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Analysis of small learning communities on suburban schools

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Analysis of Small Learning Communities

on Suburban Schools

by
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Abstract

Matthew G. Campbell   Analysis of Small Learning Communities
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                                       2003
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Students in large schools are getting lost. In a school of over 2300 students, it is very easy for a student, who does not excel academically or athletically or those students who gain attention through negative behavior, to blend into the student body for four years without being noticed. Across the nation the move to create smaller learning communities has been an attempt to solve the ills that plague our inner city schools. The intended question of this study is whether or not the smaller learning communities will have the same measurable impact in a suburban district.

The data collected and analyzed were measures of academic achievement, student discipline and student feelings towards the school. Lenape Regional High School District is a regional high school district located in Burlington County, in the southern part of New Jersey. Cherokee, the third largest high school in the Lenape District, implemented a small learning community set up in the fall of 2000.

The data collected revealed that in three of the four data sets, the creation of a small learning community had a detrimental effect on students, manifested as increased suspensions, lower attendance, and a slight decrease in GPA.

Mini-Abstract

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Analysis of Small Learning Communities
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Smaller learning communities have been successful at curing the ills that plague our inner city schools but what about a suburban district? The data collected revealed that in three of the four data sets the creation of a small learning community had a detrimental effect on students.

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Chapter I

Introduction

<u>Focus of Study</u>

Students in large suburban schools are getting lost. A student can spend four

years in a large school and never really make a connection. In a school of over 2,300

students, it is very easy for a student, who does not excel academically or athletically or

those students who gain attention through negative behavior, to blend into the student

body for four years without being noticed. In the post-Columbine world of education, it

is this type of student who needs to be reached. The tremendous media exposure given to

the acts of violence in our schools has provided an easy way to gain attention. Across

the nation the move to create smaller learning communities has been an attempt to solve

the ills that plague our inner city schools.

Since the 1950's the educational reform movement's purpose was to create

cost-cutting larger schools. This movement resulted in schools that were impersonal and

factory-like. Large schools were set up as a matter of economics, usually in urban

settings. Cushman (1997) states that "Today's public schools grew large in an era that

regarded their task as producing large numbers of educated citizens as efficiently as

possible" (p. 2). Likewise, Paul Houston, the executive director of the American

Association of School Administrators (AASA) traces the history of larger schools back

the end of World War II, when the consolidation movement began. Based on his studies,

the problem Houston points out is that the average school population is 5 times what it

was 50 years ago. Wasley (2002) cites the National Center for Educational Statistics

when stating, "In 1930, 262,000 U.S. public schools served 26 million students; by 1999

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approximately 90,000 public schools served about 47 million students" (p. 2). This concept of "bigger is better" has changed since James Bryant Conant's 1959 landmark book, *The American High School Today*; in his text his original idea of large was around 100 students per graduating class (Cushman, 1997). The general idea of bigger is better approach was to eliminate the overhead costs for running a number of smaller schools by combining the schools into one larger, more cost-effective setting. Another advantage to a larger school conglomerate concept was that a more diverse offering of academic and extracurricular activities, which a smaller school could not support, would be feasible.

Accordingly, the idea behind creating smaller schools comes from research that shows larger schools are impersonal and create an atmosphere, which enables some students to disassociate from the school community. This is alarming when U. S. Department of Education statistics show that " although two-thirds of American high schools have fewer that 1,000 students, these serve less than 30% of all high school students. More than 70% attend high schools with enrollments greater than 1,000; 50% attend schools with more than 1,500" (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Today, many schools report that disassociation is the major cause of discipline referrals, high drop out rates, vandalism and school violence. One remedy for addressing this problem is creating smaller learning communities. All across the nation smaller learning communities are having a positive impact on the success of students in urban schools by allowing them to feel connected to the school community. In urban schools, students who excel academically or athletically receive attention from the acknowledgement of their accomplishments. Likewise, students who are discipline problems receive attention of another kind, negative attention in the form of discipline. Students in a large school who

do not fit into any of these three groups because they do not excel academically or athletically, nor have discipline issues, have no way of feeling connected to the learning community because they are not recipients of positive or negative recognition. In a school of over 1,000 students, it is difficult for the staff, who might see over 100 students a day to reach out to every student that feels lost or invisible. This feeling of total anonymity is at the heart of the push to create smaller learning communities. "Large, troubled urban high schools, in particular, have used the small-school strategy for more than a decade to combat scholastic failure and the anonymity that can fuel disengagement, high dropout rates and violence. At least 300 of the downsized schools have opened in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia in the last 15 years alone" (Gewertz, 2001, p. 2).

