My Do Over: A Case Study of an Intentional Focus on Relationship Building, by the School Leadership, in a Newly Formed School

Jean Marie Livingston

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MY DO OVER: A CASE STUDY OF AN INTENTIONAL FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING, BY THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, IN A NEWLY FORMED SCHOOL

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

By
Jean Marie Livingston

May 2017
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Jean Marie Livingston

2017
MY DO OVER: A CASE STUDY OF AN INTENTIONAL FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING, BY THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, IN A NEWLY FORMED SCHOOL
ABSTRACT

MY DO OVER: A CASE STUDY OF AN INTENTIONAL FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING, BY THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, IN A NEWLY FORMED SCHOOL

By

Jean Marie Livingston

May 2017

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Rick McCown

The closing of public schools is occurring each school year in cities across the country. This case study will look at one public school that endured the closure of three school buildings and the reconfiguration of the entire school district during the 2015-2016 school year. The main focus of this case study was on one building in this district and the question to be answered was, “Does an intentional focus on relationship building, by the school leadership, influence school culture and instructional practice in a newly formed school?” The literature will discuss school closures and the impact on stakeholders, grief and resilience, the importance of building relationship, leadership styles and how the Resilience Framework can be a guide through the process of closing schools. The methods used in the case study included extant data, semi-structured interviews and a reflective narrative. The extant data included field notes, anecdotal records, test scores, and observations made by me through the lens of a participant observer. The findings demonstrated that a, intentional focus on relationship building and actions aided in the
development of a positive school culture and a change in instruction. This information could be relevant to leaders who are involved in school closures and used to ease the strain of change.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all of the school communities who have experienced the loss of their school, their home, due to closures and changes in the educational landscape. This research is also dedicated my parents, Joseph and Mary Louise, my brothers, Joseph and Rick, my sister-in-law Carla and my niece Ashley. It is also dedicated to the Livingston’s and my friends who continually checked on my throughout this process and my Duquesne Cohort who watched me cry and held my hand for the last three years. Most importantly, my work is dedicated to my husband, Fred, who without his support, love and frequent motivational speeches, none of this would have been possible. I am forever grateful and thankful to him.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Rick McCown, for his guidance and support throughout this journey. Without his weekly check ins, feedback, suggestions and patience I would not have survived this process or made it to my defense. I would also like to thank Dr. Carol Parke for agreeing to be a member of my committee. I appreciate your input, feedback and time you gave to me. Finally, I must thank Dr. Fran Serenka, who has been there from the very beginning. Without her, I would never have become an administrator or gone on this doctoral adventure. You have been there every step of the way and a simple thank you doesn’t even begin to cover the gratitude I have for you and your impact in my life.

I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou
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Chapter 1: A Problem and a Problem of Practice

More and more frequently public school districts are faced with closing schools as public student enrollments decrease. School closures are impacting traditional public schools in many major cities across the United States and impacting them in serious ways. In this dissertation in practice, the general problem of school closures sets the stage for a case study focused by a problem of educational leadership practice: building relationships in a newly formed school.

The overall structure of the work follows. In the remainder of this first chapter, the general problem of school closures is examined through a review of literature. After the general problem is examined, the problem of practice that motivates the case study, how a leadership effort to build relationships in a newly formed school influenced the school’s culture and instructional practice, is addressed. Chapter 2 describes the data sources, as well as the data collection, and analysis methods used to conduct the study including extant data, semi-structured interviews, and a reflective narrative. Chapter 3 presents the findings from the case study and Chapter 4 describes the leadership agenda that has emerged from what was learned from the case study. Each chapter will begin with a brief Overview in an effort to provide the reader with a kind of “roadmap” of the material to follow.

This first chapter begins with a conceptual distinction between a problem and a problem of practice. In the present study, the former is school closures and the latter is building relationships in a newly formed school. The literature on school closures is then examined with regard to the impact of school closures, how relationships influence schools and school culture as well as the role of attributions, leadership style, and resilience. The chapter concludes with a review of the context in which the problem of educational leadership practice was addressed. The context review includes a history of the researcher who served as a participant-observer in
the case and a brief historical overview of the circumstances of the district—referred to with a pseudonym—in which the case occurred. The chapter concludes with the specification of the research question that guided the case study.

**Distinction between a Problem and a Problem of Practice**

In this section I will differentiate a Problem and a Problem of Practice. According to The Merriam-Webster Dictionary the general definition of a problem is something that is difficult to deal with: something that is a source of trouble or worry, etc. Included in the definition is a difficulty in understanding something or a feeling of not liking or wanting to do something ([www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/problem](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/problem)). When related to work in schools, problems can be disadvantaged students, classroom management, curriculum and instruction, or social justice, major themes and situations that are relevant to schools today. General problems exist throughout each and every school but when a leader wants to address a specific problem and drill down to root causes, a problem of practice emerges.

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate offers the following as a definition of a problem of practice: A Problem of Practice is as a persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in the work of a professional practitioner, the addressing of which has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience and outcomes ([http://cpedinitiative.site-ym.com](http://cpedinitiative.site-ym.com)). A problem of practice is addressed through inquiry, review of literature, incorporation of theory and the use of professional knowledge to address a problem that is specific to an organization. Rick Mintrop has done work in the field of school improvement and uses a similar framework throughout his work.
In Rick Mintrop’s recent work he uses case studies and theory as a guide to address general problems in the education system and problems of practice with current leaders in education (Mintrop, 2016). He defines a problem of practice as one that is urgent for the organization, actionable, feasible, and strategic, tied to a specific practice or set of practices and is also forward looking (Mintrop, 2016, p. 30). In Design-Based School Improvement, Mintrop introduces us to four educational leaders who identify problems in their setting and work through the improvement process to address their individual problem of practice.

The Problems of Practice of Four Educational Leaders

First we meet Christine who is the principal of a middle school which has been identified as a school that is demonstrating an increase in suspensions from school. The increase in suspensions coincided with the increase in novice teachers joining the staff (Mintrop, 2016, p. 32). Christine assembled a team of veteran teachers and novice teachers and introduced the concept of grade level teams to address classroom management. Through improvement inquiry and literature to guide their work the teachers worked together to address the behaviors.

The next leader we meet is Michelle. Michelle is an elementary school principal in a school that is racially equitable among students but the teaching staff is predominantly white. There is an achievement gap that is a concern to all of the schools in the district so a district wide committee is formed to tackle the issue. Culturally relevant material is purchased and the principals are expected to share with their staffs the material (Mintrop, p.33). Michelle has a small group of teachers willing to pilot the material and gather data. Michelle determines, through data collection and plan-do-study-act models that more structural support from the district level would increase the chance for a smooth transition and success (Mintrop, p. 226).
The third administrator we are introduced to is Eric. Eric is the assistant superintendent of his district and responsible for providing professional development for the district principals. He wants his focus to be on the process of the evaluation of teachers and improve the feedback they are giving to the teaching staff. He planned events where they would watch videos of teaching and evaluate as a group during principal meetings (Mintrop, p. 35). Eric becomes frustrated with his staff as they are not providing thoughtful feedback even after he has worked with the administrative team. Additional planning and collection of data begin to paint a better picture of how his principals learn and process the information he is disseminating. He learns, after many cycles of inquiry, he needs his coaches to assist him and that he cannot do it all alone (Mintrop, p. 214).

The final educator is Nora. Nora is a high school principal who has too many students being disrespectful and using racial slurs despite the schools efforts to highlight cultural sensitivity and awareness. Nora notices her staff often ignore student comments to each other and realizes she has to work with the staff on addressing the students as well as teaching the students (Mintrop, p. 36).

As a practicing educational leader the case studies featured in Mintrop’s book resonate strongly with my own experience. Thus, I use Mintrop’s pattern of (1) identifying the general problem and (2) describing the specific problem of practice that emerges as the educational leader examines the specific practice context.

I begin with discussing the school closure problem plaguing the public education system and weave in my personal experiences, literature, the use of improvement cycles and data collection to focus on my problem of practice, building relationships in a newly formed school to
influence school culture and instruction. In my work, as in Mintrop’s there is a constant dialogue between my specific problem of practice, literature and theory.

The problem that is the focus in my research is the problem of school closures. Pennsylvania has not been spared from the unpopular decision of closing buildings and reconfiguring schools and districts. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the historical policy, one no longer in effect, was one of the pieces of legislation that greatly influenced the need to reduce the number of traditional public schools. Charter schools and funding have also been reasons behind the reduction in the number of traditional public schools in recent years (Garnett, 2014, p.289).

NCLB, authorized by President George W. Bush, in 2001, was the federal government’s effort to address the public school system. Levels of proficiency were determined and an accountability system for public schools were established (No Child Left Behind, 2001). NCLB tied performance to funding and schools were identified as failing or successful based on high stakes tests. Schools identified as failing received a reduction in funding so staff and programs were impacted. NCLB also encouraged parent choice so parents began to choose charter schools as an option. The charter schools received their funding from the public schools which further reduced the amount of money to be spent per child in the public schools. This in turn caused schools’ enrollment to decrease, the need for teachers decreased and the number of schools needed in districts decreased (www.pacode.com).

A result of schools closing causes other problems for the entire school community. When a closure of a neighborhood school takes place, the sense of community, relationships and culture can be shattered. It could be likened to a death and the grieving process could be experienced. A school community is an anchor for many and when it is gone intentional, planned work needs to be done to re-build the loss. Milstein & Henry (2008) tell us that
“communities are about connections” (Milstein & Henry 2008, p. 19). My understanding of Milstein & Henry’s work led me to believe the implications of not addressing connections while rebuilding the new school could cause negative results. When the work environment is depressing, the morale is low, the instruction is poor, relationships are strained and student achievement does not progress. This is not the desired result.

According to the research conducted by MacNeil, Pratter & Busch (2009) we learn the principal is responsible for setting the tone of the building and that a positive school culture is necessary for teacher morale and student achievement. When working through a consolidation and reconfiguration intentional steps need to be taken to ensure relationships develop and culture and climate are constructive.

