atmosphere more conducive to learning and discipline (Yecke, 2005).

The embrace of the K-8 structure was not driven by academic considerations but by parents fighting for neighborhood schools. Over time, however, evidence suggesting positive outcomes from K-8 configurations began to catch the attention of analysts and district officials. Students in K-8 schools often showed fewer behavioral problems and achieved at higher levels than pupils enrolled in middle schools (Yecke, 2005, p. 20).

Wholesale implementation of the middle school concept resulted in reorienting schools toward social experimentation and away from academics. Instead of a learner in urgent pursuit of cognitive skills and knowledge, those advocating for the middle school
concept painted the early adolescent as a victim: an unhappy dysfunctional figure whose manifold problems could only be solved by a new, softer middle school environment focused on adjustment, socialization, and immersion in coercive egalitarian practices (Yecke, 2005, p. 46).

The crux of the matter is not grade configuration but educational ideology. The key issue is the education philosophy, assumptions, goals, and expectations that drive a school and those that lead and teach in it. However a school is structured in this era of nationalized standards and increasing accountability, it must focus first and foremost on students’ acquisition of essential academic skills and knowledge. If key stakeholders subscribe to this mantra, they will pay greater heed to their students’ long-term prospects than their short-run adjustment and will concentrate their efforts on the academic gains that play a much the greater role in those youngsters’ prospects over time.

Trust

The keys to student academic success have been the center of research at least since the time of the Coleman Report in 1966. Coleman hypothesized that family background, not school characteristics, was the determining factor in student academic success (Coleman et al., 1966).

Deal and Peterson (1999) identified the community as customers. According to them, in order for schools to expect or request resources from community members, they needed to build a bond of trust. Communities, seen as customers, view schools as resources, centers of pride, and places that hold fond memories.

Two groups of researchers are responsible for the majority of the conceptual and empirical research on trust in the education field: Bryk and Schneider (1996, 2002) and
Wayne Hoy and his colleagues at Ohio State University (1989-2004). Hoy and his colleagues (Barnes, Bliss, Goddard, Sabo, Tarter, Tschannen-Moran, Witkoskie, and Woolfork-Hoy) have conceptualized trust from a school-climate perspective as a school-level attribute that is maintained as part of the school culture.

Faculty trust in parents and students is a school property that is related to student achievement. Several factor analyses have demonstrated that trust in parents and trust in students are not separate concepts (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). Bryk and Schneider (2002) posit theoretically that teacher–student trust in elementary schools operates primarily through teacher–parent trust. Trust is defined as one's vulnerability to another in terms of the belief that the other will act in one's best interests. After an extensive review of the literature, researchers Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2000) concluded that trust is a general concept with at least five facets: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Benevolence is confidence in the goodwill of others, reliability refers to the extent to which one can count on another to come through, and competence is the ability to come through. Honesty refers to a person's character, integrity, and authenticity; and openness speaks to the extent to which important information is shared among parties (Hoy & Tschannen–Moran, 1999). Research on schools shows that all five facets of trust in schools do indeed form an integrated construct of faculty trust in schools, whether the schools are elementary or secondary (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2000).

Hoy (2002) examined the trust–achievement hypothesis in high schools and found that faculty trust in parents and students was positively related to student achievement after controlling for socioeconomic factors. Hoy theorized that trusting others is a
fundamental aspect of human learning because learning is typically a cooperative process, and distrust makes cooperation virtually impossible. When students, teachers, and parents have common learning goals, trust and cooperation are likely ingredients that improve teaching and learning.

As Tschannen–Moran and Hoy (1998) worked to develop an instrument to measure the levels of trust in schools, they found faculty trust in students and parents seemed to measure as a single construct: “trust in clients” (Tschannen–Moran & Hoy, 1998). Consequently, the researchers found that faculty trust in clients, colleagues, and principal were related. The three dimensions were moderately correlated and related to parental collaboration and decision-making at the school level. Further analysis determined that faculty trust in clients had a stronger relationship to collaboration than the other two dimensions (Hoy & Tschannen–Moran, 1999). One crucial finding in the research was that trust in clients is reciprocal, with all sides needing to trust in order to nurture the relationships that are crucial to helping raise student academic performance.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) performed a 10-year longitudinal study in over 400 Chicago elementary schools, in which they concluded that relational trust was a prime source of school improvement. Trust and cooperation among students, teachers, and parents influenced regular student attendance, persistent learning, and faculty experimentation with new practices. Bryk and Schneider’s research revealed that trust among teachers, parents, and students produced schools that showed marked gains in student learning, whereas schools with weak trust relationships exhibited virtually no improvement.
Schools are complex social systems with unique organizational properties that make trust a critical component to ensuring their effective and smooth operation. Multiple tasks required to achieve positive school outcomes usually outnumbered the required personnel to achieve them. In turn, adults must trust one another to do their share. Reducing the vulnerabilities which result from these tendencies constitutes the most important social foundation for building trust in schools (Tschannen–Moran & Hoy, 2000). The daily social exchanges that occur in schools, therefore, become the most important mechanism by which school administrators and staff are able to maintain an understanding of their roles and obligations as well as maintain expectations for the roles and obligations of others (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). When relational trust is high among the various stakeholder groups, the school as an organization is likely to exhibit properties of its operations that are more conducive to school improvement, such as more effective decision-making and stronger social support for innovation.

Individual school members discern the intentions of their colleagues simultaneously according to four distinct criteria: respect, personal regard for others, integrity, and competence. Respect in a school setting is most directly related to how individuals interact with one another; for example, teachers who are genuinely listening to one another reflect a mutual regard for one another’s worth and dignity. Closely related but distinct from respect is personal regard, which is characterized by individuals who extend themselves beyond what their role requires in order to further mitigate inherent vulnerability. Integrity characterizes a person whose beliefs closely match his or her actions, and competence is the ability to perform the duties associated with one’s formal role (Ford, 2010).
This could lead one to question, “How do individual beliefs become social property in schools?” Adams and Forsyth (2009) believe that this occurs through the process of group formation. According to Schein (2004), groups evolve through four temporal phases, each characterized by dominant group assumptions and the socioemotional factors that inform individual and collective behavior. In the initiating phase, group members come together as a collection of individuals, each with unique social orientations. Group building starts during the second phase, as members relinquish their defense mechanisms to participate in group-building activities. As the group evolves, shared norms, instead of individual orientations, begin to serve as the regulating mechanism for individual and group behavior. The third phase is defined by collective action. Groups become focused on accomplishing goals that benefit the collective, not simply one person. As groups mature during this phase, they approach the pinnacle-group actualization—where they strive for stability and sustainability. If groups do not reach the advanced phases of collective action and actualization, individual self-interest becomes the operating norm (Adams & Forsyth, 2009).

Adams & Forsyth (2009) apply Schein’s theory of trust formation to a parent role group within a school. They posit that parents enter a new school with unique dispositions formed from their personal experiences. As they interact with other parents and school personnel, their orientations begin to reflect the shared understandings of expected teacher and parent behavior. Over time, the orientation of new parents reflects existing and emerging norms.

Adams and Forsyth (2009) agree with Bryk and Schneider (2002) that once expectations become shared within role groups, they become the standard to judge the
intentions of individuals and other role groups. They differ from Bryk and Schneider in that, from their perspective, the formation of trust in schools occurs at the group level and manifests itself as a shared perception of the group, not in the aggregated discernments of individuals.

According to Tschannen-Moran (2004), most people rely on an intuitive feel of what is meant when we say we trust someone. Trust is undergirded by the person’s willingness to be vulnerable. There are two sides to a trusting relationship: a symbolic relationship exists between the trustee and the truster. The trustee serves as steward and the truster is the “willing, vulnerable” party. In order to promote “willing vulnerability,” the trustee must demonstrate competence in his ability to care for, protect, and do what is in the best interests of the truster. The truster can only be “willingly vulnerable” when there is some measure of confidence in the trustee’s competence (Beard & Brown, 2008).

Though the facets of trust developed by Bryk and Schneider are very similar to those that were developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy and even intersect at some points, they are not as meaningful for understanding the collective levels of trust. It is due to this limitation that this study focused on the conceptualization of trust shown through its five facets as advanced by Tschannen–Moran and Hoy (1998).

**Benevolence**

Benevolence, commonly recognized as a sense of caring, involves the assurance that one can count on the goodwill of another to act in one's best interests and that the other will not exploit that vulnerability even if the opportunity to do so is available (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996). People make emotional investments in trust relationships with the understanding that there is care taken not only for the goal result, but also for the
relationship. Parents who trust faculty to care for their children are confident that the educators will consistently act in the best interests of their children. Students who do not trust their teachers or fellow students cannot learn efficiently because they invest their energy in calculating ways of protection rather than engaging in the learning process (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

**Honesty**

Honesty employs a person's character, integrity, and authenticity and reveals the capacity for goodwill. Tschannen-Moran argued that the revelation of dishonest behavior may be more damaging to trust than lapses in other facets because it is read as an indictment of the person's character. Integrity is earned from telling the truth and holding to promises, and authenticity relies on one's ability to be accountable, avoid manipulation, and treat others with genuine respect (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

**Openness**

Openness is a process by which people make themselves vulnerable to others by sharing information, influence, and control (Zand, 1997). It is in the sharing of thoughts and ideas that exchanges lead to greater openness on the part of both parties involved. Trust and respect are inherent to the sharing of influence and control. According to Tschannen-Moran (2004), the sharing of information increases vulnerability because with knowledge comes power. She also warned that openness in communication must take place in the context of good judgment and not at the sacrifice of confidentiality (Beard & Brown, 2008).
Reliability

Dependability and predictability are key components of reliability. Our expectation of others is often determined by our ability to count on them to follow through with respect to patterns of behavior and consistency. Reliability implies a sense of confidence that one can rest assured that he or she can count on a person doing what is expected on a regular, consistent basis (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Competence

Competence is the ability to perform a task as expected, according to appropriate standards (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). We trust those whose skill we can depend upon, who are honest about their skill level, and who work to maintain or improve their skill. In the case of schools, students rely on the competence of the faculty to adequately meet the goals inherent to teaching. Students and parents understand that a measure of teacher competence is directly related to teacher quality. Teacher quality involves not only the knowledge of their subject matter, but the skill with which they impart and share their knowledge, most often measured in the learning acquired. Faculty competence, parent competence, and student competence are all relative to expectation and standards (Beard & Brown, 2008).

While the literature on trust development in education is miniscule, the literature that identifies trust as an important component in the school improvement process is substantial. This gap in the research is likely due to the questionable linkages between the aspects of trust growth and aspects of the school improvement process. This is the result of the complex and reciprocal nature of these linkages (Forsyth, 2008).
This study did not seek to establish a causal relationship between school reconfiguration and trust development but rather to investigate the phenomenon of increased student performance, increased parent involvement, and a reversal of previous trends in student mobility in three reconfigured schools in a small urban district in New Jersey. There is much that can be learned about school reform and trust development through continued inquiry and testing.

Tschannen-Moran’s theoretical model of trust provides a conduit through which insight can be gained from the data received from parent, student, and faculty perspectives. An analysis of the participants’ perspectives can inform us as we, community stakeholders, strive to lay the foundation for building a sustainable school improvement effort.

**Summary**

The review of literature has lauded parent involvement as an effective strategy necessary for school improvement and accountability purposes (Barnard, 2004; Desimone, 1999; Hill & Craft, 2003). The research suggests that parent involvement leads to early social competence and increases social capital, which ultimately leads to academic success (Hill & Craft, 2003). The expansion of the parents’ social networks allows expanded access for students to additional support, resources, and curriculum extensions beyond the school (Lee & Bowen, 2006). However, schools are still plagued by low attendance at school events and disaffected parents. This is particularly true in schools with a large number of students of color and/or low socioeconomic status. Is this an accurate assessment? It depends on one’s definition of parental involvement.