Another issue that has taken to support the call for smaller learning communities is the new way of viewing the learning process. In education there has been a paradigm shift away from the "bell curve" mentality of hoping to educate only a portion of students. It is no longer acceptable to let students slide through school because it is believed they are not genetically able achieve in school. The current focus for teachers is on every student, because, "cognitive scientist, neurologists, biologists, and educators determined that all students have the capacity to learn" (Wasley, 2002, p. 2). If this is the foundation on which today's schools are to be run, than the large factory-like schools are no longer a feasible configuration to establish and affect learning. The "bell-curve" belief of intelligence that was widely accepted in the past but it has now been replaced by the concept that children can get smart. According to Jeff Howard (1995) "Intelligence is not a fixed inborn limit on learning capacity. All children can do rigorous academic material

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at high standards" (p. 86). This belief has major implications on the set up of America's schools. If all students have different needs and a teacher is going to identify and teach to those needs, a smaller learning environment is necessary.

Purpose of Study

Smaller learning communities have proven to be very effective at curing the ills of the urban school in our country. The ability of the smaller school to create an environment that allows for students of lower socioeconomic status to feel a sense of belonging has been widely acclaimed. This sense of belonging has been shown to mitigate problems ranging from low academic achievement to discipline issues. The purpose of this study is to see what impact the creation of smaller learning communities has on a suburban district that consists of students from upper to middle socio-economic levels. The problems that face the low socio-economic level urban schools are not the ones facing those of more affluent socio-economic level suburban schools. Smaller learning communities may not be the cure all for these problems in the more affluent schools. The impact of smaller learning communities has been well documented and the results are encouraging when it comes to urban schools. Research has shown that such learning communities provide students with a sense of community that is lacking within their own larger community. The intended question of this study is whether or not the smaller learning communities will have the same measurable impact in a suburban district. In suburban districts the problems are not the same as those facing the urban districts. The focus of this study is not the low-achieving, urban high school; it is on

seeing if the positive impact of small learning communities, that has already been shown

to exist on urban schools, translates to high achieving suburban schools.

Definitions

Small school: high schools with enrollments of 400 to 800 students (Cushman, 1997).

New Jersey Group Classification I: enrollment grade 10-12 between 488-184
students.

New Jersey Group Classification IV: enrollment grade 10-12 between 2132 – 1138
students.

District Factor Groups: classification set forth by the New Jersey Department of
Education for school districts which is based upon socio-economic levels and
receive a range from A (lowest level) to I (highest level).

Grade Point Average: numerical average on a 0 to 4 scale with 4 being the highest
and 0 being the lowest.

Limitations of the Study

Study limits include the fact that the small learning community format has been in

place in only one of the district's schools, Cherokee, since the 2001-02 school year.

Additionally, a second school, Lenape has instituted a small learning community for the

2002-03 school year. Finally, the third school, Shawnee, is in the process of studying the

feasibility of creating a small learning community to be put into effect for the 2003-04

school year. Thus, the already two existing schools' data was not available for the

completion of this study. The data collected were measures of academic achievement,

discipline, and student attitudes towards the school. Since societal emphasis is on a

student's right to privacy and is at an all time high, it was difficult to find and design a

measure of academic achievement for such a short duration of time, thus the data for academic achievement was in the form of Freshmen English year-end grades.

Setting of the Study

The following information was obtained from the Report on Further Progress from *The Middle States Evaluation Report* dated May 1, 2001. Lenape Regional High School District is a regional high school district located in Burlington County, in the southern part of New Jersey. The Lenape Regional High School District serves the following eight communities: Medford which is 40.29 square miles and has a population of 22,253 with a median income of $64,140, Medford Lakes which is 1.25 square miles and has a population of 4,173 with a median income of $63,998, Mount Laurel which is 22.15 square miles and has a population of 40,221 with a median income of $57,347, Evesham Township which is 29.65 square miles and has a population of 42,275 with a median income of $56,404, Shamong which is 46.61 square miles and has a population of 6,462 with a median income of $58,406, Tabernacle which is 47.64 square miles and has a population of 7,710 with a median income of $58,582, Woodland Township which is 95.38 square miles and has a population of 1,170 with a median income of $43,958, and Southampton which is 43.31 square miles and has a population of 10,388 with a median income of $38,486. The District has three regular education high schools: Cherokee with an enrollment of 2,035 students, Lenape with an enrollment of 2,236 students, and Shawnee with an enrollment of 2,069 and a fourth alternative school (Sequoia). A fourth regular education high school (Seneca) is set to open in September of 2003. All three of the