The specific problem of practice this case study is addressing, is, “does an intentional focus on relationship building, by the school leadership, influence school culture and instructional practice in a newly formed school?” The Joseph Peterson School District (pseudonym) is the focus of this work and the victim of a forced merger and then school closures. The impact of closures on the school community that make up Joseph Peterson School District and the efforts being made by one administrator in the district to intentionally focus on relationship building in an effort to improve instruction in a newly formed school are what will be highlighted.

The Joseph Peterson School District is a public school district located in Western Pennsylvania. The district is a direct result of the only forced court ordered merger that began in the early 1970’s and is currently a district being affected by charter schools. The court ordered merger began in the 1970’s and was finalized in 1981-1982 school year. The merger was the result of a lawsuit that was filed by parents on behalf of the children they believed were not
receiving the same quality in education as other local neighborhoods. Pennsylvania’s public schools are managed under local control and school boards. Unlike some states that use the county wide system to organize the public school systems, Pennsylvania schools operate through the use of local and state funds and a school board voting on decisions (www.pacode.com).

The Joseph Peterson School District is a public school that seems to be in a constant state of change. The district is one that also depends on its school board to maintain school operations and vote on changes. The most recent transformation the district has experienced is the main stage for this work. This makeover introduced the idea of closing three schools and reconfiguring the grade levels, which included the creation two kindergarten through third grade buildings, one fourth through sixth grade building, one kindergarten through eighth grade building, an alternative school and one seventh grade through twelfth grade setting. This would be a change from five kindergarten through sixth grade buildings, one building that housed seventh and eighth grade and one nine through twelfth grade setting.

Not only will this work focus on the rich history, this work will also focus on the significance of leadership, culture and the value of relationships and the influence on school climate and instruction. Improvement Inquiry, in conjunction with the Resilience Framework will be used to document intentional steps made by the administrator in an effort to intentionally focus intentionally on relationship building, culture and instruction in a newly formed school.

The context of this researcher’s work involves one of the newly created Kindergarten through Grade 3 schools that consists of children from seven communities, a staff comprised of teachers from six different buildings who were assigned based on seniority and preference and an administrator who is new to the building but has fifteen years of service in the district.
Extant data, semi-structured interviews and a reflection of my reflective narrative were used in this case study to determine if the actions taken by the administrator impacted the culture and instruction in a positive way. The review of the data indicates a foundation for a positive school culture was developed in year one and intentional efforts must continue in the upcoming years to ensure a positive culture is engrained in our school community.

In this chapter, I will discuss the literature that demonstrates how school closings impact students, staff, parents, and a school community. This work will also detail how relationships and school culture and the development of a school culture are important and influenced by the leadership. The work will then focus on a school community that has experienced the recent closure of three schools and the reconfiguration of the district. The context review will explain the history of the district, integration, unitary status and the rebirth of the district.

The case study began formally on Wednesday, January 21, 2015 when the school district school board voted to close three buildings and reconfigure the district for the 2015-2016 school year. The decision to close schools came after months of community meetings, statements of the financial concerns and listening to the members of the community insist upon change. The multiple closures created many obstacles and logistical issues that needed to be considered and planned for the movement that was to occur during the summer months of 2015. The change was needed for the survival of the district but where do we focus our efforts when so much is involved and so much is at stake?

Within any new organization, relationships are formed. My claim is that if the leadership does not intentionally focus on building positive relationships a toxic culture could be the end result and instruction and achievement will suffer. One of the statements made by Jim Collins is that it is necessary to have the right people on the right bus, in the right seats and get the wrong
people off of the bus (Collins, 2009, p. 181). When working in an organization that requires one to follow a collective bargaining agreement and place staff by preference and seniority there is potential for grouping people that are on the wrong bus. If the culture is toxic, morale is low and instruction suffers; ultimately staff and students suffer. How does an intentional focus on relationship building influence school culture and instructional practice in a newly formed school?

**Literature Review**

Chapter 1 will provide an overview of literature and how it relates to school closures, school culture and leadership. This chapter will review the impact of charter schools and the effects a school closure has on students, the staff, parents, and community members. The literature shows the importance of relationships and culture not only in schools but any organization that has experienced a crisis, grief or trauma. Also included is literature about leadership styles and the influence of leadership styles on the culture of an organization. The Resilience Framework as a guide for leadership and how the resilience factors can be utilized in an effort to reduce the stress of change and loss, recognize the grief and develop a new school culture through an intentional focus on relationship-building.

The final section of Chapter 1 is the context review. The context review begins with the history of the researcher and the district. It is necessary to acknowledge the history of the researcher and the district as it sets the stage for the case study. The context review addresses the importance of integration and the definition of unitary status. The context review then demonstrates how the district prepared for the change, how the community was involved in the change and what happened in one particular setting once the closures happened.
School closures

School closures, reconfigurations and consolidations are nothing new to the American education system. Since the early 1900’s, African Americans have been fighting segregation in education. The funding for both the black and white segregated schools primarily came from state and local governments but much of the money raised was given to white schools and only a limited amount of the money was given to fund the black schools. From 1910 through the 1930’s African Americans raised their own money to build their own schools through taxes and donations. African Americans had an education system in place that was producing educated children. Even though there was academic progress, the funding and facilities were not equal to what their white counterparts were provided. White government leaders made the decisions about how funding would be disseminated. The lack of equal funding hindered the advancement of status, economic growth or academic achievement of African Americans (Spring, 2011, pp. 220-222). The Joseph Peterson School District is a direct result of a ten year legal battle that occurred to address the unequal educational opportunities. This is further explained throughout the context review of this work.

Supreme Court and federal government decisions have hindered progress that was being made towards the education system being integrated. The funding involved with the integration movement has been reduced which has led many districts to return to neighborhood-based school assignment policies, leading to increases in racial imbalance and racial isolation (An & Gamoran, 2009; Clotfelter, Vigdor, & Ladd, 2006; Mickelson, 2005; Reardon et al, 2012). Federal policies, which helped spur desegregation in the 1960s by tying federal funds to compliance with nondiscrimination laws (Cascio et al, 2010), have increasingly favored accountability policies and turned a blind eye to school segregation (Orfield & Lee, 2007). Also,
the recent expansion of school choice (Orfield et al, 2002); suggests that families choose charter, magnet, and other choice schools in ways that exacerbate racial imbalance and isolation (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; Saporito & Sohoni, 2006; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008). This is the current situation in the Joseph Peterson School District and school closures have occurred due to the number of parents choosing charter schools and a decline in enrollment.

Many school closures occur in poverty stricken neighborhoods. Schools in low-income communities remain highly unequal in terms of funding, qualified teachers, and curriculum. This has the potential to cause long term financial and community effects. If it is rectified the results could be positive but if left unaddressed the financial and community effects could be debilitating. Research continues to demonstrate there are disparities among schools depending on where they are located. Wealthier districts tend to attract and retain students and parents that fight for student achievement and resources, both material and human, that will advance academic growth. High performing schools that produce high achieving students create opportunities to further education and economic growth. The parents also provide basic necessities such as food, shelter, medical care and parent involvement. Poorer neighborhoods typically do not have strong schools, resources, or parent involvement that can assist with moving children academically and economically. As a consequence, conditions are likely to get even worse in the immediate future (Orfield, 2009). Many school districts are faced with the unpopular decision of closing schools because of the increase in school options for parents.

**Charter school impact**

The charter school movement and options other than traditional public schools are one of the factors that are the cause of school closures, particularly in urban areas (Garnett, 2014, p. 289). No Child Left Behind was a driving force behind the charter school because it tied funding
to test scores. When students in public schools did not acquire proficiency on state examinations and were identified as a failing school, funding was decreased and parents were given the opportunity to choose where their child attended school (Garnett, 2014, p. 302). Common sense dictates that parents would not choose to send their child to a failing school so many opted for charter schools. This is another effect the Joseph Peterson School District has experienced. The return to neighborhood schools, poor test scores and the increase in options directly impacted the enrollment and funding for the Joseph Peterson School District.

No Child Left Behind encouraged options for parents so the closure of traditional public schools is becoming routine. In the 2010-2011 school year over 1,000 public schools in the United States were closed (Garnett, 2014, p. 290). The massive numbers of school closures is what prompted public school activists and parents to meet with Arne Duncan, then United States Secretary of Education, and demand an immediate ban on public school closures (Garnett, 2014, p. 290). Even though a ban was not possible, the meeting did alert many to the negative impacts school closures are causing to public schools and communities. Unfortunately the Joseph Peterson School District continues to rebuild after the latest school changes.

**School closures’ impact on students**

Research says closing schools is one of the most controversial actions a district can take (Engberg et al., 2012). If done properly the closure of a school can rejuvenate a district. However, if not done properly the closure can leave children, parents, teachers and community at risk. Something to consider when closing a school is the impact to the community, families, students and staff. A closure can negatively impact a community, families, students and staff and if not properly planned for can have devastating long term effects. When it comes to opposition to school closures unfortunately there is evidence that situations for children do not
improve after a closure. A study of the Chicago school system demonstrated no improvement in test scores when a consolidation occurred. This study suggested that students who transferred out of their existing high school to another high did nothing for student achievement. The data from this study “suggested that transferring students to new schools disrupted their relationships with teachers. Students also reported differing academic norms, routines, and expectations in the new schools, which could create adverse learning effects” (Engberg, J., Gill, B., Zamarro, G., & Zimmer, R. 190). Fortunately, some of the baseline data gathered through the 2015-2016 G-RADE scores indicated growth was made by students as demonstrated in Figure 1. The G-RADE is the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation tool used to provide evidence about each student’s reading ability. The assessment is administered three times per year and assesses six different components of reading. The teacher gains valuable information about which students need intervention and which students have mastered certain literacy skill. The six subtests include word reading, sentence comprehension, word meaning, passage comprehension, vocabulary and listening comprehension (http://www.pearsonassessments.com/learningassessments).