Traditional definitions of parental involvement call for investments of time and money
from parents. Those who are not able to provide these resources are considered to be uninvolved. Volunteering in schools usually depends on parents taking the burden of providing class supplies and participating in fundraisers (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). I find this information pertinent to this study because it generates concerns that most literature about parental involvement overlooks differing perceptions on the parts of parents from low SES and minority populations regarding educational responsibilities and parental involvement (Nieto, 1987). More recent research on parental involvement suggests that schools should develop broader frameworks that will be more inclusive of families of color (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Jackson & Remillard, 2005).

The heavily referenced Epstein Model (2009) framework for parental involvement failed to address the advocacy shown by African-American parents or the deference shown by Latino parents. Instead, it provides a general approach to parental involvement, regardless of race, class, or sociocultural factors, further validating a perception that does not always represent reality (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). Add to this the alienation of families in poverty by middle-class families, who see the lack of traditional involvement as a lack of caring or concern about their children (Kroeger, 2007). These factors as viewed through the lens of the Hoy and Tschannen-Moran’s (1998) facets of trust, suggest a crack in the foundation of trust in schools through the lenses of openness, honesty, and benevolence. Not including the perspectives of minority or low SES parents leaves studies running the risk of being of limited relevance when attempting to generalize recommendations to a diverse parent population. Although significant research exists that details the benefits of parental involvement for improved
academic performance, distinguishing what the ideal strategies may be remains a daunting challenge.

The review of the literature on school restructuring, specifically the restructuring from a K-5 model to a K-8 model, was anchored theoretically by Coleman’s (1974) focal theory of change that suggested that the cumulative effects of multiple life changes in different aspects of one’s life can be deleterious to psychosocial functioning. The theory argues that the timing of adult-imposed changes on children ages 10-14, such as school transitions, should be cautiously considered. Throughout the various studies, the surface level discourse of grade reconfiguration is commonly drilled down into deeper discussions of early adolescent development and, essentially, environment. The research of Eccles and Midgley (1998) anchors the conceptualization of early adolescents and their developmental needs. What has been concluded is that there is somewhat of a mismatch between the middle school context--departmentalized, impersonal, efficiency-driven, controlling, aptitude-oriented--and early adolescents’ need for a delicate balance in forestalling stressors (Poncelet, 2004). The reality for many middle school children in the United States is that their schools are unresponsive to their desires for the types of challenges, interactions, and opportunities that support their well-being. This is at odds with educators’ desires for motivated, well-adjusted, self-confident, early adolescent learners (p. 85). Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, and Blyth (1987) theorized that early adolescents would benefit from arenas of comfort in their lives, places of retreat and sanctuary characterized by supportive relationships and familiar routines to buffer the stresses of multiple major life events.
Simmons & Blyth (1987) found similar conclusions to Larson (2002), revealing a downward trend in the emotional state among White and African-American, urban and suburban, working and middle-class, fifth through eighth grade boys and girls that stopped at Grade 10.

The evidence strongly suggests that (a) children entering adolescence may not be ready to cope with the transition from an elementary school to a middle school, (b) that creating such discontinuity is likely to result in higher levels of stress and negative social and emotional outcomes, and (c) that emotionally and socially frustrated young adolescents trying to deal with a pile up of changes in several life spheres simultaneously will be less motivated to learn. If child development is a high priority, then a school transition during early adolescence may be counterproductive (Poncelet, 2004).

The question that leads this final section of the literature analysis is “What does the research tell us about the role of trust in schools engaged in improvement practices?” The majority of the empirical and conceptual research on trust in education has been provided by Wayne Hoy and his colleagues at Ohio State University (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) and Bryk and Schneider (2002).

From a historical perspective, the early work of Hoy and his colleagues sought to establish relationships between variables like teacher trust, principal authenticity, and teacher empowerment (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985). Later work focused on investigations of relationships of trust among teachers and of teacher and principal to measures of school effectiveness (Hoy, Tarter, & Witkoskie, 1992).
Bryk and Schneider (2002) conceptualized relational trust as an emergent property of the everyday interactions between and among adults in the school setting. They found that schools are often striving to achieve multiple, inter-related goals at the same time (high role incongruence), while the means for achieving these multiple outcomes remain complex and diffuse (high performance ambiguity). They concluded that the conditions of high role incongruence and high performance ambiguity which are characteristic of schools demand frequent context-specific decision making and cooperation on local problem solving. To that end, the daily social exchanges which occur in schools therefore become the most important mechanism by which school administrators and staff are able to maintain an understanding of their role obligations as well as maintain expectations for the role obligations of others (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

This relational trust concept is grounded in the day-to-day discernments of the intentions of other school administrators and staff within the set of role-relations characterizing the social organization of schooling. Individual school members discern the intentions of their colleagues simultaneously according to four distinct criteria: respect, personal regard for others, integrity, and competence.

Though Bryk and Schneider’s facets of trust share similarities with the previously mentioned facets developed by Hoy and his colleagues, one could argue the strength of influence of Bryk and Schneider’s facets of relational trust against Tschannen-Moran and Hoy’s facets of trust in schools. While the conceptualization of trust as advanced by Bryk and Schneider can be advantageous for understanding the presence of trust among the various role-relations within a school, it is less useful for understanding the collective levels of trust. It is due to this limitation that this study focused on the work of
Tschannen-Moran and Hoy and their five facets of trust that served as the theoretical lens through which this study was viewed.

The synthesis of this literature review was considered through the common themes and theoretical influences on this study. While various studies on the constructs of parental involvement and school reconfiguration were examined in this review of literature, the resulting data from the mostly theoretical studies served as conceptual background information for this particular study.

The early studies on parental involvement provided generalizations that did not include the minority perspective. Data from more recent researchers revealed that cultural differences are perhaps more responsible for the differences in the expectations of parental involvement among ethnic groups rather than SES.

The empirical studies about school reconfigurations, particularly from a K-5 model to a K-8 model, seem to validate the reversal from the middle school movement from years past to an “excellence movement,” which favors the K-8 structure, based upon research that supported better outcomes for students.

The primary focus of this review of literature was the comprehensive research on the study of trust in schools. A considerable amount of theoretical and empirical research documents the association of trust in schools and its relationship to increased student performance. The most influential theme comes from the extensive empirical research of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran. The resulting five facets of trust conceptualized and developed by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran have the most direct connection to my study, as it provides a lens through which to frame and analyze the collected data.
The consistently positive effect of trust in schools on student academic performance suggests that any school reform or redesign model that amplifies this characteristic has the potential to enhance the collective educational experiences for parents, staff, and most importantly, students.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the K-8 reconfiguration of three schools in a small urban district in New Jersey on parent trust. The research design was an exploratory multiple-case study design.

Role of the Researcher

Gall, Borg and Gall (2003) state that the researcher is the primary measuring instrument in qualitative case studies. As the primary instrument of data collection, the researcher must remain interactive with the participants. Moreover, previous to the process of conducting interviews, the researcher was required to first gain entry into the three selected reconfigured schools. The gatekeepers identified for this study were the principals of the three reconfigured schools. As Lofland and Lofland (1984) suggested, researchers are more likely to have success in gaining entry to situations if they make use of contacts that can help eliminate barriers. The researcher made initial contact via phone calls to the principals of the selected schools. As per the conversations with the principals, the researcher was confident that any potential barriers had been eliminated. After being given a straightforward description of the goals of the study, the principals provided the researcher with the contact information of potential participants that fit the criteria of having a child in the school in Grade 6 or higher or having a child that had transferred out of the school after fifth grade. Subsequently, the researcher contacted the potential participants and solicited their participation in the study with a pre-prepared script detailing the purpose and the researcher’s intent (see Appendix F).
The role of the researcher was that of interviewer. Interviews were conducted with twelve parents at a location convenient to the participants. Six of the participants had children that currently attended the reconfigured schools, and six of the participants had children that had transferred out after fifth grade. There were four parents representing both perspectives from each of the three schools. Though limited, the role of the researcher was personal and interactive during the interviews.

The role of the researcher in this study was to focus on what the impact of the K-8 school reconfiguration was on parent trust. The researcher obtained this objective by gaining entry into the selected sites, conducting interviews, interpreting the data accumulated, and offering that information, as well as the researcher’s interpretations and recommendations, to the reader.

To ensure internal validity of the study, a researcher’s bias must be disclosed (Merriam, 1988). Revealing a researcher’s bias involves clarifying the researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the beginning of the study. The researcher who conducted this study works in the field of education, currently employed as a principal of an elementary school within the identified district. Prior to his current position, the researcher was employed as a vice-principal and a teacher in various elementary schools, for a combined twenty-year tenure. It is because of this extensive experience in the elementary school setting that the researcher remained impartial in his interpretations.

The researcher’s assumption was that the reconfiguration of three schools from a K-5 model to a K-8 model had not impacted parent trust positively for those parents who decided to transfer their children out. This researcher believed that trust in schools
remained low due to a number of factors. Parent concerns about the district in general, derived from anecdotal evidence, seemed to emphasize dissatisfaction at the very least from a segment of the general population. Also, the number of charter schools within the county continued to grow and administrative turnover was relatively high. The experience of the researcher as a principal fed his assumption that, although possible, few efforts to increase parent trust were successful for the long term.

**Research Design**

A case study is done to understand a phenomenon. A phenomenon is a process, persons, things of interest, or events a researcher wishes to study. The case is a specific instance of a given phenomenon (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003). In addition, Merriam (1988) suggests that the case study can possess a variety of options for the researcher when seeking to understand aspects of education. A case study can test or build a theory, include quantitative or qualitative data, and use random or purposive sampling. Qualitative or naturalistic research focuses on discovery, insight, and understanding from the subjects being studied.

“The purpose of most descriptive research is limited to characterizing something as it is, though some descriptive research suggests tentative causal relationships. There is no manipulation of treatments or of subjects; the researcher takes things as they are” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1984). Merriam (1998) states that the researcher is striving to gain insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing. In qualitative case studies, the researcher also intends to uncover the interaction of important characteristics of the phenomenon through its design. Justification for the design are: (a) the questions that direct the study, (b) the theoretical perspective that drives the study, (c)
the research methods, (d) the determination of schools and the samples from those schools, and (e) the desire to interpret and describe the phenomenon being investigated.

The data gathered during this study will add to the body of knowledge of parental trust relative to education, thus assisting school district decision makers in making informed, research-based decisions when contemplating the restructuring of schools.

**Research Questions**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Why did parents in the reconfigured schools choose to transfer their child(ren) into out-of-district schools after fifth grade (i.e., charter, private, or parochial)?

2. Why did parents choose to keep their children in the reconfigured schools after fifth grade?

3. How important was trust in the parents’ decision making?

**Sites**

The setting for this study was a K-12 urban public school district in central New Jersey. A few years ago the district leadership selected three schools for reconfiguration from the K-5 model to the K-8 model. Data for this study was collected from current parents and former parents from the three reconfigured schools in the district. The selected district has a student population of less than seven thousand students. Purposeful sampling was implemented to select the schools for this study. The criteria for selection included the following:
• All schools were formerly K-5 schools.

• All schools had been reconfigured to K-8 schools.

These boundaries were provided to establish focus in this study.

The schools chosen for this study share similar traits. Most of the students are African-American and Latino with the majority of students at all three of the schools receiving free and/or reduced-priced lunch. Table 1 outlines each of the restructured schools’
demographics.

Table 1

Restructured Schools Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximately 600 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66% Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34% Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75% of the students qualify for the free- and reduced-lunch program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximately 260 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2% Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76% Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64% of the students qualify for the free- and reduced-lunch program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximately 340 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39% Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61% Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89% of the students qualify for the free- and reduced-lunch program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*School restructuring took two years, as a new grade level was added each year until eighth grade was implemented.

**Sample**

The qualitative methodology of case study was utilized to conduct this research. Purposeful sampling was the preferred strategy in this case study and focused on three reconfigured schools in a small urban school district in New Jersey. Potential participants for this study included specifically the parents from the three reconfigured schools whose children had been attending or attended the schools since the fifth grade. The sample population reflected mixed socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. All of the individuals were 21 years of age or older. There were no other special subject characteristics. From this population, 28 parents were solicited and ultimately agreed to be interviewed.