regular education high schools are Group IV, this is the largest of the states public school classifications, with enrollments over 2,000 students. The district has a District Group Factor of GH. The communities that are served by the district are ethnically homogenous with 97% of the population being Caucasian. The overwhelming majority of the households in the district are in the middle to upper-middle income levels. The largest parental occupations in the district are in the professional and technical groups (23%), followed by managerial positions (20%), while sales positions and clerical work are next with 17% each. The population is stable with 90% of the students are in the schools for the entire four years of high school and 84% live with both parents. In term of parental education level, 61% have four-year college degrees, while 10% have obtained an advanced degree.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of the study will be organized as follows:

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

Chapter 3 Design of Study

Chapter 4 Presentation of Research Findings

Chapter 5 Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

References

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Since the mid 1980's the smaller learning communities concept has been one

method of school reform that has received a tremendous amount of attention. Overall,

the findings of research regarding the effectiveness of smaller learning communities have

been overwhelmingly positive, especially when it pertains to low-achieving urban

schools. " Research conducted over the last fifteen years has convincingly demonstrated

that small schools are superior to large ones on many measures and equal to them on the

rest" (Cotton, 2001, p. 1). The United States Department of Education's (USDOE) 2001

report on smaller learning communities states that, "reducing school size produced

proportionately greater results for schools with more students from low-income families

and that smaller schools reduced the negative effect of poverty on school performance by

at least 20% and by as much as 70% in both rural and urban schools" (p. 12). Howley,

Howley, & Johnson (2002) found similar results in a study of Arkansas schools, "poverty

has a negative impact on student achievement, but smaller schools are able to mitigate or

even minimize that negative impact" (p. 15). There is also evidence that small schools

help promote academic equity; "According to a continuing Rural School and Community

Trust study called the Matthew Project, smaller schools and smaller districts help narrow

the achievement gap between students from poorer communities and their peers from

wealthier communities" (USDOE, 2001, p. 11).

An argument in favor of large schools lies in its ability to provide a more diverse

offering of curriculum and activities from which students can choose. In reality these

advantages are not always spread throughout the school. In Natt (2002), Kathleen Cotton, the former leading researcher for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in small learning communities, points to a different realization, "The same 7% are still joining everything, and more varied in a smaller school" (p. 2). This is true when the small size of the student body (around 800 students) coupled the large number of extracurricular activities forces a higher percentage of students to participate just so these activities can function. In a large school setting, a large portion of the population does not get involved because they feel the competition from just the sheer numbers of their peers is too intimidating, hence the students opt out of participating.

Additionally, Cotton goes on to refute the historical belief in the economical benefits of the larger schools by arguing for the use of a different analysis of cost, cost per-graduate not per-pupil. This change in definition forces the higher drop out rates found in the larger schools to factor into the equation by driving up the cost ratio. Mike Klonsky, the director of the Small Learning Community Workshop at the University of Chicago, agrees, "If you want places to just warehouse kids, bigger is more economical... but if you are talking about graduating kids, knowing kids well, keeping kids in school, having a curriculum kids are interested in and need, there is no question there is a diseconomy of scale" (Natt, 2002, p. 2). Furthermore, research has shown that it is in the poorer urban settings that the negative aspects of a large school setting are felt the most. Wasley, et al. (2000) cites, "Large schools can be impersonal places where many people feel lost, alienated and neglected. Large schools tend to have a higher rate of absenteeism and dropping out; they also experience more discipline problems" (p. 2) and

another alarming problem in lager schools, "the most horrifying recent development in large schools is the increase of violence" (p. 2).

The movement towards smaller learning communities is well grounded in research. Cotton noted that, "student behavior as measured by discipline problems, violence, theft, substance abuse and gang participation is more positive in small schools" (Natt, 2002, p. 3). The two-year *Great Strides* study of Chicago's small schools completed in 2000 found, "stronger attachment, persistence and performance in small schools, less violence, more satisfaction from parents and community members and a better teaching environment" (Wasley, et al., 2000, p. 22). Klonsky (1998) concurs with these results; "Small school environments positively affect achievement with noted improvements in grades, test scores, attendance rates, graduation rates, drug and alcohol use, and school safety" (USDOE, 2001, p. 2). In addition, Bryk, Holland & Lee (1993) concluded that "smaller high schools are more engaging environments and produce greater gains in student achievement" (p. 75). Likewise, Deborah Meier (1996) identified seven reasons why smallness offers the best chance of making failing, urban schools work, such as the case with New York's Central Park East schools. The seven reasons are governance, respect, simplicity, safety, parental involvement, accountability, and belonging.