Another study that focused on students was conducted at an urban high school that experienced a closure. The students are the ones sometimes overlooked but in the study conducted by Kirshner and Pozzoboni, future closures and consolidations should consider the voice of the children. The children in this study attended Jefferson (pseudonym) High School, a large urban district that had low test scores, ninety two percent of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch and the population consisted of African American and Latino students. It was decided that Jefferson would close and be re-opened after a year after a “rescue mission” was complete. The administration thought they were saving the students but in listening to the students, teachers and parent voices different results were found. A main response from the
students was that they did not want to lose the connections they had with staff members and felt the decision was made by placing blame on them. The students knew things were not perfect but they valued their school and the teachers because of the relationships. The interviewed students were concerned they would not find that level of relationships in another setting. This study is another example of the importance of relationships. The administration and the board, the leadership, thought they were doing what was best for the students by providing another school setting for the students but in the minds of the students they believed they were targeted and their voice was ignored. The importance and necessity of building relationships with all stakeholders is a key to success. The voice of the students in the Joseph Peterson School District was not considered throughout this closure process but students in the Kindergarten through third grade building I am in have told me they love that they don’t have to eat and have gym in the same room, they like the uniforms because they don’t have to think about what they are going to wear and they love how bright and beautiful the building is. One teacher had her students write letters to me and one let me know that I have good potential as a principal and a second child shared she feel I did a really good job of picking the best teachers. Students and staff have made connections and continue to work on relationships.

School closures’ impact on staff

A study conducted in Arkansas yielded interesting results. The study focused on those immediately impacted by the closures; administrators, students and staff. Nitta, Holley & Wrobel (2010) noted that during a closure students tended to adapt better to the change than did the teachers. The teachers in this study reported they had difficulty with building relationships in the new setting with colleagues and students and this, at times, caused stress (Nitta, Holley & Wrobel, 2010, p.3). The positive that teachers did report was the opportunity for increased
professional development and an improvement in working conditions. Through this phenomenological study the teachers repeatedly reported that collegial relationships were difficult to make in the new setting after the consolidation. The report did not make mention of any type of team building activities or transition activities for staff but this study reinforces the need for intentional actions that promote building relationships.

The information presented by Quentin Brummet who believes the impact, positive and negative, is experienced by both students and teachers (Brummet, 2014). When schools close and teachers and students are redistributed to receiving schools the potential is there for improved achievement and test scores. When students and teachers from poor performing schools are reassigned to higher performing schools and exposed to higher performing students and instruction the likelihood of increased test scores and instruction occurs (Brummet, 2014, p. 108). Even though there is evidence of academic improvement the impact of relationships is again mentioned in Brummet’s work. He states, “Roughly 40% of students surveyed reported they felt a sense of loss or that friendships and relationships were disrupted by the displacement” (Brummet, 2014, p. 109). Worrying about students impacts the teachers.

The other impact on teachers, as mentioned in Brummet’s work, is that after closures and reassignments, some teachers decide to leave the profession. The teachers get reassigned to schools throughout the district and have no familiarity with the existing staff, parents and students and it causes a situation that is unproductive for the incoming staff member (Brummet, 2014, p. 110). Maybe the outcome would be different if there was an intentional focus on relationship building?
School closures’ impact on parents

Parents are an essential piece of a school’s culture. According to Richard Valencia (1984) parent support diminishing for public schools is a potential outcome of a school closure that can have an upsetting ripple effect. Parents may become disenfranchised from the new school. They may decide to no longer participate in school events or they may no longer have the ability to get to the new school. A lack of parent participation could lead to a community that no longer supports public education. If participation in parent events and after school activities becomes difficult teacher-student-parent relationships cannot be established. If parents are unable to be present at school functions this can lead to disengagement. The parents could also choose to find other schooling options for their children in an effort to avoid the school closure altogether (Valencia, 1984, p.12). There are arguments to support parent needs when deciding to close schools as made evident in the Joseph Peterson School District. There have been parents who have chosen charter schools for the 2016-2017 and I called them to find out why they were leaving. The overwhelming response was due to location of the newly formed school and the inability to get here easily. A charter school opened up within walking distance of their community and this was the response from parents in two different communities.

Garnett (2014), in her article, presents information that neighborhood schools are a place where parents network and build their own social network (p. 325). The social piece for parents allows the parents to be invested in the local school community. Garnett goes on to say that if a neighborhood is without its school the community members are deprived of their community institution (p. 297). The relationships are disrupted.

In Wanda Warner’s work with her colleagues (Warner, Brown, Lindle, 2010) relationships with parents and community is a major facet to a successful change to a school
district. The district their work focused on experienced closures in the past and with another closure looming the parents and community did not want history to repeat itself (Warner, Brown, Lindle, 2010, p. 309). The administration heard the concerns of the public and devised a task force to work with them through the closure and changes. The recommendation of which school to close and which school to use was presented to the board for a vote after months of data collection. The board did not vote in favor of the task force’s recommendation but the administration honored the work of the task force by continuing working with them through the transition (p.311). The transition team worked together to be transparent with the progress, provide continual updates to the communities and offer tours and information to ease the concerns throughout the closure. In the end, the transition proved to be successful because of the intentional focus on opportunities for relationship building. Valencia, Garnett and Warner agree the public school decision makers cannot ignore the parent and community voice throughout the planning process and even after a decision is made.

School closures’ impact on community

A school is an important part of a community. For some staff, parents, children and community members, a school may be their anchor. The school may even be viewed as a permanent address for some. If that permanent address is removed and the students, parents, staff and community don’t have something to identify with there can be a feeling of emptiness (Noddings, 2002, p.446). A school closure can result in a “permanent address” being eliminated resulting in feelings of loss.

The other loss that can be created by a school closure is the loss of potential residents and the invitation for crime. There are three things that can be a negative outcome for a neighborhood that has an empty school building. The first outcome could be is that an empty
building demonstrates there are problems in the community and the neighborhood is in a decline. Crime could occur; vacant buildings can indicate there is no reason to live in that neighborhood which would impact real estate. This could result in a second problem which could lead to residents feeling no one cares about them and devastate a community and its culture. The third repercussion of a school closure could be that an anchor in the community is removed (Garnett, 2014, p. 316). A community cannot thrive with empty buildings and the loss of an institution.

The loss of identity is a reality for many small urban communities and the community members can feel “alienated and fractured” (Warner, Brown, & Lindle, 2010). Any community that loses its school to a closure or consolidation often times fear their voice will be lost and their concerns and struggles will be ignored (Warner et al., 2010). Garnett adds to the identity argument by stating that if charter schools occupy a building in the neighborhood where the traditional public school had previously been it brings in children that are not from the neighborhood and sends neighborhood children out of their own community to schools in other areas. Again, this can be another disruption to relationships Garnett, 2014, p. 297). In order to limit the negative consequences of a closure, relationships need to come first.

**Relationships and culture**

“Culture is defined as ‘an integrated system of meanings, values, and standards of conduct by which a people of a society live and which is transmitted between generations through socialization’” (Warner et al., 2010).

Turan and Bektas (2013) let us know that “culture is a complex process that involves many variables, such as socialization, rituals, language, authority, economy, technology, and influence” and “emerges as a product of the interaction of many dimensions” (Turan & Bektas, 2013, p.155). This study also highlights the importance of the administrator and the leadership
practices that are used. “Good leaders have the power to change organizations, while better leaders have the power to change people” (Turan & Bektas, 2013, p.157). The key to getting people to change is through building relationships, interacting with stakeholders and developing the vision with the stakeholders instead of imposing it on the staff. This study focused on primary teachers in Turkey and their perceptions of the school leader and the impact on school culture. The results once again demonstrated that positive school culture, teacher perceptions and the art of building relationships is the key component to the development of a positive school culture. This study also reinforced the idea that “creating a school culture is the responsibility of the school leader” (Turan & Bektas, 2013, p.162).

According to the Odhiambo and Hii (2012) article the principal of a school is the individual that sets the tone for the building. The positive relationships the principal builds with the staff, parents and students is a necessity when striving to develop a strong, positive school community. An effective school leader can lead to the, “improvement, development and sustainability of success” (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012, p.233). The relationship building must encompass two features; actions and words and the actions and words must be demonstrated to staff, parents and students (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012, p.235). The result of building relationships through positive words and follow through of actions then has a ripple effect of increasing the level of trust and willingness to work as a team because the stakeholders know there is care and support for them and the importance of building a strong community permeates throughout the school (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012, p. 239).

We are learning that teacher and administrator attitudes impact school culture and school community. The article continues to support the idea of building relationships and goes as far to say that, “data revealed how the relationship between the principal and parents helps to build a
school’s reputation within the wider community” (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012, p.241). This leads to the development of the school’s culture. When it is common knowledge in the community the principal has relationships and expectations and the staff, parents and students are part of the team the culture of the building reflects those ideals. The Adams, Forsyth and Mitchell (2009) article reinforces the idea of building collaborative relationships and trust. The opportunities and relationship building should be intentional and well planned. Nothing should be left to chance; there must be thought and purposeful planning put into effect (Adams, Forsyth & Mitchell, 2009, p.5).

MacNeil, Pratter & Busch (2009) make the claims that “focusing on development of the school’s culture as a learning environment is fundamental to improved teacher morale and student achievement (MacNeil, Pratter & Busch, 2009, p. 74) and” real and sustained change is more readily achieved by first changing the culture of the school, rather than by simply changing the structures of the way the school operates and functions (MacNeil, Pratter & Busch, 2009, p. 74). A school leader or a leader in any organization must be aware of the influence of personalities and intentionally focus on relationship building in an effort to influence culture and practice especially if relationships are fractured.

**Attribution Theory**

During a crisis or a loss attributes are attached to the experience. This in turn influences the reputation towards the workplace. Emotions are assigned to an experience and anger and sympathy are key emotions of the Attribution Theory (Coombs, 2007, p. 165). When a crisis is negative, people look for who they should blame. If the blame is placed directly on the organization the stakeholders can become angry and speak negatively. This will lead to a negative reputation and the stakeholders ultimately end up suffering. It is of upmost importance
to keep the stakeholders apprised of the steps being taken and communicating what is happening (Coombs, 2007, p. 165). These are efforts that can be made by the leaders in management in an effort to minimize the crisis.

The goal is to keep employees positive through the experience in order to keep production increasing. If a crisis is handled well in the past then the fear that comes with change is minimized because stakeholders can predict the outcome. On the flip side, if crises in the past were not handled well, fear will spike and the end result will not be positive (Coombs, 2007, p. 169). The organization has the potential to not recover. When the Attribution Theory is compared to the Resilience Framework there is common ground. The Attribution Theory promotes showing care for the stakeholders, working together to improve the reputation and the organization, communicate progress and rely on relationships. There is overlap throughout the Attribution Theory and Resilience Framework which ultimately influences the culture of an organization.