Parents from each of the three schools were categorized into two groups; those whose children currently attended the reconfigured schools in Grade 6 or higher and those who no longer attended the reconfigured schools due to parent-requested transfer. A total of 12 parents were selected to be interviewed from these two categories. Of the participants selected to be interviewed, 6 parents had children that were current students in the sixth grade or higher of the reconfigured schools, and 6 parents had children that attended schools out of district after transferring out of the reconfigured schools. Interviews were conducted at mutually agreed upon locations.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Patton (1990) describes three types of interviewing techniques: (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) informal, conversational interviews, and (3) standardized, open-ended interviews. Semi-structured
interviews were used for this study. With a semi-structured interview, the interviewer is given the autonomy to probe within the predetermined areas of inquiry and be able to remain focused (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Parent participants were asked open-ended questions that allowed them to share their thoughts regarding their successes, concerns, perspectives of their own, and their child’s experiences in the schools that were identified to be restructured.

To help maximize the efficient use of limited interview time, an interview guide was used. An interview guide is a general list of questions that the interviewer would like to address during the interviews (see Appendix A). Interview questions were developed and adapted from the Parent Trust in Schools Scale Survey (Adams and Forsyth, 2004), which the researcher had received permission to use (see Appendix B). In order to determine the suitability of the interview questions for optimal participant response, the initial interview guide was field tested and revised accordingly. The final interview guide was presented to the IRB for review and approval.

Sample Questions from the Interview Guide

1. What are your thoughts about academic excellence?
2. What has educating your children been like for you as a parent?
3. How do you feel about the way children are cared for in this school?

Data Analysis

Before data could be collected, confidentiality laws and guidelines were adhered to in questioning and interviewing strategies. Study participants signed letters of consent. The purpose of the analysis of data is to bring the reader into the perspectives of those being studied (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The type of data that were collected came from semi-structured interviews of parents of children who had remained in the reconfigured
schools after fifth grade and those parents who had transferred their children from the reconfigured schools to charter, parochial, or private schools after fifth grade. The data were collected and then documented according to the original research questions. The research questions were as follows: (1) Why did parents in the reconfigured schools choose to transfer their child(ren) into out-of-district schools after fifth grade (i.e., charter, private, or parochial)? (2) Why did parents choose to keep their children in the reconfigured schools after fifth grade? (3) How important was trust in the parents’ decision making?

The challenge of qualitative research is to put raw data into logical, meaningful categories and present the data to others. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) describe qualitative analysis as “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145).

The interviews were subject to a systemic procedure of data analysis based on template analysis (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). This qualitative content analysis model involves using an a priori codebook developed from the five-faceted lens of trust to analyze, describe, and interpret the transcriptions. In template analysis, the researcher defines a template or set of codes a priori, based on the findings from prior research and/or a theoretical perspective. In addition to the emergent codes of those that represent patterns of ideas that were not anticipated, analysis was aided by the use of the NVivo 10 software. The use of a priori and iterative category development follows Constas’ (1992) method. Using this method, the “veneers of phenomenological representation are
removed so we may become acquainted with subjective understanding and the meaning of human interactions” (p. 254).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that the primary purpose of qualitative research is the generation of theory, rather than mere description or theory testing. Subsequently, theory is not a “perfect product” but an “ever-developing entity” or process (p. 32). It was the intent of the researcher, during data analysis, to develop a theory about the impact of the K-8 school reconfiguration on parent trust.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that in qualitative research there are four important criteria for assessing trustworthiness of the researcher’s data: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria parallel the quantitative concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

There are four questions that Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that researchers must answer. The first is “How credible are the findings of the study?” The credibility of the data was preserved by the use of direct quotations derived from the interviews. Additionally, a sample size of 12 participants was secured to contribute to the study’s credibility. Gaining the perspectives of various participants from the three different schools created the opportunity for multiple perspectives, which in turn created the researcher’s opportunity to generate inferences regarding this phenomenon.

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) second question is “How transferable and applicable are the findings to another setting or group of people?” The transferability of this study was assured by the description of the participants’ origin sites and the purposive samples
interviewed. “Thick description” allowed educated judgments to be made regarding similarities of other contexts and environments.

The small size of the study and its focus on elementary schools may actually limit the transferability to the high school level. However, Merriam (1988) states that by using multiple cases, the capacity for generalization is increased. The researcher built general explanations across the cases even though the cases varied somewhat in their details (Yin, 1984).

The third question from Lincoln and Guba (1985) is “How can we be reasonably sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same population and in the same context?” Dependability was assured by incorporating an audit trail throughout the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe an audit trail as (1) raw data, (2) analysis notes, (3) reconstruction and synthesis products, (4) process notes, and (5) preliminary developmental information (pp. 320-321). The concern for reliability was addressed through the implementation of a chain of evidence, a code map, and database (Yin, 1989) for those who would replicate the researcher’s steps to arrive at the same conclusions.

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) fourth question is “How can we be sure that the findings are reflective of the participants and the inquiry itself as opposed to a product of the researcher’s biases or prejudices?” To achieve confirmability and prevent researcher bias, multiple perspectives were chosen from each of the three sites identified for the study.
Internal validity refers to the degree in which a study’s findings describe reality. Credibility rests less on sample size and more on the rich, thick description of the information being studied and on the analytical abilities of the researcher (Patton, 1990).

One way of preserving internal validity is member checking. Member checking is providing analysis to those who are involved in the study to check for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Merriam (1998), member checking is the process in which the researcher takes “data and interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asks them if the results were plausible” (p. 169). In this case study, the researcher provided data garnered from the interviews to the participants for their review, allowing them the opportunity to give feedback.

By specifying the viewpoints, the perceptions, and the role of the researcher at the beginning of this study, the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the collected data were preserved.
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the reconfiguration of three schools (from K-5 models to K-8 models) on parent trust as measured by parent perceptions in a small urban school district in New Jersey. The goal of this chapter is to present the major themes discovered during this study as a result of analyzing a substantial amount of raw data. An interview protocol was developed to elicit parent responses about the reconfigured schools’ ability to meet the middle school needs of their children and its impact on one component of the parent-school relationship: trust. The interviews used in this study were analyzed through the five-faceted lens of trust: reliability, benevolence, competence, honesty, and openness as advanced by the research of Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998).

The reader is provided with direct quotations from the interview participants from all three reconfigured schools. For the purposes of anonymity, school names or any other identifiers have been eliminated and have been randomly designated with an X, Y, Z, XX or ZZ designation.

All participants were asked the same 14 questions (see Appendix A) in personal interviews. The recorded interviews were subject to a systematic procedure of data analysis based on template analysis (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Template analysis focused the analysis on data relevant to the research questions to make comparisons between the theoretical framework and the experiences of the participants as they described them.
Participants for this study included the parents from the three reconfigured schools whose children had been attending or attended the schools since the fifth grade. The sample population reflected mixed socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. All of the individuals were 21 years of age or older. From this population, 28 parents were solicited and ultimately agreed to be interviewed. Parents from each of the three schools were categorized into two groups: those whose children currently attended the reconfigured schools in Grade 6 or higher and those whose children no longer attended the reconfigured schools due to parent-requested transfer. A total of 12 parents were selected to be interviewed from these two categories. Of these participants, 6 parents had children that were current sixth grade students or higher attending the reconfigured schools, and 6 parents had children that were current sixth graders or higher that attended schools out of district after transferring out of the reconfigured schools. The participant demographic data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Participants’ Demographic Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th>Status/School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Attending/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Attending/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GF</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Transferred/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transferred/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LJ</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Attending/B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Attending/B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transferred/B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JB</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Transferred/B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ER  Male  African-American  4  Attending/C
LW  Female  African-American  3  Attending/C
YS  Female  African-American  2  Transferred/C
IW  Female  Hispanic  2  Transferred/C

*Status denotes whether the parent has a child “Attending” the school or “Transferred” out of the school. Letter designation denotes school A, B, or C as described in Chapter 3.

All of the participants interviewed for this study value education and want what they feel are the best possible opportunities for their children. Their collective feelings about the school system range from the overwhelmingly positive to heavily disappointed to say the least. When asked what educating their children has been like for them as parents, the participants gave mixed reactions, oftentimes within the same response. On one hand, DS shared, “In the earlier years, the K through third grade, I thought we had--they had--an exceptional education; and I do not think that we would have been able to get that type of foundation anywhere. I felt that they were very nurtured. I felt that they were safe. I believed in the leadership.” On the other hand, DS also revealed, “I lost confidence when the leadership decided to start shifting people around in the school with no detailed indicators or reason other than a new person comes into leadership that gives them the right to say that we are going to shake things up and let people know that I’m in charge of this district now.” Some of the other responses to that question were as follows:

When the change came (the changing of principals) and my son at that time I think was in the fifth grade, we kinda thought, what’s next? We weren’t sure; my wife who works as a guidance counselor at another school district was, like, if they don’t get somebody who is going to keep
the system the way it is, then we are going to be looking to go to private school (DR).

It’s not encouraging for a parent who has a fifth grader, fourth grader, third grader projecting into the future and seeing, well, do I really want to send my kid to a school where the proficiency is minimum to none? So, that’s the challenge, that’s the struggle and we, my husband and I, we actually put our house on the market to move into another community for middle school because we were like, uh-uh, our kids are not going to Y; they’re not going to X, and they’re definitely not going to the high school; and this is based on just our feeling they would not get the education that they needed (YB).

Educating my children in X has been a struggle everywhere and every which way I’ve turned. I don’t see teachers giving their full effort forward. I don’t see them protecting our children as we expect them to be protected or teaching them to their expectations of the grade that they attend (GF).

I would say they were all good feelings. I haven’t really had any bad feelings towards her school. I feel that everyone has treated me and her fairly. You know, she gets in trouble, she gets in trouble. You know, if it’s her fault, it’s her fault. I don’t, I don’t. I feel that I’ve only experienced good feelings with her school. Not always with the teachers but school in general (SR).
Educating my children for the most part has been relatively painless. I’ll speak for my daughter first, very painless for the most part. Most of her teachers were accommodating, were cooperative, shared information with me, things that she wasn’t doing, you know, so I can stay on top of her, which wasn’t often. My son was a little difficult because I realized that he had ADD so I got on that as soon as possible. Once I kept getting the signal words, lack of focus, you know, easily distracted. So once I got that clarified and on medication with him, it was a lot easier (FP).

As a result of their own experiences, anecdotal information, and first-hand knowledge, 100% of the parents interviewed initially expressed that they were not interested in their children attending either of the district’s middle schools or high school. All but one did not. Most reported feeling pressured to find alternatives to the district middle and high schools, which prompted school changes as early as elementary school or feelings of relief at the implementation of the K-8 restructuring of their schools. They explained as follows:

Working in the school district and having worked at one of the two middle schools, and having first hand knowledge of the behavior of the students, the behavior of the teachers at times, the dynamic of the school, there was no question in my mind that I was going to send my child to the middle school because it was definitely a different dynamic, from, you know, from 1992 to now. I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t see my daughter surviving in that environment because I don’t want to say that she was sheltered, but
having her stay where she was, was a sense of normalcy for her, a sense of comfort for her too (SR).

So, that’s the struggle as a parent: is finding a learning environment where you feel comfortable and trust that your child is going to learn and when you look at the scores of the schools in the middle school where you have zero proficiency in math and English, I believe that was for X [school]. Where you have 3 schools that I believe are being taken over by the state because of poor test grades. (JB).

Disappointments started to pile up and eventually we had to do what was in the best interests of our son, who was going to be in middle school. We think that’s when the turmoil takes place at that age: 12, 13, 14 year old kids are unstable as all heck and we wanted a stable place as opposed to an unstable environment. So, that’s why the move came, that’s one of the negatives that happened. Not to mention the financial cost to the family. It was more money than we wanted to spend, but we made the sacrifice and we’re adjusting things and moving forward (DR).