Moreover, the Federal government supports the shift to smaller learning communities. In the fiscal year 2000, Congress appropriated $45 million to Section 10105, the Smaller Learning Communities Program, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (USDOE, 2001). The money was issued in the form of grants to programs that were undertaking the transitional process of creating small learning communities out

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of large high school settings. President Bush has included substantial grants for the creation of small learning communities in his "No Child Left Behind" program for 2002. Equally as important, are the private foundations that have supported the move to create small schools. Foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has set aside more than $250 million to reduce the size of high schools in the United States, (Wasley, 2002), provided the needed change monies. Furthermore, the Gates Foundation teamed with the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Open Society Institute to create more small schools in New York. (Gewertz, 2001) Similarly, Gewertz (2001) refers to the contributions from the Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia and the Annenberg Foundation of St. David's, Pennsylvania to Philadelphia's schools.

Accordingly, Kathleen Cotton has completed a variety of studies in which she has found a positive impact of smaller learning communities on students as well as teachers. In terms of academic achievement, Cotton (1996) has found that generally speaking, large and small schools do not report much difference, but when it comes to, "the effects of small schools on the achievement of ethnic minority students and students of low socioeconomic status are the most positive of all" (p. 4). Mary Ann Raywid (cited in Wasley, et al., 2000) concurs with these findings, by reporting that, "disadvantaged students in small schools significantly outperformed those in large ones on standardized basic skills tests" (p. 3). Using the *Great Strides* data, Wasley, found that between the years 1997 and 1999 students in small schools: had better attendance rates; lower dropout rates; higher GPAs; failed fewer courses; and were less likely to repeat a grade than their counterparts in larger schools. In addition, Cotton (2000) was cited in the US Department of Education 2001 report on small learning communities, stating that

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students from small schools are better prepared for college, "students from small high schools do as well or better on college-related variables such as entrance examination scores, acceptance rates, grade point average, and completion as students from large schools" (p. 12). The reason for this type of success found in smaller schools is articulated by Adria Steinberg (2000), "Smaller, more personal schooling environments make it possible for a student to form real relationships with adults, who know the student well enough to build on his or her strengths and interests. Such learning communities also encourage conversation and collaboration among teachers as they work toward more student-centered, active learning in the classroom" (p. 42).

Currently, research in the area of student attitudes towards school and self have gleaned results positively favoring small schools, while showing the greatest benefit for students enrolled in urban, minority and low socio-economic schools. In support, Cotton (1996) quotes findings from Robert A. Rutter (1988) who noted that, "Evidence of increases in social bonding to teachers and school, self-esteem, academic self-concept, locus of control and sociocentric reasoning suggests that [small alternative] programs can respond constructively to the students' underlying needs" (p. 7). Another positive with regards to developing student attitudes is the stronger sense of belonging contributed to small schools. Research indicates that small schools reduce student alienation. Student alienation is, "both a negative thing in itself and is often found in connection with other undesirable outcomes" (Cotton, 1996, p. 7). Small schools allow students to feel as if they are connected to the school, which in turn removes many of the roadblocks that keep students from achieving a successful academic experience.

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Another measure of the positive effects of small schools is decreasing dropout rates, where smaller schools have a positive impact on lowering the number of students who leave school prior to receiving their degree. Cotton (1996) quotes the findings of Laurence A. Toenjes in his study of the twenty-one largest school districts in Texas, which found that "It may be that …the relevant conditions that exist in the smaller schools are much more conducive to keeping students in school than are the conditions in the larger high schools. If this is true it raises a new equity issue, based not on how many dollars per pupil are spent, but on the size of the school to which the pupils are assigned" (p. 7).