Another factor to consider is locus of control. The study by Lam & Mizerski (2005) focused on locus of control and the power of word-of-mouth communication. The importance of relationships and communication transcends through the business world and can be applied to the school community. When a product is being discussed through word-of-mouth the product can be a success or a flop based on what is said and who is communicating the opinions. The same can be said for schools. In a time when traditional public schools have a great deal of competition word-of-mouth can influence a parent’s decision. Word-of-mouth is a powerful marketing tool and teachers and parents can promote or discourage attendance in their setting (Lam & Mizerski, 2005, p.215). Parents are impacted by word-of-mouth tactics and the decline of enrollment in the Joseph Peterson School District is influenced by the stories that are shared
throughout the community. In the world of competition for students a district could use word-of-mouth strategies to their advantage or not solely rely on word-of-mouth and aggressively seek parents and students who would positively promote the image of the district.

**Relationships and the workplace**

The importance of relationships and culture are not limited to the school environment. Any organization that wants to be successful and productive relies heavily on relationships and the educational world can learn lessons from the business world. The business world, like schools, suffers crisis situations and is forced to recover from the event. Businesses suffer trauma and loss, too.

According to the work of W. Timothy Coombs (2007) a crisis can harm the reputation of a group and the stakeholders’ interactions and it is “ethical” to address the well-being of the stakeholders first (Coombs, 2007, p. 165). The reputation of the organization after a crisis will depend on the treatment of the stakeholders before, during and after the crisis. There are many benefits to the business if the reputation is positive. Those include the return of customers, the attraction of top employers, competition will increase, the financial situation will improve and positive comments by the employer, employees and customers will extend far beyond the community (Coombs, 2007, p. 164). A school closure is a crisis, but if the employees are attended to by the employer through positive relationships and the management of the crisis the end result can be positive for all. The finances can improve if students return from the charter schools to a traditional public school setting. When students return, there will be a need for the district to hire new staff to meet the needs of the growing school population. High quality teachers will be attracted to apply and they will offer high quality instruction which will improve student achievement. When a district reflects high student achievement, the reputation of the
organization improves and damaged relationships can begin to mend. The first step, though, is taking the necessary steps to build relationships that have been strained during the closure process.

**Recovering damaged relationships**

Dirks, Lewicki & Zaheer (2009) refer to a crisis or traumatic event as a “transgression”. When a transgression occurs and there are shifts from what was once positive, stakeholders look to place blame. Trust, negative affect and negative exchanges can occur after a transgression. This can lead to negative feelings and actions towards the organization by the stakeholders. A positive exchange can begin to turn the tide and shift the relationship (Dirks, Lewicki & Zaheer, 2009, p. 70). Trust is a main factor in the repair process.

In a crisis situation or a traumatic experience relationships can be damaged but through the repair process there are steps that can be taken to begin the efforts to repair trust and move forward as a team. Included in their repair process are attributional process, social equilibrium process and structural process. The attributional process focuses on repairing relationships through “apologies and penance”, the social equilibrium process focuses on the social aspect of the process and the interpersonal while the structural process focuses on establishing systems and incentives that can help avoid transgressions in the future (Dirks, Lewicki & Zaheer, 2009, p.72). The social equilibrium is an effort to stabilize the equilibrium of an organization so the balance can be restored. The repair work can be accomplished by establishing norms and rituals of the organization (p.72). The structural process notes that the, “transgressions leads to breakdown in positive exchange and increase in negative exchange” (p.72). Structures to assist with the repair after a transgression include monitoring, incentives, policies, procedures and contracts (p.73).
Many of the suggestions important to repairing damaged relationships are found in the Resilience Framework.

To continue the efforts to repair the trust information must be given by the perceived violator of the trust and prove to the wronged party that true, honest steps are being taken to repair the relationship (Dirks, Lewicki & Zaheer, 2009, p.71). As demonstrated in Coombs’ Attribution Theory work emotions are assigned to an experience. In order to return the organization to a positive level the “social equilibrium” of the organization must be re-established. Rituals and norms must be revisited and highlighted in the process of repairing relationships (Dirks, Lewicki & Zaheer, 2009, p.72). Peterson & Deal argue that norms and rituals are necessary parts to be included in a positive school culture. This rings true for business organizations too. Trust needs to become a norm and expectation in the organization. Trust needs to become part of the fabric of the culture or it will quickly dissolve and lack of trust in management, leadership and the organization will re-emerge (Dirks, Lewicki & Zaheer, 2009, p.74). Trust is built through relationships and trust is an important development in the culture of the organization.

**Staff and the development of culture**

As has been mentioned numerous times, relationships are important to organizations and if the relationships are broken it is necessary to take steps to repair what has been broken. The recurring theme that continues to be present throughout this work is that of trust and relationships. Trust is a key piece of relationships in the workplace and this fosters the culture in the workplace. Since all workplaces of all have varying personalities that impact the development of culture it is important to recognize the various personalities and intentional focus on things that will foster positive exchanges.
On any given teaching staff there are typically four types of teacher. According to Muhammad (2009), a staff member can be identified as a Fundamentalist, Believer, Tweener, or a Survivor. A teaching staff needs a balance but if the staff is comprised of too many toxic individuals, efforts towards building a positive school climate can be difficult. The group that is most likely to sabotage change efforts are the Fundamentalists. To change a toxic culture the Fundamentalists on the staff must be identified and addressed.

There are four levels of Fundamentalists, Level One, Level Two, Level Three and Level Four. A Level One Fundamentalist will continue to resist change until they are provided with the rationale and data to prove why change is needed (Muhammad, 2009, p. 87). A Level Two Fundamentalist has a need to trust the leader’s judgment and skills. This staff member relies heavily of relationships. A Level Three Fundamentalist is one who will, “resist change because they are unsure if the change will cause them more stress, and perhaps still not achieve a better result than their current methodology” (Muhammad, 2009, p.92). They are not unwilling to change but the Level Three Fundamentalist needs to be shown the steps and have the time to process the changes and work with others through the change.

The Level Four Fundamentalist, “may refuse to change because change may mean admitting to failure” (Muhammad, 2009, p.95). If relationships and trust cannot motivate a person to change then it is best for the administrator to take the necessary steps to document actions and use the disciplinary process to remove the teacher from the staff. It is interesting to note that one of the participants in the semi-structured interviews referenced the four types of people you can have on your staff and the significance of dealing with them accordingly.

Ferris, Linden, Munyon, Summers, Basik & Buckley (2010) focus on some ideas that are used in the business world but can also be shared in the educational setting. The ideas of trust,
support and respect are needed to make an organization function. As trust, support, and respect increase, the commitment of the stakeholders to each other and the organization improves (Ferris, Linden, Munyon, Summers, Basik & Buckley, 2010, p. 1389). When the commitment increases, the reputation of the organization improves and this becomes visible to those outside of the organization (p. 1393). When there is a positive work environment, the culture improves.

The other part of their work discusses the importance of the work relationship and how the relationships within the organization dictate how the culture will evolve. Work relationships provide mentoring and a social network. Mentoring, in an organization other than a school and also a school, provides coaching, protection, role modeling, advice, and friendship. This enhances trust, commitment, loyalty and support (p. 1383). These are all components of the Resilience Framework that increase resilience. The Resilience Framework maintains that there are steps that can be taken to strengthen resilience (Knight, 2007, p. 547). The social network that blossoms in a work place also enhances relationships, trust and is a way to build strong bonds (p.1383-1384). When these are in place the tenets of the Resilience Framework are enhanced and the goals of an organization can be met. The first year of the newly formed school came with obstacles but bonds were slowly developed.

A step in creating a healthy culture is a clear focus and working towards a company goal. The idea of having clear goals is highlighted as a way to have a successful school environment. The other important piece to this is to use data and evidence to prove to the doubters there is a need for change (Muhammad, 2009, p.102). These are also ideas supported by Peterson and Deal.

Kent D. Peterson and Terrence E. Deal (2002) discuss their work around leadership and culture in their book, *The Shaping School Culture Fieldbook*. The conclusions they arrive at are
aligned to the work of others by their belief that school culture is crucial to student success, administrators are responsible for shaping the culture and a toxic culture can destroy staff morale (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 87). They also promote the ideas of intentional actions a leader can take to ensure a positive school culture and an effort to minimize the toxic staff members who aim to sabotage. The intentional steps include communicating core values in words and actions, honor and recognize the staff members, who are making a difference, observe rituals and traditions, speak clearly about the mission of the school and take time to celebrate success (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p.88). This first year as a newly formed school we did attempt to take the intentional steps as seen in the Anchor Events. These are all ideas supported by Muhammad and the Resilience Framework that can be used in a school community or transferred to a business organization.

In addition to Muhammad supporting the ideas, Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008) have determined there are four things leaders can do to negate the toxic and increase the positive in a school culture. The reoccurring themes are building a vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning programs (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008, p.30). The Resilience Framework can be demonstrated in these four ideas through the factors of providing opportunities for meaningful participation (building a vision and setting directions) increasing bonding (understanding and developing people), setting clear and consistent boundaries (managing the teaching and learning programs) teaching life skills (building a vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization), and managing the teaching and learning programs, providing care and support (understanding and developing people) and setting high and realistic expectations (redesigning the organization). The cornerstone to changing a school culture is leadership and a focus on relationships.
Leadership Styles

A closure in any organization can be divisive and difficult. “Negative feelings about consolidation can be mitigated when leaders actively attempt to understand community cultures and actively seek to involve parents and community members in the process (Howley, Johnson & Petrie, 2011, p.8). Not many individuals want to make such an unpopular decision and many do not want to be impacted by an unpopular decision but change must happen. Change will be experienced by most of us and Michael Fullan (2011) presents some ways to accept change and ride the wave of uncertainty that accompanies changes that take place in organizations.

One of the ideas a leader must recognize immediately is the possibility of and “implementation dip” (Fullan, 2011, p. 40). This means there will be a dip in how the new company, organization or school functions within the first year. There is fear of the unknown and until you are part of the new organization stakeholders are not sure of their new role. The suggestion is to take the time to build relationships, focus on the emotional bonds and pay attention to the people (p. 41). Once again, the reoccurring theme of building relationships presents itself, but how does this happen and who leads successfully through change? A combination of leadership skills is necessary to bridge the feelings of uncertainty and lead a smooth transition.