Some of the struggles were here in the district. It was extremely important to me to be based at a school that was progressive, that was positive, and that was meeting the goals academically for my two children. In the past it was hard to have them placed somewhere beyond fifth grade because I was not satisfied with either middle school, so that has always been a struggle. Foremost, it’s the academic process and their progress that was part of the struggle and reasons for them being at X (AS).
As a collective, the parents discussed components of the facets of reliability and benevolence most frequently. The majority of parents spoke of the schools meeting their expectations with the various staffs being accommodating, helpful, and informative. They mentioned that the administrators were accessible and that they were kept well informed. All but two of the parents felt that the schools cared for their children and that they were safe while in school. Those that did not concur cited distrust of teacher competence, dissatisfaction with curriculum, and lack of communication as areas of major concern. All parents agreed that there cannot be a productive relationship between home and school without some level of trust. Transparency and open, honest communication were suggested as key ingredients to building the foundation for that trust.

**Reliability**

Reliability implies a sense of confidence that one can rest assured that he or she can count on a person doing what is expected on a regular, consistent basis (Tschannen-Moran 2004). The reliability in the schools manifested itself chiefly in the actions of the staff.

I can remember when I, one time, when I was again trying to get my daughter classified, she went through a year of a 504 [plan] and that wasn’t enough for me. I felt like it still was not enough resources that she would need and they, the district, wind up having an IEP meeting in July. I emailed the teachers even though I knew they were on summer break. I said, please, if possible, if you could shoot me a note so that I can have evidence to go into the meeting [with] and the majority of the teachers either showed up or they sent something, a note, so that there was enough
documentation for her to finally get classified. I will say that that definitely helped (LJ).

With my daughter having a 504 plan, the guidance counselor is very informative. She definitely goes above and beyond… if there are resources, if there are programs, if there’s tutoring, she informs me…and not only the guidance counselor, the teacher, I mean, depending on who her teacher was at the time. When I’ve needed it, they were there to provide it for me (SR).

The only thing I would’ve needed assistance on was my daughter, ‘cause she has asthma, so the nurse would help me out. I would drop the asthma pump off and she would call me if she had an asthma attack or she needed to be picked up because she had a fever. That was excellent, I had no problems (YS).

If I ever have a question, I just shoot an email and usually I can pretty much say within 24 hours of the email, the email has been answered, one way or another. So, if I’ve ever had a question or concern about a grade or a project or if I needed a deadline extended, for the most part I would say the staff has been really good and provided the information for me (LJ).

A few of the parents questioned the schools’ ability to adapt to the changes that accompanied the K-8 reconfiguration. Those parents that were familiar with the K-8 concept did not express as much alarm as those who were not familiar with the K-8 configuration. The data suggest that the parents were willing to be tolerant regarding most of their concerns by compromising on some issues for the opportunity to keep their
children in an environment which they found familiar and safe. Still, concerns were voiced over a variety of issues like the size and maturity of the older children versus the younger children, student safety and their overall emotional well being, to discipline, staffing, curriculum, and academic rigor in the upper grades. Although voiced, these concerns were not important enough to force parents to find alternatives to the K-8 model.

I was definitely happy that they didn’t have to go to the middle school, but when you include sixth, seventh, and eighth into an educational environment, other things need to change as well. I see the center as growing and they weren’t quite there yet when my children went there because of course they were the first group. I noticed that some of the teachers weren’t as prepared as I had expected them to be in handling middle school children. I noticed that some of the rigor, some of the flexibility wasn’t in place with the teachers (AB).

For my son, it was just more of, I didn’t trust the teachers who were in place at that time and that’s why I had to move him. I didn’t…it was just a lot of nonsense going on and I didn’t trust that he would get what I felt he needed to be successful in that school if he stayed with some of the teachers (FP).

There’s been a change in the quality of teachers either being brand new and needing training or they’ve been veteran teachers who don’t wish to stay current with educational trends that are out there now (IW).
**Benevolence**

Benevolence, commonly recognized as a sense of caring, involves the assurance that one can count on the goodwill of another to act in one's best interests and that the other will not exploit that vulnerability even if the opportunity to do so is available (Cummings and Bromiley 1996). Findings indicate that 10 out of 12 participants interviewed felt secure in the schools ability to keep their children safe and make them feel part of the school community.

Well, my daughter has been here from kindergarten all the way up to eighth grade and she has had no problems in this school. Far as mentally, physically, abuse…nothing. Zero, no problems (LW).

There have been some really good positive activities that we’ve had that made me feel like, wow, we are all coming together. There was a multicultural night, different parents from different ethnic groups set up a booth and the kids got a passport, and they really got to learn the different types of kids that are in the school together with their families (LJ).

The teachers for the most part are dedicated at X and everybody, the custodian, the secretary, people in the lunchroom, everybody there. It’s a very nice learning environment, learning community. The PTO, the parents; it’s family (JB).

I feel children are dealt with compassion and caring. The teachers try to understand where they come from so they’re not just being cold and distant. I think the teachers really work…you know, put themselves out there to give kids extra time. They pull them at lunch, they may stay after
school; I feel that the children are getting a lot. They really are getting a lot from the educators at the school (FP).

The experience overwhelmingly has been positive. I will tell you that the teachers knew you, they can call you, they would email you; information was flowing back and forth. So we had a good feeling. The principal that they really enjoyed working with and working under was YY. They loved him, they loved going to school (DR).

All the teachers from the kindergarten through the eighth grade, the majority of the teachers knew my name. I always felt that we had the same frame of mind, the same passion, the same commitment and the same goals towards the success of the children and I felt that we were a community within a community (AB).

One parent interviewed had views that were opposed to the collective. Her interactions at the school left her disgruntled and angry at the lack of compassion and communication shown at the school.

Educators think their building is their castle and they can do as they please and tend to forget that although that might be your castle, those are my children. They take it upon themselves to run things in a totally different way.

There’s no compassion for our children today. There’s none. We need to find out what’s wrong with our children so they can fix it so they can grow up to be productive adults instead of angry teenage gang members. We don’t get that. We need to find out what’s wrong with our children, in
other words, if we had communication and everyone did their due
diligence and did their job, what they’re actually getting paid for; then
maybe our dropout rate would not be so high (GF).

**Competence**

Competence is the ability to perform a task as expected, according to appropriate
standards (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). We trust those whose skill we can depend upon,
who are honest about their skill level, and who work to maintain or improve their skill.
In the case of schools, students rely on the competence of the faculty to adequately meet
the goals inherent to teaching. Although there were more than a few parents that were
generally pleased with their school’s instructional program, competence of the teaching
staff was where the most doubt was expressed concerning the reconfigured school’s
ability to meet the needs of its students. Some parents also expressed concern on how the
school’s instruction and subsequent student performance ranked with those of
neighboring districts. However, after being compared using alternate metrics (honor roll
participation and testing by supplemental educational services), some parents admitted
that their children were competitive with their out-of-district peer group.

In the earlier years, the K through third grade, I thought we had, they had,
an exceptional education and I do not think that we would have been able
to get that type of foundation anywhere. I think [in] K-3 they had a top-notch education because the school they are currently in, they’ve also
made honor roll…so there wasn’t any gaps in delivery in academic
instruction (DS).
I found that both in the charter and in the public school, when you have teachers who are dedicated, who love what they do, then the kids bloom and blossom…and so that has been a beautiful thing at X. I would see things come home and say oh, that’s pretty cool you know, that’s thinking outside the box for that teacher to assign this assignment that way and to give you these things to do (JB).

There are teachers here that exceed my own [expectations], but as far as the school is concerned, I think as a whole, they are meeting my needs for academic excellence (SR).

When we look at data from other schools, our data would tell us that our math scores compared to other districts that surround us are not that good. I’m not so confident with math and science. I think we can push the envelope a little more; the rigor could be ramped up. The kids are trying and I don’t think it’s taken as serious (DR)

I wasn’t sure about some of the teachers in place at the seventh grade level for both of my children. So, that was the only reason why I decided to move them (FP).

I find the K-5 (teachers) slack and the 7-8 [teachers] are the ones that are doing their due diligence as educators. My son should be doing way better and stronger academics than what he’s doing now.

They also can’t teach what they need to teach if they’re being dragged out of a classroom 2, 3 times a week for some conference here or some
conference there. We need our teachers in the classroom. We need them attentive (GF).

I do know that, again, with it [the school] being so small, I was expecting the test scores to be a lot higher because the class sizes are small. If you have 17 in a class, 18 in a class and you have other schools in the same district and there are 28 and 29 [students in a class], they shouldn’t have to meet the same types of test scores. So, I’m a little disappointed with that as well (LJ).

**Honesty and Openness**

Honesty employs a person’s character, integrity, and authenticity and reveals the capacity for goodwill. Tschannen-Moran argued that the revelation of dishonest behavior may be more damaging to trust than lapses in other facets because it is read as an indictment of the person's character. Integrity is earned by telling the truth and holding to promises; and authenticity relies on one's ability to be accountable, avoid manipulation, and treat others with genuine respect (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 1998). Openness is a process by which people make themselves vulnerable to others by sharing information, influence, and control (Zand, 1997). It is in the sharing of thoughts and ideas that exchanges lead to greater openness on the part of both parties involved.

The majority of parents interviewed spoke somewhat favorably about the schools’ keeping them informed. Participants mentioned feeling a part of the school community because of the abundance of communication from the school.

Yes, this school has kept me informed because now they have electronics and so with the emails. So, if there is anything going on they have set it up in the computer (LW).
They kept me well informed. They let me know what events was coming up in a reasonable time and I had no problems. I always felt part of the school community ‘cause whenever they had functions they would let me know. You know, encourage us to be a participant in it (YS).

I think the school tries to keep the parents informed, but they’re still on the book bag express and if I don’t check my kids’ book bag, I don’t know about a lot of stuff. I think they’re trying to use more updated technology, but it’s just not being done effectively (LJ).

While my kids were at X, I was well informed and was updated on upcoming events. I always felt like anytime I wanted to go into the school, I was welcomed. I felt X was a family and I don’t think many parents would tell you that they didn’t feel the same (DS).

Has the school kept me well informed? Not all the time. There are times that I found out information after the fact. Whether it be, you know, the teacher or the principal that I had to contact to say…well, why was I not notified ahead of time or when it happened (SR)?

Well, basically how schools communicate and X is one of them, they send parent letters home and unless your child gives you that letter, you’re not really going to be informed unless you remember to ask for it (JB).

I get a lot of notices and calls from the school letting me know of different programs and my children would share programs that they were involved in. That’s how I was involved. I felt I was involved in the school (FP).
Subsequent questioning increased parents’ levels of discontent when the discussion changed to how information was communicated and if the parents felt it was the truth.

The school has always kept me well informed and I do feel that the information coming from the school was the truth with the exception of the change in administration. The parents needed to be given more information as to why you would change something that was already good. In other words, when something is not broken, you don’t need to fix it, so we weren’t clear as to why they would make that change in administration (AB).

Well, I’ll tell you with the not [feeling a part of the school community], there was a change in leadership at the school and the rumor mill was suggesting that they knew who the principal was going to be before it was ever announced. But, no press release, no information to the parents and all the parents were asking [and] having to wonder who is going to come there, but we don’t know. We found out because we got a global connect [electronic message] from the principal herself announcing that she was the new principal. As a parent, I can tell you, my wife was like I don’t believe this. I don’t believe it’s true; there has to be some communication from the Superintendent’s office, but we never did get any. That was a real negative experience that I just kind of remembered and reflected upon as we speak. It caused a lot of angst in our household (DR).
I guess the final factor for me was that when they decided to shift all the principals and it wasn’t clearly communicated to the parents. It was a last minute decision, I feel. I feel it wasn’t justified (DS).