Further research suggests that small schools are also safer and create stronger communities than do their larger counterparts. Wasley, et al., (2000) shared data collected from the National Center on Educational Statistics (1998), which recorded, "1 out of 3 schools with 1,000 students or more reported incidents of serious violence (e.g., armed assault, gang fight, rape, etc.) and almost all reported incidents of lesser violence (e.g., fights without weapons, threats, etc.)" (p. 3). Plus, Gottfredson (1985) stated in Wasley, et al., (2000), "compared to larger schools, students in smaller schools fight less, feel safer, come to school more frequently, and report being more attached to their school" (p. 3). This positive effect of small schools was upheld by Toby (1993) as cited in Klonsky (1998). Toby found, "the first step in reducing school violence is personalizing large schools by creating smaller communities to combat anonymity" (p. 46). This is an area of great public concern, especially since the Columbine shootings. Even though the effects of small schools are not as great on the academic achievement of whites, there is an essential benefit for those schools since according to Cotton (2001), "nearly all of the

high–profile school shootings of recent years have occurred in large high schools attended by middle class whites" (p. 1).

Conclusively, research findings show there to be a positive impact on students when school size is reduced. Beneficial effects are felt by students and teachers alike. The smaller learning communities allow for the teachers to get to know students on a personal level, this intimacy allows teachers to better serve the individual academic, emotional, and social needs of every student. The benefits students receive from this greater level of intimacy can be seen both academically, with individualized attention to their specific needs, and socially, by gaining an increased sense of belonging. Research has shown there to be a strong link between a greater sense of belonging and a decrease in negative behavioral outcomes, such as violence, vandalism and truancy.

Smaller learning communities can come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The US Department of Education on its Small Learning Communities Website (www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SLCP) presents four examples of structures that can be used to develop a small learning community: *Academies; House Plans; A School-Within-a-School; and Magnet Schools.*

What the research has not been able to determine is the effect smaller learning communities have on large schools that are deemed to be successful in their present configuration, with success being defined as high academic achievement, low drop out rates, and low incidents of violence in the schools. Now the key question is: By creating smaller learning communities will the benefits to the students be measurable enough to warrant the substantial expenditures required to make the transition a reality? This question needs to be answered before the public will acquiesce to paying for the required

reconfiguration expense for seemingly successful schools that excel in their present shape and form. This question is the basis for a research study which will go a long way towards determining the impact of smaller learning communities on large suburban schools that already demonstrate a track record of high academic achievement.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

The data collected and analyzed were measures of academic achievement, student discipline and student feelings towards the school. The data were quantitative in nature, since the measure of academic achievement, student discipline, and student attitudes was in the form of empirical data. Academic achievement was represented by the final grades for the Freshmen English classes from the school year 2000-01, the year prior to the creation of the small learning community at Cherokee High School, and the school year 2001-02, the first year of the small learning community at Cherokee High School. The final grades were on a 5 point letter scale with: an A equaling a grade range from 100 points out of a 100 points to 90 points out of 100 points, a B equaling a grade range from 89 points out of 100 points to 80 points out of 100 points, a C equaling a grade range of 79 points out of 100 points to 70 points out of 100 points, a D equaling a grade range from 69 points out of 100 points to 60 points out of 100 points, and an F equaling a grade range from 59 points out of 100 points to 0 points out of 100 points. Due to the strong emphasis on student confidentiality, using student data was very difficult. The short duration of time over which the study of the effects of the small learning community on a suburban school was conducted has also limited the access to measures of academic achievement. Also, the final grades of the Freshmen English classes provided a sample large enough to be statistically significant. The course grades provided a point of comparison as to the effect of the small learning community on academic achievement.

Additionally, student discipline was measured by the number of suspensions from the school year 2000-01 and the school year 2001-02.

Since, student's feelings towards the school were an affective measure that was difficult to determine without a survey of student attitudes, and student surveys were not permitted in the district, the percentage of athletic participation was used a measure of student's attitudes towards the school. A higher rate of student participation in athletics was recorded as students' positive attitude towards the school, while a lower rate of participation would reflect students' negative attitude towards the school. The study analyzed the rates of participation from the school year 2000-01 and the school year 2001-02. Another measure that was representative of students' attitudes towards school was attendance rates. The study analyzed the rates of student attendance from the school year 2000-01 and the school year 2001-02.

Since the study was ex post facto, the data collected and analyzed was from year-end reports provided by Cherokee High School Administration. The data on attendance, suspensions and extra-curricular participation were on file in the principal's office. The Lenape Regional High School District office provided the data on academic achievement.

The data was organized in a manner, which allowed for the quantitative statistical analysis. In the area of academic achievement, an independent sample t-test was used to determine if a difference existed between the year before the creation of the small learning community in 2000-01 and the first year of the small learning community in 2001-02. In the other areas, student participation in athletics, student attendance rates,

and student suspensions, was a simple analysis of the increase or decrease in the

percentage rates.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

The data collected was broken into four data sets, which were designed to

measure the academic and affective impact of the newly created small learning

community at Cherokee High School.