Adults can be resistant to change but if shifts are to occur, it is best to learn how to motivate adult learners to learn something new. Fullan reminds us that resistance is a normal part of the process. A skilled leader will use that resistance to the advantage of the newly formed organization (Fullan, 2011, p. 43). Motivating adults involves the art of building relationships. Thoms (2001) tells us adult learners need to feel their voice is being heard and there is an immediate benefit to them in order for them to be actively involved in the process. Thoms also
offers that leaders know that experiences and two-way communication are important (Thoms, 2001). Having open communication, building relationships and learning from each other’s experiences are themes that can be found when it comes to change and building a school community that produces excellent outcomes, engages parents and supports teachers in their professional growth and development. Building relationships and having positive connections are cornerstones when it comes to community building. “Communities are about connections” (Milstein & Henry, 2008, p.19). A school leader can influence connections and the building of community and culture.

According to the James Griffith (2001) article there are six types of leadership styles an administrator can model themselves after. They are Master Teacher, Administrative Agent, Gamesman/Politician, School Manager, Maintenance Manager and Missionary. The Master Teacher is considered an instructional leader who is visible in the classrooms and provides feedback to improve instruction. An Administrative Agent is the leader who is concerned with instruction, the daily activities and test scores. There is not much emphasis on the human side. The Gamesman/Politician is concerned with pleasing parents and community members. The School Manager budgets properly, maintains order, complies with curriculum directives and knows the community hierarchy. The Maintenance Manager has no concern with curriculum and instruction. Their concern is that the building does not have discipline issues. The Missionary’s main focus is the climate of the building, relationships with parents, community and staff and providing a place where it is safe to take risks (Griffith, 2001, p. 163).

There are traits of leadership styles that overarch with one another due to the focus on building relationships. Authentic leaders conduct actions that are for the good of the entire group and not only the leader. A Moral leader uses personal stories and the art of mutual relationships
to lead. The Distributive leader leads by building relationships and empowering the staff and the Transformational leader intentionally strengthens relationships in an effort to improve the culture of the school.

An overarching theme that continues to reappear is building relationships. A leader who is fraudulent and insincere in delivery of information will be discovered, the initiative will fail and credibility will be damaged which could have long term effects. Both the moral leader and authentic leader focus on using personal stories and relationship building. Moral leadership theory relies on the leader knowing oneself and having life experiences with making decisions that positively impact a group and not just the leader. A moral leader is one who has the final outcome as the center of their attention and not personal gain (Hannah et al., 2005). Moral leadership relies on mutual relationships between the leaders and the followers.

A distributive leader takes on the belief that there are leaders throughout the building who are not necessarily the building administrator who can influence change. Leaders can come in many forms, informal and formal. By empowering staff members and allowing them to share their strengths, improvement for the school can occur. Empowering staff members come through relationship building.

There are several criteria that are identified as essential for school improvement and instructional leadership according to Spillane, Halverson and Diamond. They are: constructing and selling an instructional vision; building norms of trust, collaboration, and academic press; supporting teacher development; and monitoring instruction and innovation (Firestone & Corbett, 1988; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Sheppard, 1996). The Resilience Framework also aligns with this.
The Alma Harris (2004) article shares the same ideas as the Spillane article. The goal of distributive leadership is to build capacity and do this by having the teachers work together and share their expertise. We want to maximize teacher expertise and use teacher strengths to become experts by working together. The networking tends to build positive relationships, promote leadership within the teachers, increase staff morale and develop learning communities within the building (Harris, 2004).

The transformational leader is a leader who wants to transform a building and its culture must be committed to client service, have a detailed vision and use a shared decision making process (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p.5). When it comes to problem solving and goal setting the transformational leader uses the people’s strengths and sets explicit goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p.6). The transformational leader focuses on strengthening relationships when the goal is to change and improve a school culture. This type of leader uses a variety of methods, “to stimulate and reinforce cultural change, fostered staff development, engaged in direct and frequent communication about cultural norms, values and belief, shared power and responsibility with others” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p.22). We may not have a clearly established school culture at the end of the first year of a newly formed school but we are taking the correct measures in the development of a positive culture.

Transformative leadership agrees with distributive leadership in the sense that to be a leader does not necessarily come from a title. Many times leadership comes from relationships and a team working together to make changes that are for the good of the organization (Dinham, 2005, p.340). Transformational leaders transform an organization through trust, collaboration and commitment and by having ideals such as: “common vision”, “mission”, “empowerment”, “beliefs”, “values”, “engagement”, “commitment”, “learning community”, and “ownership”
(Dinham, 2005, p.340). The transformational leader is also influential in transforming the culture of the setting. We are reminded by Leithwood and Jantzi of similar notions. It is their belief that leadership does not come by way of a title but through actions. The actions they describe align with Dinham but also follow suit with other types of leadership styles.

Transformative leaders are informed and committed to personal growth (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p. 113). The model that Leithwood developed, “describes transformational leadership along six dimensions: building school vision and goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; symbolizing professional practices and values; demonstrating high performance expectations; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood et al., 1999). Each of the dimensions is broken down into additional descriptions and actions.

The vision, or the purpose, brings together the local school building needs and the goals of the district. This allows for the building and staff to take on its own personality. The culture equals the norms, values, beliefs and assumptions that shape members decisions and practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). None of this can take place without relationships. The Joseph Peterson School District has broken relationships and a continued effort by leaders must be made to repair relationships. The Resilience Framework can support these efforts.

Resilience Framework: Nan Henderson and the Resilience Model

In this section of my work I want to demonstrate how the Resilience Framework can be adapted to be used with adults when it is typically referenced when working with children. I want to recognize the changes the school community experienced were devastating and show how the Resilience Model we typically use when working with children who have experienced grief and loss can be translated to adults who have experienced grief and loss; the loss of
relationships and the loss of the buildings they called home for years. I will attempt to demonstrate in the proposed methods chapter how I have focused on the themes of the Resilience Framework and woven those ideas throughout my intentional focus on relationship-building.

In the *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (2003) resilience has been defined as, “the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.” A school closure and reconfiguration is a misfortune, a trauma, a change that impacts staff, parents, students and community. Nan Henderson and The Resilience Model (Nan Henderson’s Resilience Wheel 2003 Retrieved from www.hopeworks.org/wpcontent/uploads/2010/09/ResiliencyWheel.pdf) focuses on building resiliency in the environment through providing opportunities for meaningful participation, setting and communicating high and clear expectations bonding, and providing care and support. It also demonstrates that in order to mitigate risk factors in the environment one should increase prosocial bonding, set clear and consistent boundaries and teach “life skills”.
Figure 1. Nan Henderson’s Resilience Wheel (Retrieved from www.hopeworks.org/wpcontent/uploads/2010/09/ResiliencyWheel.pdf)

An administrator can use these six pieces of the wheel; teach life skills, provide care and support, set and communicate high and realistic expectations, set clear and consistent boundaries, provide opportunities for meaningful participation and increasing bonding or connectedness, when structuring the school calendar, professional development opportunities and the physical environment of the school.

Milstein & Henry (2008) recommend that challenges be addressed in a positive way and should include creating a sense of belonging, having shared values and beliefs, creating an environment that supports everyone and having common goals that benefit everyone (Milstein & Henry, 2008, p.20). A school closure, a challenge, can provide the opportunity for relationships to be developed and for the end result to benefit all stakeholders.
Cecily Knight’s Resilience Framework supports Nan Henderson’s Resilience Framework and idea that schools and teachers can increase a student’s resilience but I am proposing the resilience of a staff can be strengthened too. Strengthened by providing a sense of identity, social competence and building stable relationships (Knight, 2007, p. 547). Knight states that if the teacher provides opportunities to be futures oriented, stresses the importance being a problem solver, be critically reflective and learning how to be adaptive to change (Knight, 2007, p.548) students’ resilience will be strengthened. As an administrator if I provide opportunities to be futures oriented, a problem solver, and critically reflective through leadership, the staff should adjust positively to the changes.

In Paul Tough’s work (2012), he discusses the medical effects of resilience and how protective factors can assist with overcoming the damage of poverty and aid with avoiding negative family history from repeating itself (Tough, 2012, p. 38). When protective factors are a focus both children and adults can benefit (Tough, 2012, p. 39). In schools, resilience is something that can be taught and resilience is a factor in teacher success too.

According to the work of Gu and Day (2013) teacher resilience is related to school leadership and relationships. The teachers in this study reported that working conditions were considered negative when the relationships with leaders, student behavior and parent support were negative (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 28) but when relationships with leadership and colleagues was promoted and positive there was a positive feeling about the workplace and resilience was increased (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 29). The study demonstrated that there is a “benefit from the support of strong school leadership and the collaborative school cultures which good leaders create, shape and transform” (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 30) and that a positive work environment
assisted with building “resilience, efficacy and commitment” (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 30) to the school and students.

One of the key elements related to strengthening resilience is building strong relationships. Some of the things that should be taught are to be optimistic, learn to be a problem solver, use critical reflection and be flexible (Knight, 2007, p.548) and these are skills that can be woven into daily life of a school community. The strengthening of resilience can be a component to a smooth transition. Not only can resilience improve the teachers’ mind set but many of the ideas proposed in the resilience model tie directly into school culture components.

According to Nel Noddings (2002) a mutual relationship of care and resilience only works when all pieces of the relationship are working together. The relationship grows as all parties contribute and one of the ways relationships grow is through personal experiences, story sharing and relationship building (Noddings, 2002, p.442). The history of the researcher and the history of the district are main reasons a focus on relationships combined with resilience are so vital to this work.

A study conducted by Sue Howard and Bruce Johnson (2004) in Australia focused on teacher stress and burnout. Some of the findings included that if protective factors were provided by the administrator the staff reported fewer incidents of burnout and stress. The main idea behind the Resilience Model is providing and strengthening protective factors. The study goes on to say that some of the factors that contributed to the stress and burnout were problems with administration/management and poor working conditions (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p. 400). Also included is the idea that if teachers begin to experience stress and burnout they may resort to unhealthy means to deal with the stress and burnout. When this happened there is risk for poor health, poor work attendance, poor self-image and poor relationships (Howard &
Johnson, 2004, p. 401). When relationships are negative or damaged the work place has the potential to become negative. The study revealed that when the staff had supportive leaders the teachers experienced fewer incidents of stress and burnout (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p. 412).