So, do I feel like they keep me informed? Absolutely not, they give me the bits and pieces of what they want me to know. They try to build brick walls in a matter of seconds to keep me from getting to where I need to go in order to get the truth. Unfortunately, for them, it doesn’t work (GF).

Upon initial analysis of the data collected for this study through the template of Tschannen-Moran and Hoy’s (1998) five facets of trust, a few other themes emerged that help tell the story of the impact of the K-8 school reconfiguration on parent trust in three schools in a small urban district in New Jersey.

One of the emergent themes was the recognition of the principal’s role in community building and increasing trust in schools. Nine of the twelve parents interviewed mentioned confidence in their principal’s leadership style as well as his or her responsiveness to parent or student concerns. The decision by the new superintendent to move principals around in the district raised the suspicions of the parents and at least temporarily derailed the efforts to build trust. The parents viewed the decision and, more importantly, the way the decision was communicated, as a lack of transparency caused some to question the competence of district administration.

They [parents] had access to the administrative offices whenever they appeared with a concern. The administrative team I never had a problem with. Whenever I went to discuss a problem, they investigated and came
back with a response. We weren’t clear as to why they would make a change in administration (AB).

The principal that they really enjoyed working with and working under was YY. They loved him, they loved going to school. They talked about stories, they talked about how he greeted people in the morning, he knew everyone’s name. My daughter, who at the time was in first grade, really loved going to school because of the principal, which is different. She said, “The principal, he makes me laugh everyday.” My son was like, “he lets us have recess and if we do the right thing he gives us affirmations and gifts and presents and we have fun contests.” So, it really was a positive unit. They loved the fact that he was there.

When YY left, a lot of things changed. I mean, the school climate changed, teachers changed. I think each time they change the leadership, they change the paradigm (DR).

I thought our current administrator, building administrator, was doing an excellent job. I thought that it was good for my sons being African-American boys to see another African-American male figure being an educator [and] working hard at being a good example for our young men and being able to deliver instruction.

The administrator at that time did a very good job at giving us a sense of community in the school, so I enjoyed sending my kids to school every day.
I guess the final factor for me was when they decided to shift all the principals with no reason. Maybe the principals were given a reason, but it wasn’t clearly communicated to the parents. It was a last-minute decision and when we as parents started asking questions…I feel it wasn’t justified (DS).

Yeah, and the sad part about it is he or she who is in office [the superintendent] doesn’t have the backbone to be in office (GF).

The principal at the time was YY and he was new to the school and he was so vivacious and bubbly! He was, like, “Oh yeah, come on in, let me give you a tour, I’m getting a tour myself. Let me give you the tour” (JB).

The academics they have here at X K-8 is wonderful. Like I said, back then, we didn’t have the academics that they have now. We didn’t have a basketball team, we didn’t have no baseball team, we didn’t have no Cultural Day; where all the nationalities come together and join as one big family, we didn’t have that. Now in this time, K-8 has that due to the wonderful principal, Ms. ZZ (LW).

Another theme that undergirded close to half of the parents’ testimonies was the sense of community that they felt within the schools. There was overwhelmingly communicated a feeling of safety for their children while in the schools and a general appreciation for the learning environment. Many of the respondents used the word “family” when describing the schools, the staff, and the students.

The school was an extended family. I always felt that we had the same frame of mind, the same passion, the same commitment and the same
goals towards the success of the children, and I felt that we were a community within a community (AB).

I’m not concerned about her safety, so I do trust the fact that they will keep her safe as they go on with this educational program (DR).

Basically, I would say all of my experiences have made me feel part of the school community because they do lots of things to encourage family participation. It’s a very nice learning environment, learning community. The PTO, the parents, it’s a family (JB).

You know, everyone knows everyone, so being there and, you know, “Hey, how are you?” Just socializing with people you see on a constant basis made you feel like it was a family (SR).

The rails that guided this study are the research questions posed at the beginning of the study. These include (1) Why did parents in the reconfigured schools choose to transfer their child(ren) into out-of-district schools after fifth grade (i.e., charter, private, or parochial)? (2) Why did parents choose to keep their children in the reconfigured schools after fifth grade? (3) How important was trust in the parents’ decision making?

Through the exploration of a wide variety of answers to these questions, the following sections describe and summarize how the parents who were interviewed for this study gave their perspectives on determining factors for keeping their children at the reconfigured schools or transferring them out. Moreover, this analysis also sought to determine the role of trust in their decision-making.
**Research Question 1**

*Why did parents in the reconfigured schools choose to transfer their child(ren) into out-of-district schools after fifth grade (i.e., charter, private, or parochial)?*

Coleman’s (1974) focal theory of change suggested that the cumulative effects of multiple life changes in different aspects of one’s life can be deleterious to psychosocial functioning. The theory argues that the timing of adult-imposed changes on children ages 10-14, such as school transitions, should be cautiously considered. This theory, as well as those from Simmons and Blyth (1987) and Larson (2002) concur with Poncelet (2004), who posits that evidence strongly suggests that (a) children entering adolescence may not be ready to cope with the transition from an elementary school to a middle school, (b) that creating such discontinuity is likely to result in higher levels of stress and negative social and emotional outcomes, and (c) that emotionally and socially frustrated young adolescents trying to deal with a pile-up of changes in several life spheres simultaneously will be less motivated to learn. If child development is a high priority, then a school transition during early adolescence may be counterproductive.

With these theories and others seemingly validating the district’s decision to restructure three schools from the K-5 model to the K-8 model, it became necessary for the researcher to investigate reasons why parents would not want to involve their children in a school reform effort that the research suggests could prove beneficial to their children.

Upon investigation, all but one of the six parents interviewed from the group that decided to transfer their children out of the restructured schools were generally satisfied with the restructured schools. The data revealed that the parents for the most part felt like “a part of the school community,” felt like “family,” and one parent reported, “I had no
problems.” Then why did the parents transfer their children? The analysis reveals that for three of the six parents, the transferring of their children was a move of foresight and planning for their children’s future. One hundred percent of all interview participants stated that they would not let their child(ren) attend the district high school due to their major concerns of low student academic performance, student safety and well-being, and teacher/staff competence. Four of the six parents in the “transfer group” decided to put their children in schools that had a Grade 6-12 configuration. Their reasoning included “securing their children’s future” and “putting their children with the best and the brightest.” Of this particular group of four parents, one parent added distrust of the teachers on a specific grade level as a concern. She felt those teachers would not be able to provide the support that her son, diagnosed with ADD, needed to be successful.

The other two respondents from the “transfer group” gave two clearly different reasons than the rest for transferring their children. One parent cited an overall general dislike for the school system. This parent stated that “teacher bullying” was the deciding factor in making the decision to transfer her child out. Interestingly enough, this parent transferred her child out of one of the restructured schools and, unlike the rest of the group, enrolled her child in one of the district’s “traditional” middle schools. The other parent cited her lack of confidence in the leadership capability of the new superintendent, coupled with the switching of principals of the school her children attended as the reasons for transferring her children out. Listen to their voices:

Again, the main reason is because I didn’t have confidence in the appointment of our superintendent, and I knew the leadership needed improving. I knew that we would struggle. I knew that I didn’t have a lot
of confidence in her ability to lead our district, and I guess the final factor for me was when they decided to shift all the principals with no reason (DS).

I was upset when we switched administrators, and that probably added to my decision to take my son out (IW).

XX was a new school, so it was a “magnet school.” I believed it was meant to pull the best and the brightest, so that’s why I wanted her (my daughter) there. For my son, it was more, I didn’t trust the teachers who were in place at that time and that’s why I had to move him. It was just a lot of nonsense going on and I didn’t trust that he would get what I felt he needed to be successful in that school if he stayed with some of the teachers (FP).

The only reason why I enrolled [transferred] her out of X school was because my older daughter goes to XX, and I wanted to put them both together, because it was (an) easier pick up for me once I got a job. Like I said, the main reason I took her out was, two main reasons. I didn’t want her to go to Y [high school], and the second reason was to put two of them [the children] in the same spot. That was it. If X school went up to twelfth grade, both of my kids would have been here. I’m an X school product, alumni (YS.)

I don’t like the education process in X at all. I believe that from what I’ve seen in X and being in X for the past 13 years, our children in X are not
ready and that’s why they leave. Sometimes you just have to grab your child and go. The school is behind, and I don’t understand it (GF).

The main thing is, I wanted to secure their future from seventh grade on up and X school gave that. If they stayed at X until eighth grade, their chances of getting into Y would be almost nil. The year to come into Y is the seventh grade year [because] that’s where they have all the openings; you have about 70 slots. In the eighth grade year the 70 move up, and you can only get in if somebody moves, or doesn’t want to go to the school…. I saw that and said, so I don’t need to stay at X until eighth grade because then to have to try to get in at ninth [grade], no. So secure the seat, [in] seventh grade and then it’s there and then you keep going, avoid the high school, then off to college and so forth. That’s the main reason (JB).

**Research Question 2**

*Why did parents choose to keep their child(ren) in the reconfigured schools after fifth grade?*

The parents that decided to keep their children in the restructured schools unanimously felt that the K-8 structure was a far better alternative to the district’s “traditional” middle schools. Concerns of student safety, low student academic performance, high administrative turnover, and their own children’s immaturity were stated during discussions of the district’s “traditional” middle schools. Parents also felt the restructuring of schools “bought them some time” as they decided where their children were going to attend high school. One parent shared that she and her husband put their house on the market for sale in an effort to find a place to live that offered a better school system for middle and high school.
The data suggested that there was a slight economic current embedded within some of the parent responses. One parent lamented her lack of financial resources as an impediment to providing better academic opportunities for her children. This parent conceptualized the ability to provide a private education for her children as being better than what they were receiving now in any capacity. Another parent stated that he consulted with his wife as they tried to anticipate who the new principal of their children’s school would be and what changes he or she would make. This factored heavily in their decision as the couple considered whether they could afford to pay tuition at a private school for their children if they needed to transfer them out. Paying tuition was not looked upon favorably by the couple but was considered a necessary evil if need be. One minor concern of the parents that kept their children at the restructured schools was the question of whether the K-8 schools would be able to provide a “full middle school experience.” Some of the components of a “full middle school experience” as the parents saw it included block scheduling, variety of lunch menu items, participation on sports teams and in school clubs, and an expanded selection of elective courses. Although mentioned during the interviews, this concern did not manifest itself to the point of becoming an emerging theme. The parents seemed more than willing to sacrifice some of the components of a “full middle school experience” for the benefits of the comfort and familiarity of the K-8 structure. They shared the following thoughts:

I believe the school X met the needs of my children K-5 and because my children was one of the first groups of children [that] went from sixth to eighth [grade]; it was a period of adjustment for the school and a period of adjustment for my children, who were also transitioning to another stage in
their lives. I was definitely happy that they didn’t have to go to the middle school (AB).

I loved X forever from K-5, and I had a serious concern with where my children were to go, not only for the middle school experience but also for the high school experience. The concern I had was not only the level of academics at the two middle schools but also the character of the children that these middle schools were producing and housing. We didn’t have these concerns with the children at X. Yes, they were younger but they were also held to a higher standard. They were made responsible for their actions and in comparison to the other centers throughout the city; the children always appeared to be of a different grade, a different caliber and a different character (AB).

So, I have two children who attend X school in Y [city]. I will tell you that overwhelmingly the response and the experience has been positive, very positive. If they weren’t thriving as they are, then the decision would be that much easier. Thriving as they are, no issues physically, [i.e.] being beaten up, being afraid to go to school. Those issues being aside, we do like the teachers, we do like the program, we do like the fact that we do have open lines of communication (DR).

Because they [the children] were doing well academically helped us a great deal. Again, if they were doing poorly, I think it would be easier to look for an alternative to what the current situation is. And, honestly, you know saving money is big (DR).
I do feel that in some ways I am short-changing my children only because fiscally I don’t have the income to pick and choose where I can live to know that they’re getting the best (LJ).