The analysis results of the first data set, *the Grade Point Average (GPA) of the*

Freshman English classes, showed the mean English GPA of the class of 2004 to be

2.579 with a standard deviation of .9, and the mean English GPA of the class of 2005 to

be 2.567 with a standard deviation of 1.03. The independent sample t-test showed the

statistical significance to be p = .882; this does not fall within the .05 limit to qualify as

being statistically significant. The results of the analysis show the difference between the

two GPAs to be insignificant. According to this analysis of academic achievement the

creation of the smaller learning community had no real impact, positively or negatively.

Equally important, the analysis of the second data set, *the attendance rate for the*

year 2000-01 and the year 2001-02 showed the rate in 2000-01 to be 95.3%, while the

attendance rate for the year 2001-02 was 94.3%. This was a decrease of approximately

1% in the attendance rates between the two years

Conversely, the results of the third data set, *the rate of athletic participation for*

the year 2000-01 and the year 2001-02, showed the rate of student participation in

athletics in 2000-01 to be 20.4%, while the participation rate for the year 2001-02 was

22.3%, which was a 9% increase in the number of students participating in athletics in the

first year of the smaller learning community.

Finally, the analysis results for the fourth and final data set, *the number of suspensions for the year 2000-01 and the year 2001-02*, showed the number of suspensions in 2000-01 to be 355, while the number of suspensions for the year 2001-02 was 493, which was an increase of 39% over the year prior to the creation of the smaller learning community. This increase in the number of student suspensions between the two school years points to a negative impact on the affective domain of the students at Cherokee High School.

Although the results are not projectable to other suburban schools that have created small learning communities, this study's results do show that for its scope and purpose, the overall measurable impact of the creation of the small learning community at Cherokee High School was mixed. The data analysis s revealed that in two of the four areas, there was an increase in the negative data (suspensions) and a decrease in the positive data (attendance). In the third data set, the Freshmen English GPA, there was a slight decrease in the GPA, the difference was so minor that it did not rise to the level of statistical significance nor was it a decrease that was of any consequence. The fourth data set, the rate of student participation in athletics did increase. It must be noted that these numbers are reflective of only a one-year period and are limited by the fact that this was an ex post facto study, which constrained the type of data to be collected to previously existing data which was accessible to the researcher.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The findings of this study help provide an initial answer to the question of whether or not smaller learning communities are effective in suburban schools. The data collected revealed that in three of the four data sets the creation of a small learning community had a detrimental effect on students, manifested as increased suspensions, lower attendance, and a slight decrease in GPA. Only in the area of athletic participation was a positive effect demonstrated by a measurable increase of student participation in athletics with an increase in the number of students participating in athletics.

In the past, small learning communities have been proven to make great strides when it comes to helping improve schooling in urban settings that are failing to provide a quality educational program. In these situations, the small learning communities have provided the students with a sense of belonging, which in turn positively impacts many deficient areas of a student's educational process. However, in the situation of this study, a suburban school, which maintains a record of high academic achievement, that sense of community lacking in urban schools, is not missing, and the suburban students do not seem to suffer from a lack of belonging. Possibly, the problems that exist in this school cannot be mitigated by the creation of a small learning community.

Future research should be conducted, but only after allowing the small learning community at Cherokee to exist for more than just one year. Allowing for the school to adjust to the new configuration for a longer period of time may reveal more measurable results on particular segments of the student population. For example, since the school is already academically achieving, future research could try to determine the effect on those

students who are "caught in the middle"; those not talented enough to receive recognition for their accomplishments or bad enough to receive attention for their misdeeds. In a school of over 2,000, there are many of these students who never really make a mark on the school community. It would be this type of student who just drifts through high school never really feeling as if he or she belongs because no one has given them the attention they need. Furthermore, surveying of teachers and students would prove to be an effective way to measure the impact of the small learning community in its attempt to reach those students who are "caught in the middle". Another area that was not addressed by this study was the level of parental involvement. This has been proven to be a key component of schools that do succeed.

Finally, in the limited scope of this study it has been shown that the creation of small learning communities at Cherokee High School has not shown the intended results at this time. Further research that would track the development of the program over a number of years might yield more positive findings, as well as, limiting the population to those students in the middle of the academic population, may show greater results in improving their performance.

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