Another study conducted in Western Australia supports the Howard and Johnson work. The team of Keith Punch and Elizabeth Tuetteman (1996) found through their research that there are four factors that lead to teacher stress but stress can be reduced when the administrator provides support and acknowledges work teachers do (Punch & Tuetteman, 1996, p. 63). The study concluded that when support and recognize are deliberately and intentionally provided to the teachers the work environment is positive and teacher stress is alleviated (Punch & Tuetteman, 1996, p. 72). The Joseph Peterson School District has survived years of closures, reconfigurations and changes without much of an intentional focus relationship-building among colleagues. This time around, the researcher was determined to do things differently.

**Context Review**

The context review will set the stage with a brief discussion of my history in education and how I came to be a participant observer in this case study. I was able to emerge myself in the context and work through the problem of practice with the staff. The context review will also highlight the rich history of the district and the importance of integration. Following the discussion of the integration, unitary status will be defined and the Plan for Excellence and the 2014 Plan for excellence will be outlined. Finally the context review will close with the beginning of a new district and a new school.
History of the researcher

The history of the researcher, my history, is necessary to include in the context review. It allows the reader to see how I came to be a participant observer in this case study and shows how this particular context created the perfect problem of practice for me to address. I have been a principal in two districts, and three buildings prior to my current assignment. As I reflected on my leadership opportunities I noted how many missed opportunities for relationships, resilience and culture I’ve allowed. The opportunity to do it right, or at least make the attempt to do it right, happened in the 2015-2016 school year. Who would have thought the divisive decision of a school closure would have provided me the chance to do something positive. School closures and district reconfigurations are happening more frequently in our public schools. Though this case study is unique to my particular context, the framework and research can be customized to many situations.

Prior to being in a newly formed school I taught in a Catholic School and had administrative experience in another district. My first administrative experience in the Joseph Peterson School District was in a K-3 building with a population of students from neighborhoods of varying economic levels. The teaching staff was established and worked as a cohesive team. There was little I had to do in terms of developing a culture or expectations. Instruction, relationships, and culture were ingrained in the school upon my arrival. As staff members retired, new teachers came in and quickly learned the expectations and how things were done.

Over the course of my nine years in this Kindergarten through third grade setting I experienced three very different superintendents and the district began to go through some transition. Also, we started to lose students to charter schools. We were no longer the only option in town and it was negatively impacting our student enrollment. In one year eighty
students, mostly white, left the district to attend a charter school that recently opened. The vision of the superintendent in 2008 was the concept of neighborhood schools, a public school that students are assigned to attend because they live in the school’s attendance area or attendance zone (www.schoolchoiceforkids.org). In my ninth year in the district, without much warning or preparation, we returned to neighborhood schools and reconfigured the buildings to be a kindergarten through sixth grade model. The staffs were uprooted and separated and no transition activities were provided. There was a lot of learning for everyone and a lot of stress due to the unexpected changes.

It never dawned on me that I should have done some sort of team building when the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade teachers that joined us from different buildings throughout the district. I figured, everyone else that came here figured out what we do here, so will all these people that are here now. That was the wrong thing to think.

While I was thinking things were going fairly well for us one of the buildings that did not do well was the building that only housed the children from one community, a poor, mostly African American community. The first year of the district moving to a K-6 setting this building had over 80 calls to the police and received a great deal of negative media coverage. There was another mass exit from the district to charter schools after that year and the enrollment began to decline.

Around May of the first year of the district having Kindergarten through sixth grade schools, the superintendent came to me. This particular superintendent terrified me so when he started the conversation with me I was already shaking. He said to me, “You have a choice to make. You can go to (the school in the media) next year or the junior high but you will not be
returning to (current building).” I chose (the school in the media) because I was much more familiar with K-6.

When the first in-service day of the school year in my new setting came along I had assembled a really good team to come with me. The secretary had been with me for the last five years, the custodian for the last nine years, the behavior interventionist for nine years, the instructional coach for the last two years and the assistant principal had subbed for me, taught for me, I was her mentor when she went through her administration course work and now she was my newly appointed assistant principal. What else did I need? And with that attitude I went into my new position on a mission to make sure the school didn’t end up on the news anymore. More or less, I went in like gang busters. I didn’t ask what went well, didn’t look to get to know anyone. They were all over the news. They had to be doing everything wrong. “You’re welcome, I’m here to save you” was the attitude I had. We put procedures, instructional strategies and behavioral expectations into place.

My five years there were exhausting but I fell in love with the children. I loved the children at my previous building but this was different. Where I learned to love instruction at my first building, I learned to love children at this setting. The staff eventually came together but not because of anything intentional that I did which I now know was another missed opportunity.

The neighborhood school had some advantages but it did not allow for the exposure to children from other communities which is the main reason the district came into existence. Also, I could never get over the haves and have nots that went on within the same district. How could there be so much disparity within one district? This completely violated the court order and the district had been re-segregated. Around the 2013-2014 school year there was talk of schools closing and my current school was on the chopping block. The court order had, by this point,
been undone and now there was another new superintendent in town. His first attempt to close schools did not happen but he continued to argue for the closure of schools in an effort to equalize the district.

After months of community meetings with parents, staff and community members that were designed to explain the necessity of closing buildings and reconfiguring the district the board voted on the closure of not one but three buildings and the proposal to return to K-3 buildings. The school closings meant I would be reassigned to a new building so I prepared for the ending of one chapter and the beginning of a new one.

I didn’t end my time at the K-6 building very well. I was too excited for a new opportunity, my do over. I received my staffing roster for my new building and cried. Fifteen years in the district and there were only about 8 people I had ever worked with before. At first glance I noticed there were a lot of veteran teachers with big personalities. In fact, administrators actually said to me, “Wow, you have a really toxic staff.” How in the world is this going to work? I’m not sure when or how it hit but I began to think about people. Everyone is experiencing change. Everyone is experiencing loss. Loss of their building, their room, their colleagues, their administrator, their comfort. Research tells us to focus on all the stakeholders but I felt it necessary to focus on one section of stakeholders, the teachers. Not that I was going to ignore the other important people but I felt I needed to take care of them so they could take of the students. To me, it made sense to use the Resilience Framework and its concepts. This is typically used for children but why couldn’t it work for adults. We had all experienced loss so why not use the same idea with adults. Everyone needs to be supported, have connections and expectations but as you can see through the history of the district that was not always the case. I wanted to make sure history did not repeat itself.
History of the district

An important point to consider during an unpopular change is the devastation felt by students, parents, staff and community and the impact on relationships and culture. This is not the first time this school community has experienced an unpopular change. The school district came into existence when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania required the consolidation of smaller districts in Allegheny County. In 1968, the newly created district merged three neighborhoods and each “were all financially troubled districts, and they also contained the largest concentration of minority students in this portion of the county” (Dorothy Hoots v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1971). The remaining four neighborhoods considered to be white and affluent, were permitted to continue to operate as independent school districts.

In 1971 parents of the students attending the newly created district in the predominantly African American neighborhood believed the students were victims of racial discrimination. The neighboring white community school districts had better facilities and resources than the newly created district. Some of the parents of students attending the newly created district filed a lawsuit in an effort to equalize education for all of the students.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was found to be in violation of the constitution and what resulted, after a ten year long court battle, was a court ordered merger. The court order required a merger of the school district that was made up of the predominately black neighborhoods with the predominately white school district communities. The newly created school district began operation in the 1981-82 school year. There were many protests against this decision and the students from one community staged protests and walkouts in an effort to show their displeasure with the merger. The parents from another community filed a countersuit to stop the merger. According to the language of the countersuit one of the affluent school
districts forced into the merger had one of the premier educational systems in the state and did not want it jeopardized by the influx of students from other communities.

**Importance of integration**

The court order was a legal mandate to integrate the communities into a de-segregated school district in an effort to improve educational opportunities for all children, no matter what zip code they live in. There is research that supports integrated schools. The 2011 U.S. Department of Education and Justice report indicates: “Integrated schools matter. Their impact may be greatest on economically disadvantaged and minority students, but they improve the academic and social experience of all students. Integrated schools also matter to the future of our nation” (Berman, 2013, p. 15).

The benefits of integration include preparing all children to be able to compete academically, both nationally and internationally. If schools do not prepare all students, including minority and low income students, the economic future of the United States may suffer. Our children will not be prepared to compete globally if segregation in our U.S. schools continues (Orfield, 2009, p.7). There is also evidence that indicates integrated schools reduce the number of instances of stereotyping, prejudice behaviors and negative attitudes towards those of different races. The experience of attending an integrated school enhances friendships across racial lines and leads to individuals working and living in more diverse settings (Frankenberg & Ayscue, 2013). Harmony and friendships did not immediately form at the inception of the merger as it took many years to ease the racial tensions and community opposition. In fact, according to a current member of the staff, who was a student during the merger, continues to be a resident, and is an employee, said the first year of the merger was hell. She went on to explain that the racial tension was something she had never experienced before and it was awful. There
were daily fights and no transition activities to prepare for the change. Schedules were given out, bus stops assigned and students were taken to a new school. The experience was very stressful and unpleasant (D. Scales, personal communication, November 2014).

**Unitary status**

The district did achieve unitary status in November 2002. The district had provided evidence to support they were no longer engaged in segregating practices. Unitary status implies the district no longer has separate standards for students based on race but that all students have equal access to educational opportunities and activities. With the hiring of a new superintendent in 2009 the district experienced a return to neighborhood schools when the decision to implement Kindergarten through sixth grade buildings was voted on and approved by the school board. This returned the district to a segregated state due to the location of the buildings and the return to neighborhood schools.

Some believe if you return to neighborhood schools and dissolve de-segregation efforts white students will return. Thronson tells us the return to neighborhood schools does not diminish “white flight” or reverse it. Typically, parents in the community find alternative setting to educate their children as opposed to actually moving into a new school district (Thronson, 1993, p. 770-771). This can further be observed in the district of focus in which more than one thousand white students live, but now there are less than 520 enrolled in district schools and there are more than 1,000 students who attend charter schools established within the district. The return to neighborhood schools did not increase the white enrollment.