I’ve had a lot of positive experiences with the school. My kids have made wonderful friendships. I’ve made wonderful friendships with the parents and the staff. I feel every year my children are learning and they are growing and building and maturing in a way that I find to be suitable. I chose to keep my child and if it continues, I would keep my second child there too because I think sixth grade is a transitional year for kids. It’s a transitional year not only with their bodies physically, but emotionally and mentally. They still need that safe harbor of making mistakes, growing and learning, but still kinda sheltered where you’re not just thrown out into the world (LJ).

I have went to see the different middle schools to look to see if they were an option for my kid. It wasn’t as bad as I thought it was going to be but I just didn’t feel that it would benefit my children. I think that they still need a little bit of that safety net (LJ).

The reason why I kept my Peanut here is that she been here since kindergarten, and she has her friends here. I seent [have seen] that through the years that sometimes when kids is tooken [taken] away from their school that they comfortable in and tooken away from friends, sometimes it effects them a little bit (LW).
I’ve seen how Peanut has grown and she done got confident with herself and she feel special about herself. So, I felt that if I kept her here she would get more and more confident about herself and that she would learn more things here at X than I think she would’ve at Y or Z (LW). It’s better for a child to go slow and learn than to jump into something fast. So by her staying here she would go nice and slow, and she’s learned a whole lot, and she understands a whole lot. So now that she knows she gets out there in the big world (and realizes) that it’s not all play but it’s serious. That’s why I kept her here at X (LW). It was a family. To have her moved out of that would’ve uprooted her mentally, socially, and it just wouldn’t have worked. So, it wasn’t a question in my mind whether or not she was going to stay or go. She was definitely going to stay at X to go on to the sixth grade (SR).

Research Question 3

How important was trust in the parents’ decision making?

Bryk and Schneider (2002) performed a ten-year longitudinal study in over 400 Chicago elementary schools, in which they concluded that relational trust was a prime source of school improvement. Trust and cooperation among students, teachers, and parents influenced regular student attendance, persistent learning, and faculty experimentation with new practices. Bryk and Schneider’s research revealed that trust among teachers, parents, and students produced schools that showed marked gains in student learning, whereas schools with weak trust relationships exhibited virtually no improvement.
The data suggest interesting results when the conceptualization of trust is applied to this context of parents making the decision to keep their children in a reconfigured school or transferring them out. When asked, “Do you trust your school?” directly during the interview, eleven out of twelve participants responded in the affirmative. This adds to the complexity of the phenomenon considering that six out of twelve participants transferred their children out of the reconfigured schools.

How important was trust in the decision-making? The data suggest that for the group of participants that kept their children at the reconfigured schools, trust played a major role in their decision. Participants discussed components of all five facets of trust in their responses to the interview questions. The facets of reliability and benevolence were referenced most frequently. Parents that kept their children at the reconfigured schools felt that their children were safe and cared for. They spoke of the reliability of school staff, especially the non-instructional staff, which they labeled helpful and accommodating. These parents also spoke of their affinity for their principals. Principals from all three of the reconfigured schools were lauded as being approachable and dependable and looked upon as being role models. Parents from this group did share that communication and being open and honest was the best way to maintain and improve relationships between home and school. Overall, there was a general sense of community, responsibility, and even pride that came from the parents when discussing their roles as part of the reconfigured schools’ stakeholder group.

The data does suggest that parents who kept their children at the reconfigured schools did indeed trust those schools.
For the six parents who were interviewed for this study that transferred their children out of the reconfigured schools, things were not so clear-cut. When asked directly, “Did you trust the school?”, five of the six answered in the affirmative. One parent answered in the negative. Overall, parents from this group reported feeling “a part of the school community,” and one parent reported, “I had no problems.” Then why did the parents transfer their children? The analysis revealed a heavily nuanced set of circumstances. Three of the parents expressed appreciation for the restructured schools but felt they had to look beyond their children’s’ current situation and plan for the next stage, which would be high school. These parents seized an opportunity to place their children in schools that had Grade 6-12 configurations, which would secure their children’s position for high school. One parent stated that it was better to secure a position in sixth or seventh grade than to try for ninth grade, where most schools had a significantly smaller amount of “seats” available for aspiring students.

Two parents from this “transfer group” detailed how although they liked and trusted the reconfigured schools up to a particular point (each point being different for each parent), circumstances developed that caused some trust issues which ultimately resulted in the transfer of their children. One parent distrusted the new superintendent’s ability to lead, coupled with the changing of the school’s administrator, as the reasons why she transferred her children. The other parent cited distrust of her son’s potential teachers’ ability to give him the support that he needed with his ADD diagnosis.

One parent expressed extreme disappointment of the school district in general and the reconfigured school in particular based on her experiences over the years. She expressed distrust of the superintendent, the school administrators, and especially the
teachers of the reconfigured school, which she likened to a “cult.” This parent expressed her disdain for the lack of communication at the school and called into question the competence of the teachers at the school. “Teacher bullying” was cited as the reason why she chose to transfer her son out of the reconfigured school.

For the six parents interviewed for this study that transferred their students out of the reconfigured schools, three of the six stated that trust, in one form or another, had been lost and contributed to the transferring of their children.

The data suggest that of the twelve parents interviewed for this study, trust was the major or deciding factor for nine of the parents when deciding to keep their children in the reconfigured schools or transfer them out.

**Summary**

Chapter 4 restates the purpose for this case study and the methods used by the researcher. The selection of participants and demographic information were presented to describe subject characteristics. An interview protocol was developed to elicit parent responses about the reconfigured schools’ ability to meet the middle school needs of their children and its impact on one component of the parent-school relationship: trust. The interview transcripts used in this study were coded, analyzed, and interpreted through an a priori codebook developed from the five-faceted lens of trust: reliability, benevolence, competence, honesty and openness. The use of a priori and iterative category development followed Constas’ (1992) method. This template analysis focused the analysis on data relevant to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and making comparisons between the theoretical framework and the participants’ experiences.
Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) explain that schools are complex social systems with unique organizational properties that make trust a critical component to ensuring their effective and smooth operation. Multiple tasks required to achieve positive school outcomes usually outnumber the required personnel to achieve them. In turn, adults must trust each other to do their share. Reducing the vulnerabilities which result from these tendencies constitutes the most important social foundation for building trust in schools. The daily social exchanges that occur in schools, therefore, become the most important mechanism by which school adults are able to maintain an understanding of their role and obligations as well as maintain expectations for the role and obligations of others (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). When relational trust is high among the various stakeholder groups, the school as an organization is likely to exhibit properties of its operations that are more conducive to school improvement, such as more effective decision-making and stronger social support for innovation.

Analysis of the data revealed that parent participants interviewed for this study overwhelmingly expressed a sense of having trust in the reconfigured schools. It was the pervasive distrust of the district’s secondary school level that led to some of the parents exiting the district for a chance at what they felt was a greater educational opportunity for their children. For the others, there was a loss of trust that weighed heavily on the parents’ decisions to take their children out.

The evidence gathered by the data collection aligned itself with the extensive literature on trust in schools; and it can be put succinctly as expressed by Baier (1985): Trust is necessary for effective cooperation and communication and is the basis for
productive relationships that will allow school staff and parents to depend on one another and create a shared vision for success.

The converse has also been revealed through the testimony of the parents. Distrust makes cooperation virtually impossible and negatively impacts the learning process. When distrust prevails, people minimize their vulnerability to one another; and the result is disengagement from the educational process (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).
CHAPTER 5
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This study brought to the forefront the emotional, social, and perceptual factors that work in conjunction to determine the success of developing trusting relationships. It was crucial to represent the data by allowing the reader to hear the voices of the parents in the context of the five facets of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran’s (1999) definition of trust.

As discussed in Chapter 1, trust plays a pivotal role in the process of community building in the public education arena. Researchers Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) found that the nature of the construct had evolved from a unidimensional and generalized belief of teachers to a social condition dependent on open, honest, competent, reliable and benevolent interactions. The more interaction people have over time, the more their willingness to trust or distrust one another is based upon the party’s actions and their perceptions of one another’s intentions, competence, and integrity (Beard and Brown, 2008).

Competence refers to the belief in one’s ability to perform the tasks required. Reliability refers to the extent to which one can depend upon another party to come through, to act consistently, and to follow through. Benevolence is having the confidence that another party has your best interests at heart and protects your interests. Openness refers to how freely another party welcomes communication and shares information with the people it affects. Honesty refers to the degree to which a party demonstrates integrity, represents situations fairly, and speaks truthfully to others. The degree to which a person (parent, student, teacher, or principal) can be counted on to be competent, reliable,
benevolent, open, and honest, determines the degree to which they are trusted in the school community (Beard and Brown 2008).

The review of literature in Chapter 2 examined some of the constructs of parental involvement and school reconfiguration, providing a conceptual background for this particular study. The primary focus of this literature review was the comprehensive research on the study of trust in schools. The most influential findings came from the extensive empirical research of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), whose conceptualization of trust provided the lens through which the collected data were framed and analyzed.

Chapter 3 explained the qualitative study design used to determine the impact of the K-8 reconfiguration of three schools on parent trust in a small urban school district in New Jersey. An interview guide was developed and implemented to enable the researcher to gain better insight into the participants’ thoughts regarding the successes, concerns, and perspectives of their children’s experiences in the reconfigured schools.

Chapter 4 presented the findings obtained from the data collection as well as the analysis of the participant responses. The responses were organized through template analysis that used Hoy and Tschannen-Moran’s (1999) five facets of trust as its theoretical framework.

Chapter 5 provides the collected data based on a qualitative analysis of the participants’ perceptions of trust based upon their children’s, as well as their own, experiences in the reconfigured schools. The researcher anticipated that the research findings would be congruent with the literature on trust in schools that says that trust is
reciprocal, with all sides needing to trust, in order to nurture the relationships that are crucial to helping raise student academic performance.

Based on preliminary anecdotal information, the researcher made an assumption that all of the participants who transferred their children out of the reconfigured schools would express that they distrusted the school system in general and/or that they did not trust their school in particular. Interview data debunked the researcher’s assumptions while supporting the literature. The majority of all study participants expressed trust in their schools. All of the participants interviewed for this study valued education and wanted what they felt were the best possible opportunities for their children. Study participants provided vital feedback that revealed unexpected themes which added complexity to the fabric of this case study.

**Interpretation**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the reconfiguration of three schools (from K-5 models to K-8 models), on parent trust, as measured by parent perceptions in a small urban school district in New Jersey. An interview protocol was developed to elicit parent responses about the reconfigured schools--their experiences, successes, and disappointments--and the impact on the foundation of the parent-school relationship: trust.

Participants for this study included the parents from the three reconfigured schools whose children had been attending or attended the schools since the fifth grade. The sample population reflected mixed socioeconomic and racial backgrounds.

Parents from each of the three schools were categorized into two groups: those whose children currently attend the reconfigured schools in Grade 6 or higher and those
whose children no longer attended the reconfigured schools due to parent-requested transfer.

To help maximize the efficient use of limited interview time, an interview guide was used. Interview questions were developed and adapted from the Parent Trust in Schools Scale Survey (Adams & Forsyth, 2004), which the researcher had received permission to use (see Appendix B).

The researcher was able to study and analyze the parent perceptions through the guidance of the following research questions:

1. Why did parents in the reconfigured schools choose to transfer their child(ren) into out-of-district schools after fifth grade (i.e., charter, private, or parochial)?
2. Why did parents choose to keep their children in the reconfigured schools after fifth grade?
3. How important was trust in the parents’ decision making?

So, what happened? The reconfiguration of schools served its intended purpose of keeping children in the district whose parents may have considered transferring them out of the district had the reconfiguration not occurred. Data obtained from this study suggest that trust did play a pivotal role when parents had to engage in decision making concerning school choice. Analysis of the data revealed that nine of the twelve (75%) parent participants interviewed for this study expressed a sense of having trust in the reconfigured schools. The remaining three parent participants (25%) expressed a loss of trust that ultimately led to their decision to transfer their children out of the reconfigured schools.

At this point the nuances of the situation begin to emerge. To clarify, even though six (50%) of the interview participants transferred their children out of the reconfigured
schools, the data revealed that lack of trust--be it in administration, teachers, or operations--was the deciding factor in only three (25%) of those cases. How is that? In response to Research Question 1, all but one of the parents interviewed from the “transfer group” were initially generally satisfied with the reconfigured schools. For three respondents from the “transfer group,” the discussion revealed that the transferring of their children was a decision of foresight and planning for their children’s academic future.

The remaining three respondents from the “transfer group” gave reasons differing from the others for transferring their children. One parent cited an overall general dislike for the school system. This parent stated that “teacher bullying” was the deciding factor in making the decision to transfer her child out. Interestingly enough, this parent transferred her child out of one of the reconfigured schools and, unlike the rest of the group, enrolled her child into one of the district’s “traditional” middle schools. This particular parent’s feelings of distrust and dislike for the school system caused the researcher to speculate whether an increase of the study sample size would reveal a consistency in ratio of parents who held similar extreme views. This parent claimed that none of her needs were being met as they related to the competence, reliability or benevolence of school staff. She did note that at one time there had been open and honest communication coming from the school but not any longer. Was this particular parent an outlier or did she represent a segment of the population? The researcher pondered, based on the discussion, whether this parent’s decision to keep her child in district was a choice made based on preference, finances, or some other reason?
Another parent cited her lack of confidence in the leadership capability of the new superintendent, coupled with the switching of principals of the school her children attended, as the reasons for transferring her children out. This parent spoke at length about her concerns with the competence and reliability of the district leadership.

The third parent listed distrust of teacher competence on the grade level to which her son was being promoted as her reason for transferring him out.

All three parents discussed reasons that aligned with the research of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) and their five facets of trust. What was of interest to the researcher was the notion that there was no exact formula for what particular facet or how many facets needed to be apparent or realized for trust to be present. For example, one parent could feel that the school administrator was open, honest, reliable, and benevolent toward her child but not feel that the administrator was competent. That realization could be enough for the parent to not be willing to become vulnerable and therefore hindering or preventing altogether her ability to trust.

The parents that decided to keep their children in the reconfigured schools unanimously felt that the K-8 structure was a far better alternative to the district’s “traditional” middle schools, thereby succinctly addressing Research Question 2. Concerns of student safety, low student academic performance, high administrative turnover, and their own children’s immaturity were stated during discussions of their children attending the district’s “traditional” middle schools. Parents also shared that the reconfiguration of schools “bought them some time” as they decided where their children were going to attend high school. The common denominator was the understanding that it would not be the district high school.
Research Question 3 asked, “How important was trust in the decision-making?” The data suggest that for all of the study participants, trust played a major role in their decision. Parents that kept their children at the reconfigured schools felt that their children were safe and cared for. They spoke of the reliability of school staff, especially the non-instructional staff, which they labeled helpful and accommodating. Principals from all three of the reconfigured schools were lauded as being approachable, dependable, and looked upon as being role models. For those that chose to transfer their children, trust was also very important in the decision-making process. It was the loss of trust that influenced three of the six parents to transfer their children out of the reconfigured schools. For the remaining three parents from the “transfer group,” even though they stated that they did trust the reconfigured schools, it was the lack of trust in the high school.

For all of the participants selected for this study, trust, or the lack of it, was a factor in the decisions that they made in the interests of their children’s education.

Beard and Brown (2008) state, “If we accept the premise that trusting others is a fundamental aspect of human learning because learning is a cooperative process, we also accept that in the give and take, the sharing of information, solutions are born.” Through the voices of twelve parents we were able to hear their willingness to trust that schools can provide the opportunities for educational experiences that will ultimately benefit their children. Intertwined with this concept emerged a few pertinent themes that help to describe a more complex situation than what was initially identified for study.

The major emergent theme resulting from the participant interviews was the unforeseen notion that none of the parents wanted their children to attend the district high
school. Parents cited a myriad of reasons such as safety, curriculum, student performance, leadership, and probably most important, perception, as to why they felt the high school was inadequate. This collective mindset has deep-rooted implications, as the data revealed that planning for high school sometimes trumped trust in the reconfigured schools. The pervasive distrust of the high school led to parents transferring their children out earlier than eighth grade in hopes of securing a “seat” for Grades 9-12 at local charter schools or private schools, which had limited capacity.

Another theme that emerged from the data was the importance of the principal at the reconfigured schools and his or her role in trust-building. Interview participants from each of the three reconfigured schools shared their appreciation and admiration for the principals of the schools. The principals were lauded as being approachable, problem solvers. Participants expressed how the principals engaged themselves with the children and were looked upon as role models. The effect of the principals in the reconfigured schools was described as being crucial to their successful functioning, so much so in fact that most of the participants expressed disapproval at the transferring of two of the three principals and the uncertainty that came with the burden of not knowing who the next principal would be and what his or her style of leadership would mean to the students, staff, and parents. For one participant, this act was considered confirmation that the new superintendent was bereft of the skills to successfully lead the district and resulted in the transfer of her children out of the reconfigured schools.

On a macro level, parents were united in their distrust of the expectation of an opportunity for a good education at the high school level academically, behaviorally, and socially. They believed that the high school was devoid of good leadership, quality
instruction, and order. In a broader sense, they believed that the education their children would receive at the high school level would not allow their children to compete in a global arena. The parents viewed the district as a system that was incapable of providing what parents wanted for their children on the high school level. The effects of this perception was felt when it filtered down to the elementary level and affected student enrollment when parents transferred their children out.

On a micro level, the reconfigured schools represented safe havens, bolstered by empathetic staff, good leadership, shared vision, and a sense of collaboration between home and school. Even though every parental expectation was not met at this level, parents were willing to compromise in order to achieve what they felt was the greater good. This willingness to be vulnerable corroborates what the literature says takes place when there is no fear of being taken advantage of; in other words, when trust is apparent. This climate has to be nourished by a pragmatic and benevolent leader. The importance of competent, collaborative leadership at the elementary level was highlighted as being a precursor to school success. The leadership styles of the building principals allowed the formation and strengthening of a home-school connection that became the foundation for community building. The actions of the principals at the reconfigured schools were aligned with the trust-building actions outlined in the literature. One quote from researchers Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) comes to mind: “Trust not only reduces uncertainty, but it also maintains order” (p. 185).

In this age of politically motivated attacks on public education, any areas of concern that fuel the flight of students to charter and parochial schools should be given the utmost priority. Acquisition and/or retention of students and the state funding that
follows them has turned into a high-stakes operation with far reaching ramifications. In the retail arena competition can be beneficial to customers when it results in lower prices for increasingly better products. Is the same true for public education? Only if it results in school districts designing a better product for its customers with demonstrably proven practical applications in today’s world.

Despite the shortcomings of the school district in this study, parents were willing to entrust their children to it when they felt that they were recognized and being heard. Most of the parents stated open and honest communication was the first step in laying the foundation for trust. When the parents felt that their concerns were being addressed and their children were protected, it somewhat relieved their anxiety about the schools being inadequate. Ultimately, the way the culture of the school was communicated to the parents provided the foundation for building trust and capturing their confidence. The researcher expected the parents of the students who stayed at the reconfigured schools to show some sort of support and/or trust at best for those schools. It was the trust that was expressed by those parents who transferred their children out that came out as an unexpected result that debunked the researcher’s assumption. Those parents who trusted the schools and still transferred their children out “peeled back a layer of the onion” so to speak and revealed what could be a common thread among more of the community’s parents. What that layer exposed was that the parents of this district generally looked at the educational journey of their children in stages, typically elementary, middle, and high school. With each stage connecting not unlike links in a chain, they are not necessarily inextricable from one another. If there is what the parents perceive to be a weak link in the chain, they are more than willing to break the connection before their child’s journey
is complete and hook up to another stronger chain. To further the metaphor, when the superintendent of schools sought to stem the flight of students out of the district by reconfiguring schools, he found a way to strengthen a link on that chain. While successful in its initial intent, the reconfigurations did not solve the bigger problem. The chain is still vulnerable at the high school “link,” and that is the crux of the matter.

The emerging data fed the researcher’s speculation that the combination of school reconfiguration, fidelity of staff, increased parental involvement, and effective school leadership formed a set of interactions that fostered trust in the reconfigured school environments. The researcher further speculated that the absence of one or more of those components would foster suspicion and uncertainty, which in turn would foster distrust and lead to the perception that the particular school environment is not conducive to student success.

For district decision makers, the implications of this study suggest that while most of the study participants continued to believe in the beneficial effects of the elementary educational experience at the reconfigured schools, they also understood that central to improving the student outcomes and perceptions of the middle and high schools are issues of deeper levels of trust and effective leadership. The trust at the elementary level only goes so far. The data suggest that it could be time for this particular school district to consider changing its current structural high school paradigm to suit the needs of its current learners and of its future learners.

**Recommendations**

This study indicates a need for those involved with the administration of schools to consider ways in which to set a tone of collaboration and supportive exchanges
between families and schools. Baier (1985) posits that trust is necessary for effective cooperation and communication and is the basis for productive relationships that will allow school personnel and parents to depend on one another, and create a shared vision for success. District administrators must plan to include parents that have left the district in honest dialogue, addressing their concerns, expectations, and visions for a comprehensive public school education for students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Parents across the district should have the feeling that staff and administration desire that they become a part of the system because their input is valued. The literature states, “When distrust prevails people minimize their vulnerability to one another and the result is disengagement from the educational process” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Many parents in this district have disengaged from the educational process in the upper grades. The need to strengthen the literature and dialogue of schools with the voices of parents is critical.

School reconfiguration in the upper grade levels (9-12) presents itself as a possible alternative to the high school in its present form and warrants further exploration and study. Forming a school within a school or a stand-alone academy based upon an instructional theme derived from student interests are examples of school reconfiguration that have the potential to recapture student and parent interest and provide better student outcomes in the long run.

The importance of a dynamic, visionary school leader cannot be understated. A school leader that can successfully examine the culture of his or her school and ensure that the tone has been set for collaboration between home and school is paramount. This school leader should also be able to implement practices that reflect the diversity of the
students and parent input for instruction. Greater thought should be given to placing
administrators in schools where their particular leadership styles and skill sets can be
maximized to foster community building.

Implications for Future Research

Insight into what the necessary components are for making schools successful is
an ongoing pursuit. Any research that can capture and study those components should be
explored and studied. The research on trust validates its necessity for cohesive and
productive relationships in organizations (Baier, 1985). The research also reports that
trust has a stronger effect on conditions under which higher levels of school achievement
can occur. This influence has been termed the “lubricant effect” (Tschannen-Moran,
2009). Future researchers might want to examine if the trust found in the reconfigured
schools has led to greater student performance than their counterparts in the traditional
middle schools. Is there a “lubricant effect” taking place in the reconfigured schools?
An examination of the connection of affluence on trust and the community perceptions of
trust of the district schools versus the non-district schools in the area, could be
worthwhile studies for future researchers. In an effort to increase the knowledge base, a
future researcher could also investigate the levels of trust in high schools that have been
reconfigured. It would be intriguing to see if the results of this study would be replicated,
thereby increasing the generalizability of the data. Current research is needed to show
evidence of the key components of what makes a school successful.

Conclusion

A primary goal of the district in this study was to recapture parent trust in the
schools and stop the flight of students to local charter and parochial schools after fifth
grade by offering an alternative to the troubled middle schools: K-8 schools. Although half of the participants interviewed for this study decided to transfer their children out of the reconfigured schools, the data revealed that trust was not the main factor in that decision. The district’s decision to reconfigure the schools did in fact display an increased level of trust in those schools.

One fundamental outcome of this case study is that although trust has been maintained and/or increased at the reconfigured schools, there is much work that remains to be done at the high school in increasing parent confidence. Parent fear and distrust at the high school level has changed the gateway grades for students leaving the district from the previous Grades 3-6 to the current Grades 6-8. The problem of student flight has only shifted. In essence, the K-8 schools have only delayed the phenomenon.