For nearly 30 years the district worked towards equalizing the learning opportunities for all students. During the time of the court order decisions made by the school board about curriculum, courses, student assignments, student discipline, and distribution of resources both
financial and human were closely monitored by the state. The district was granted unitary status in 2002 but since then the spirit of the court order has begun to fade.

There are no federal guidelines to be followed once a court order merger is lifted. There is still a great deal of local control afforded to the school boards and there is a lack of consistent standards to follow. The lack of consistency is why some districts that were involved in court orders in an effort to desegregate ultimately return to re-segregationist practices (Poser, 2002). The court order that created the school district was circumvented by the re-institution of neighborhood schools in 2009. The schools were returned to neighborhood schools and the heart of the court order that created the district in the first place had been dissipated. The present superintendent’s plan to return to a Kindergarten through third grade and a fourth through sixth grade building configuration is an attempt to improve finances, increase student achievement and address the racial and economic imbalance. These are often times the reasons for school closures to occur.

Supreme Court and federal government decisions have hindered progress that was being made towards the education system being integrated. The funding involved with the integration movement has been reduced which has led many districts to return to neighborhood-based school assignment policies, leading to increases in racial imbalance and racial isolation (An & Gamoran, 2009; Clotfelter, Vigdor, & Ladd, 2006; Mickelson, 2005; Reardon et al, 2012). Federal policies, which helped spur desegregation in the 1960s by tying federal funds to compliance with nondiscrimination laws (Cascio et al, 2010), have increasingly favored accountability policies and turned a blind eye to school segregation (Orfield & Lee, 2007). Also, the recent expansion of school choice (Orfield et al, 2002); suggests that families choose charter, magnet, and other choice schools in ways that exacerbate racial imbalance and isolation (Bifulco
& Ladd, 2007; Saporito & Sohoni, 2006; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008). Parents choosing charter schools have had a direct impact on the student population in the buildings and the district budget. In the 2003-2004 school year there were 5,463 students in the district; 3,078 African American students and 2,385 White students attending school in nine buildings. Ten years later in the 2013-2014 school year the student population had shifted but the number of buildings in use remained at nine. The student population consisted of 2,500 African American students and 1,088 White students; a total of 3,588 students. While the number of students attending school in one of the nine buildings decreased the amount of money being sent to fund over 30 charter schools within the district was over thirteen million dollars of the Joseph Peterson School District budget.

**Plan for Excellence**

In January 2014 there was discussion by the school board that the district may close schools and students from a struggling community would attend the school, identified through test scores as a “failing” school. The mayor of that community spoke to KDKA on January 15 and said, “Kids from poorer towns like B will suffer once more” if they were to attend school in certain neighborhoods. He went on to say the students should stay in the elementary school they currently attend because, “they have access to a high-quality education.” The perception is the students will not receive a quality education at the “failing” school. The teachers in all of the buildings are highly qualified and the same curriculum and text books are used in all of the elementary schools.

The superintendent’s “Plan for Excellence” began in April of 2014. The groundwork consisted of public meetings, community input surveys and difficult proposals. The meetings that took place at the beginning of the closure/reconfiguration process focused on the current
superintendent’s plan for the future of the district. Originally the plan included only the closure of one school, one of the kindergarten through sixth grade buildings that had, for years, had low test scores and low enrollment. This recommendation was met with resistance, as most school closures are. The most resistance came from school board members and community members because it was the only elementary school remaining in a neighborhood where there was a high level of poverty and a high level of African American residents.

In this plan, and all other versions of the plan, the focus always was to equalize the resources for students and staff members, improve academic opportunities for children, increase test scores and become fiscally responsible. There would also be curricular changes for Kindergarten through third grade which included an even stronger emphasis on literacy and for the students in fourth through sixth grade STEAM would be highlighted.

The Community Forum meetings took place in various settings throughout the months preceding the vote in an effort to provide several opportunities to hear about the possible changes taking place in the district. The meeting also allowed for a question and answer period and each participant was encouraged to complete a five question survey. The questions were:

- In order to maintain all current programs and operations, we will need to raise taxes the maximum amount permitted by law each year (about 2.8%). Would you support this measure? Yes or No
- Would you be able to support a plan for consolidating school operations as a means to improving education and saving significant costs? Yes or No
- Would you support an effort to place at least one full time Reading Specialist in each building backed by trained reading tutors? Yes or No
- Would you support going to K-3 and separate 4-6 configuration for the district? Yes or No. Do you think the district should remain as a K-6 configuration? Yes or No
- Would you support a proposal to initiate a bond issuance to support the construction of a new 7th and 8th grade building at the High School campus and also to help upgrade our instructional all around the district? Yes or No.

After each question there was space provided to add additional thoughts and comments.
The plan that included a tax increase, consolidating buildings, at least one full time Reading Specialist in each building backed by trained reading tutors, K-3 and separate 4-6 configuration for the district instead of a K-6 configuration and a proposal to initiate a bond issuance to support the construction of a new 7th and 8th grade building at the High School campus and also to help upgrade our instructional all around the district was ultimately voted down by the school board but the momentum for change in the district was growing. There was support growing for change and the closures of schools. One aspect of the district that was an increasing concern was the financial situation. Without some type of substantial change to the landscape of the district the district was going to find itself in financial ruin.

2014 Plan for Excellence

In the fall of 2014, the Superintendent began to present a new plan for the future of the district. This plan was even more aggressive than the original plan. On September 18, 2014 the Superintendent held a press conference to announce his plan that recommended school closings and the re-configuration of the district. On September 19, 2014 an advertisement was displayed announcing the public hearing to be held on October 6, 2014. On October 6, 2014 the required public hearing was held. Throughout the months of October through December 2014 the Superintendent held community forum meetings in various neighborhoods to provide the opportunity to hear about the proposed changes and offer input. The Community Forum meetings, led by the Superintendent and his leadership team, encouraged parent and community participation and the participation steadily increased at each presentation. January 14, 2015 was the date slated for the vote to take place.

On the evening of January 14, 2015 the school board could not come to an agreement on which direction to vote. This vote involved the closure of the three elementary school buildings
and reconfiguring the district to include two kindergarten through third grade buildings, one fourth through sixth grade building, one building that would have kindergarten through eighth grade and the seventh and eighth grade would move to the high school. The crowd was very vocal and threats to unseat current board members were made throughout the evening from members in the crowd. The parents and community members voiced their support of the superintendent’s plan, loudly at times, without concern or focus on race unlike when the original merger happened. The vote was then postponed to the following week and on Wednesday, January 21, 2015, largely due to community support, the school district school board voted to close three buildings and re-configure the district. This time the focus on change was about academic opportunities for all students with the parents and community working together.

The beginning of a new district

The state of the school district in the 2014-2015 school year has some overtones of the past. There are still communities that are predominantly African American and financially struggling and there are still communities predominantly Caucasian and affluent. The purpose of closing schools at this time is to regain financial stability for the district and focus on student achievement. Fortunately, this time during the discussions of combining neighborhoods there have been no racially motivated protests. In fact, parents from diverse socioeconomic communities within the district all spoke out at the community meetings and board meetings in favor of the plan to close schools and redistrict.

The beginning of a new school

While planning for a new school for the 2015-2016 school year the idea of resilience and grief came to the forefront of my thoughts. During the 2009-2010 school year the district was reconfigured to include kindergarten through sixth grade buildings. One of the buildings in the
district had over 80 calls to the police, teachers hurt, low test scores and were on the news multiple times to share negative news. Many parents removed their children from the school, enrollment declined and charter school enrollments increased. For the 2010-2011 school I was reassigned to this building and given the task of keeping the school out of the news while the principal was removed and reassigned to a different school. There were many teachers who were upset by this and loyal to the previous principal. Instead of recognizing this, I took the approach of going in like “gang busters”. There was very little effort on my part to build relationships or gain input from the stakeholders. It was a very top-down management approach that ended up hurting the staff because I didn’t take into consideration their grieving; loss of students, loss of a principal, their suggestions or input about some things that did work or take steps to develop trust. I was looked at as the one who forced their principal out and the efforts, or lack of effort, I made did not create a positive culture.

I wanted to approach the reconfiguration of the district using the lens of grief and recognize that staff and students would be lost without familiar surroundings and staff. I wanted to use the underpinnings of the Resilience Framework to improve upon the approach I had taken in 2010. The Joseph Peterson School District is a district that exists today because of a court ordered merger that began in the early 1970’s and other traumatic changes in the years since its existence. In January 2015 the school board initiated change again when it voted to close three schools and reconfigure the district. The inspiration for this mixed methods case study is the opportunity to develop a positive school climate in a newly formed school and influence instruction.

The literature and context review that have been presented about school closures and the impact that results from them, the influence of leadership on school culture and how important
relationships are to a school community provide support to the research question: How does an intentional focus on relationship-building influences school culture and instructional practices in a newly formed school? The Resilience Framework used to focus on relationship-building was chosen because of its attention to grief and loss, emotions the district and staff have experienced more than once.

The methods used to research this question came through two efforts; the first being a review of extant data that came through several cycles of improvement inquiry. The second effort will come through a series of semi-structured interviews that were used to determine if the intentional focus on relationship-building influenced the school culture and instructional practices in a newly formed school. As I began to develop my case study I used the participant observer approach. A participant observer is “a blend where they are participating at some level, but not fully engaged” (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011, p. 218). This allowed me to participate directly in the case study and make adjustments based on immediate feedback. Using feedback to make adjustments throughout the process is considered an improvement inquiry approach.

An Improvement Inquiry approach was taken and Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles were conducted. The Plan-Do-Study-Act Model approach follows four principles: knowing what you need to improve, having a way to get feedback to let you know improvement is happening, developing a change that you think will result in improvement and testing a change before any attempt to implement.
Improvement inquiry was used formally and informally throughout the cases study. By using the Model for Improvement I was able to focus on relationship building in an effort to improve our school culture and change instructional strategies. There were occasions when unexpected conversations led me to act in one way that was not planned for and other opportunities, such as in-service days and faculty meetings, were planned for and the feedback led to next steps. The changes were an improvement in culture and instruction because data were collected, reviewed and the evidence identified positive changes. While the steps taken were not always formally organized as PDSA cycles, the Model for Improvement was a way for me to think through events, conversations and actions and these are documented in the timeline (Appendix B).