The parents in this study shared their experiences, good and bad, about their schools. They are concerned and involved parents who were excited to share stories that represented the successes and failures of a school system. The personal narratives of the participants recount the struggles and hopes of parents who want their children to be given the opportunity to achieve and excel. Their contributions to this study enabled the researcher to navigate the complexities of the planning and decision making that took place while trying to make the best decisions for their children.

It behooves district decision makers to change the paradigm of what is being offered as compared to what the parents and students want and need. Couple this with the need for knowledgeable, competent leaders at the school level to foster a climate of collaboration and to design sustainable relevant instruction for the benefit of the most important of district stakeholders, the children.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Interview Guide
1. Please explain what educating your children has been like for you? (Your struggles, your concerns, your disappointments, your successes and your expectations).

2. Do you believe that this school effectively meets or met the needs of your child(ren)?

3. What are your thoughts about academic excellence?

4. Do/Did the standards of this school for student academic success meet or exceed your own?

5. How do you feel about the way children are cared for in this school?

6. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how would you rate this school and why?

7. Has this school kept you well informed, and if so do you feel the information that comes from this school has been the truth?

8. Explain how this school has provided you with assistance when you needed it.
9. Are you/Were you confident in your child’s well being while he/she is/was in this school?

10. What experiences have you had that made you feel part of this school community or not part of this school community?

11. Do you/ Did you trust this school?

12. Do you believe that in the presence of distrust, schools can develop a productive relationship with parents?

13. What are some of the things that can be done to improve the relationship between home and school?

14. Please take your time to fully elaborate on what were the main factors that influenced your decision to keep your child in this school? To transfer your child out?
APPENDIX B

Request and permission to use PTS Survey
Good afternoon Dr. Forsyth and Dr. Adams,

My name is Frank Asante and I am a student in the Executive Ed.D. program at Seton Hall University. At this time I am preparing my dissertation proposal for RB and I am seeking permission to use your research instruments for my study.

My study seeks to determine the effects of school reconfiguration (from K-S to K-8) on parent/faculty trust. My intention is to use your Parent Trust in School (PTS-Scale) to survey parents’ trust in schools.

At your request I would gladly discuss my study at greater depth and would humbly accept any feedback that you would be willing to offer. If you so feel inclined to contact me by phone, please do not hesitate to call me at 848-565-7518. You can also reach me at the sender email and my home email: afrikanblak@gmail.com. I sincerely, Thank You for your anticipated cooperation.

Frank Asante
Principal
Emerson Community School
305 Emerson Avenue
Plainfield, NJ 07062
908-711-4300 X5000
Dear Mr. Asante,
You have the permission of Professor Adams and myself to use the parent trust in school scale, which you can find in our book (below: Forsyth, Adams and Roy, Teachers College Press, 2011) on page 179. Best of luck. PBF

Patrick B. Forsyth
Patrick B. Forsyth, Professor of Education
& Co-director, Oklahoma Center for Education Policy
The University of Oklahoma
Jennie Rhoads College of Education
918-685-2970 patrick.forsyth@ou.edu
APPENDIX C

Request to conduct study
December 17, 2012

Dear Madame Superintendent:

As you are already aware, I am a doctoral student in the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University in the Executive Ed. D. Program. My doctoral dissertation research seeks to examine the impact of the reconfiguration of three district schools (from K-5 models to K-8 models) on parent trust. My intent is to commence this study during the winter of 2013. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of one specific school reform strategy on parent trust in schools. The results of this study could impact future decisions made in this district concerning school reform in general and school reconfiguration in particular.

At this time, I am requesting your permission to conduct interviews with past and current parents of the three district schools that have been reconfigured (Cedarbrook, Clinton and Cook). After receiving your permission and approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Seton Hall University, I will contact the principals of the identified schools to allow my designee access to parents to set up and conduct the interviews. Participation will be voluntary and all responses will remain secure and confidential. Participants’ answers will be coded to protect their anonymity. Interview data will be securely stored on a thumb drive kept in my possession and locked in a safe at my home to ensure its security. The IRB requires that your approval be provided to me on official letterhead stationery.

I gratefully appreciate your time and consideration in this matter and upon your request, will gladly share with you and the district, the implications of my research findings.

Sincerely,

Frank Asante
Executive Ed. D. Program
Seton Hall University
400 South Orange Avenue
South Orange, NJ 07079
APPENDIX D

Permission to conduct study
Dear Mr. Aantie,

The Board of Education recognizes that educational research can be a valuable tool in identifying and applying strategies to enhance student achievement and professional development. Pursuant to Plainfield Board of Education Policy on Research, File Code: #5162.5 permission is granted for you to conduct the proposed research study entitled, "The Impact of the Reconfiguration of Three Schools on Parent Trust in a Small Urban District in New Jersey."

As stated in your letter of request, please arrange that written informed consent is obtained from all participants in the interviews. In addition, ensure that the respondents' interview answers are encrypted to protect their anonymity at the completion of your research study.

I look forward to the opportunity to review the findings of your research study with the school district. If you have any questions or require additional support during this investigative process please do not hesitate to contact this office.

Sincerely,

Anna Belin-Pyles
Superintendent of Schools
APPENDIX E

Letter to Principals
March 17, 2013

Dear Principal_________________,

I am currently engaged in a doctoral study for the Executive Ed.D. Program at Seton Hall University, in South Orange, New Jersey. Upon securing approval from the Superintendent and university authorities, the implementation of the research for my study will begin in the spring of 2013. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the reconfiguration of three schools on parent trust. The intent of this study is to assist administrators and district stakeholders with informed decision-making based on research when considering, planning and implementing school redesign as an improvement strategy.

As principal of one of the schools that has been identified in the study, I would greatly appreciate your assistance in providing me with the names and contact numbers of 5-10 randomly selected parents that have recently transferred students from your school. I would also need the names and contact numbers of 5-10 randomly selected parents that currently have children in your school in grades 6 or higher.

Upon providing this information to me your involvement in the study is complete. Every precaution will be taken to maintain the confidentiality of the information provided. I will be the sole person who sees this information. All information will be destroyed immediately after its use. There are no known risks and/or discomforts with this study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or would like to receive a copy of my findings please do not hesitate to contact me at (908) 731-4201 X5000 or via email at fasante@plainfield.k12.nj.us. I will follow this letter with a telephone call in a few days to confirm your anticipated cooperation and schedule the delivery/pickup of the information. I thank you in advance for your attention and assistance in this matter.

Frank Asante
14 Marigold Lane
Somerset, NJ 08873
APPENDIX F

Telephone Script for potential study participants
TELEPHONE SCRIPT

March 17, 2013

Hello Mr./Ms.____________.

I am Frank Asante, a principal in the district and I am currently engaged in a doctoral study for the Executive Ed.D. Program at Seton Hall University, in South Orange, New Jersey. I hope I can enlist your help in a study I’m conducting. My study will examine the impact of the reconfiguration of three schools on parent trust. My study seeks to capture the voices of parents like you, about your views, perceptions and experiences in our schools. The intent of this study is to use your voices to help guide the district when implementing improvement strategies like school reconfiguration.

Your name has been randomly selected to participate in the selection process for this study because 1) you chose to transfer your child out of one of the reconfigured schools. OR 2) you chose to have your child remain in your reconfigured school. If you are interested in participating in this study your name will go into a pool of candidates that could eventually be selected to be interviewed for the study. After all potential candidates are selected from the pool of up to 60 people; two groups of 6 candidates each (with 2 alternates) will be randomly selected to become the actual group of participants who will be interviewed for the study.

Your participation in the selection process of this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the process at any time. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this selection process. Anything discussed during our conversation will be kept strictly confidential. If you are not selected for participation in the study any information about you will be destroyed immediately following the selection. If you are selected for participation you will be required to sign an Informed Consent document which will provide you with more details about the study and how the data that is collected will be handled.

I hope I have been clear in my intentions to have you participate in my study. Do you have any questions for me?

Frank Asante
14 Marigold Lane
Somerset, NJ 08873
APPENDIX G
Recruitment Letter
Dear ________________.

I am currently enrolled at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, in the Executive Ed. D. program as a doctoral student in the College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy. The Superintendent of Schools has agreed to allow me to conduct a study about the impact of school reconfiguration on parent trust. Accordingly, I am writing to invite your participation in a semi-structured interview that is needed for this dissertation study.

My research study is a qualitative case study of parent perceptions of trust from the three schools within the district that have been reconfigured from the K-5 model to the K-8 model. This study focuses on those parents who chose to keep their children in the reconfigured schools after fifth grade and parents from those same schools who chose to transfer their children out to charter, parochial or private schools. Data collection will be through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews.

The interview will be approximately one hour and your responses will be recorded electronically for the purpose of transcription. All identifying characteristics and responses will be coded to protect your anonymity. Recorded data will be securely stored on a thumb drive and stored in a safe in my home to ensure its security.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this study. Only the principal researcher will have access to the codes that match interview responses to data.

If you agree to serve as a participant in the study, please read and sign the attached Informed Consent Form. If you have any questions, please contact me at 848-565-7518. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your anticipated cooperation.

Sincerely,

Frank Asante
Executive Ed. D. Program
Seton Hall University
400 South Orange Avenue
South Orange, NJ 07079
APPENDIX H

Informed Consent
Informed Consent

The following information is provided in the doctoral research study conducted by Frank Asante. The researcher is affiliated with Seton Hall University as a doctoral student in the Executive Ed.D. Program.

**Purpose:**
The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the reconfiguration of three schools on parent trust in a small urban district in New Jersey as measured by parent perceptions.

**Procedures:**
Participants will participate in an interview regarding their views, expectations and experiences in the reconfigured schools, lasting approximately one hour in duration. The interview will be audio-recorded for transcription and content analysis of the responses by the researcher.

**Instruments:**
The semi-structured interviews will be conducted using questions developed and adapted from the Parent Trust in Schools Scale Survey (Adams and Forsyth, 2004). The questions will seek to capture parent views and perceptions through the five facets of trust conceptualized by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1999) and advanced by Adams and Forsyth (2004). A sample question would be as follows: How do you feel about the way children are cared for in this school?

**Voluntary Nature:**
Participation in this study is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time. You can refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

**Anonymity:**
There is no anonymity because face-to-face interviews with the researcher will be conducted. No names of participants, schools of origin or district will be used.

**Confidentiality:**
Every precaution will be taken to maintain the confidentiality of participating individuals and their responses. The researcher and dissertation advisor will be the only ones to view the interview transcripts. Any information obtained through this study connected with the identity of the subjects or the schools will be used solely by the researcher and kept strictly confidential.

The data will be analyzed using the NVivo 10 software application, manufactured by QSR International. The software will help the researcher to organize and analyze the non-numerical unstructured data. This organization of data will allow the researcher to identify trends and relationships that form important
evidence in the researcher’s investigation of the phenomenon. All data will be stored securely on a USB memory key and kept in a locked safe in the researcher’s possession. Upon completion of the study the data will be kept on a USB memory key and secured in a safe within the researcher’s possession for at least 3 years.

**Risks or Discomforts:**

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study.

**Benefits:**

The benefit of this study will be its’ potential to assist administrators and district stakeholders to make informed decisions based on research when considering, planning and implementing school redesign as an improvement strategy.

**Contact Information:**

Any questions concerning this research or participation in the study may be directed to the researcher, Frank Asante at fasante@plainfield.k12.nj.us or to the researcher’s mentor, Dr. Daniel Gutmore at daniel.gutmore@shu.edu. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Dr. Mary Ruzicka, Director of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects Research at 973-313-6314 or email irb@shu.edu.

I hereby give my consent to participate in the interview and acknowledge that it will be audio recorded. I further understand that I will be given a copy of this Informed Consent Form for my records.

_____________________________________________                              ____________

Signature of Participant                                  Date