A final piece of data emerged after the semi-structured interviews when I began to put the pieces of the case study together and realized there was still something missing. The reflection
of the reflective narrative, was used as an instrument to organize my thoughts. I created a PowerPoint that was a timeline of events that covered the span of my career from my first teaching job to my current leadership position. I audiotaped myself and the process served as a tool to identify the times through my career when relationships proved to be an asset. The reflective narrative was instrumental in the development of themes that emerged and with addressing the research question. The Methods chapter will expound on the methods used through the research conducted in this work.
Chapter 2: Methods

The next chapter, Chapter 2 Methods, discusses the methods that were used to address the research question, “How does an intentional focus on relationship building, by the leadership, influence school culture and instructional practice in a newly formed school?” The Methods section includes information about the Research Design, Data Sources and Collection of Data, the Instruments used and Data Analysis. A description of the research design, data source that were used, the data collection tools, the instruments and interview questions and a section on confidentiality is included. The chapter concludes with the data analysis of the research, how the themes were developed and how the perspective of a participant observer was used.

Research Design

The research design that was used in this research was a case study of a particular school during a particular window of time. I acted as a participant observer throughout the case study and used a mixed methods approach that included both qualitative and quantitative data. The extant data were both qualitative and quantitative and came from field notes, anecdotal records, and test scores. Most of the data existed however there were data collected through semi-structured interviews which were qualitative data. It became apparent that reflective narrative was necessary to put the work into a context. The reflective narrative that was constructed was based on prior experience in advance of the formal chronology of this case and is presented as part of the findings of this study.

Data Sources

The data in this study are from a two-pronged approach to include data from pre-existing sources; extant data and semi-structured interviews. The extant data included are 1. Field notes, 2. Test scores, 3. Observations, 4. A detailed timeline of events which includes anecdotal records.
from interactions and conversations with parents, staff, and community members, 5. Surveys and the responses, and 6. Reflective narrative all gained from being a participant observer in this research. As a participant observer, I had the benefit of observing what was happening in the present but also observe and reflect on what had happened in the past. This gave me the advantage of being able to use current and past information to drive my course of action.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with three district members who had knowledge of the building climate and instructional practices prior to 2015-2016 school year. The interviews followed a scripted set of questions and as a result of the responses, some of the participants required follow up questions. The information gained from the interviews provided evidence that change occurred in relationships, climate and instruction.

The reflective narrative were an additional data source that proved to be the catalyst for many of the findings that surfaced and aided in the development of the themes that emerged. I was able to create a timeline of events that occurred in my professional life as both a teacher and an administrator and reflect on my lived experiences. The themes of school culture, instruction and building a strong school community came to light and the common thread among all of the themes was building relationships. Throughout all of it the Resilience factors played key role too.

**Data collection**

A case study of the relationship-building efforts between the time when the new school staff rosters were announced (January, 2015) through the end of the first six months of the newly formed school (February, 2016) is what occurred. A two prong approach was used throughout my work and participatory action research was incorporated throughout the data collection period. That means, I am a participant in this study and I am studying the actions I took to build
relationships in order to influence school culture and instruction. I am the participant observer that created this case study. I used extant data to improve relationships and improvement inquiry to take action.

**Extant Data**

The first approach used was the review of extant data that were collected throughout the improvement effort. The improvement effort began in January 2015 and continued through February 29, 2016. The extant data, existing data, included field notes, test scores, anecdotal records and were collected and analyzed from participant observer approach. Since I am the administrator in the building where the intentional focus on relationship-building occurred I initiated and participated in events and observed the outcomes, reactions and feedback of the staff members.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

The second prong included semi-structured interviews. The interview responses were collected from three individuals occupying different positions in the district, Curriculum Director, Building Maintenance Manager, and Curriculum Coordinator, each who had knowledge of the climate and instructional practices in the school prior to the school closures and reconfiguration. The answers were recorded with the use of an audio recording device in order to accurately capture the participants’ responses and then transcribed.

The interviews sought to document three individual’s perceptions of the relationship-building efforts and how those efforts influenced school culture and instructional practices during the first six months of the new school’s existence. At the completion of the semi-structured interviews the data were transcribed and analyzed through the lens of the participant observer. As a participant observer I reviewed and analyzed both the extant data and the semi-
structured interview data. The data from all areas were used to determine if an intentional focus on relationship-building impacts school culture and instruction positively in the Joseph Peterson School District. As I reviewed the data, I became aware there was still something missing with my work. I needed to review another data set; my personal history and experiences in education and the use of a reflective narrative approach was what I chose to further explore.

**Reflective Narrative**

As I reviewed my own personal history in education I realized my reflective narrative added to the case study and needed to be included. This proved to be crucial piece of evidence to include in my research as it assisted with the identification of patterns and themes that have proven to be beneficial. This process also involved the use of the improvement inquiry. As I reviewed what I have done over the course of my career I reflected on mistakes I have made and made adjustments in my actions in order to avoid repeating history. I used reflective practices, interwoven with improvement inquiry, while acting as a participant observer, to intentionally build relationships to build resilience and influence school culture and instructional practices.

**Instruments**

An instrument used in the research were the semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews with 3 individuals from the district were conducted to provide validation and information to my research question. The participants were contacted by the researcher through an email and invited to participate in this work. The participants had the opportunity to decline the invitation. Once the participants notified me of their agreement to participate a consent form was completed and an interview time was scheduled. The participants were asked a series of questions that focused on climate of the building, relationships and instruction and their responses were recorded through an audio taping device. It was necessary to transcribe the
interviews and the data were reviewed. Included below are the questions that were asked during the semi-structured interviews and the transcribed answers and follow up questions can be viewed in Attachment C.

**Interview Questions**

- When you walk into [name of school], what does it “feel” like? If you were here previously, is there a difference?
- How are you treated by the staff? Is that different than before?
- What do you think the focus of [name of school] is?
- Do you think the “pockets” of teachers that came together from other buildings are starting to interact with staff members from other buildings?
- Do you think the relationships among the staff members are improving?
- Have you seen changes in instruction? What are the contributing factors to the change or lack of change?
- Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to build relationships?
- Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to address school climate?
- Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to change instruction?
- Any additional comments you would like to add.

The questions were developed with the research question in mind. I wanted to focus on culture and the feel of the building in comparison to how it was in previous years. I also wanted to gain insight on instruction and if gains and progress forward were being made. It was important for me to have an understanding if my leadership style was instrumental in the development of a positive school culture and change in instruction and the questions developed could provide me with that insight from other people’s point of view. The questions were semi-structured so this allowed for follow up questions, clarification and dialogue to occur.
Confidentiality

Prior to participation in the semi-structured interviews the participants were asked via email, to avoid feeling pressured to participate, if they would be interested in participating in the semi-structured interviews. When the participants agreed, they were asked if it was permissible to audio record their answers and use their responses in my work. An application to IRB was submitted in order to work with individuals throughout this process and the approval notification is attached. All of the data gathered are being kept secure in a locked box in the office of my home. The participants’ job performance evaluations were not positively or negatively impacted because of participation and no compensation was given for being involved in this research. I felt it necessary to include a confidentiality piece to this work in an effort to protect the interview participants and the Joseph Peterson School District.

Data Analysis

To complete the analysis of data I organized the data, and began to interpret, the existing data and results of the semi-structured interviews. When I reviewed the existing data, I began by making a timeline (Appendix B) of anchor events. After I listed key events, I categorized the events according to the Resilience Framework. An event was identified as either something that built resilience in an environment or mitigated risk factors in an environment. Often times the events overlapped categories and strengthened one or more of the factors that are included in the Resilience Framework (Appendix D). Each time an event took place I took into consideration if the event was beneficial, the outcome, what could have been differently; an improvement inquiry approach was used through the lens of a participant observer. After I reviewed the timeline I conducted the semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview responses (Appendix C) presented evidence that supported my research question but I believed I needed more
evidence to show further support. The final piece of evidence I examined came in the form of a reflective narrative. This gave me the opportunity to put together a history of my professional life as a teacher and an administrator. My research was given my voice through my lived experiences.

I demonstrated the steps taken through an improvement inquiry and reflective narrative approach. The extant data from the case study were organized chronologically. As the chronology unfolded, the key relationship building efforts that were designed and tested were organized into “cycles of improvement” using the Plan-Do-Study-Act convention. The analysis expected to yield a case description that identifies—in chronological order—the key events that were planned, implemented, studied and acted upon in an effort to build relationships that would enhance school culture and improve instructional practices.

I looked for evidence in the responses of those interviewed that validated the research question. I acted as a participant observer throughout the process and examined the data and feedback received from various sources. I also matched the evidence to the Resilience Framework. Reflection of my reflective narrative was instrumental in shaping my work.
Chapter 3: Findings from My Do Over, a case study

Findings

The Results chapter addresses the research question, “Does an intentional focus on relationship building, by the school leadership, influence school culture and instructional practice in a newly formed school?” and demonstrates what I did, what I learned and what I want to do next. To lay the groundwork, Chapter 3 begins with a reflective narrative that documents the events of my path in both the private and public school education system as a teacher and administrator and are an integral piece of my findings. Part of the findings in this case study start with a narrative that documents my experiences as an early educator through the present time as a veteran administrator. In the early stages of my research I was solely focused on the data collection window, January 2015 – February 2016, but in reality my life experiences and reflective narrative need to be part of this current work. I consider my reflective narrative to be another finding in my research because I did not realize how much of my personal history influenced my current work. I was able to chronologically document my teaching and administrative experiences and study the parts I did well and make note of where I made mistakes. The mistakes led me to wanting to do a Do Over. I wanted to improve my relationship building, strengthen the resilience of staff members and recognize the grief and trauma they had experienced and focus on instruction. The best approach for me to use throughout the research was as a participant observer.

As the work in the case study began to progress and I focused on relationships it became clear as the participant observer in this case study in order to answer the question, “Does an intentional focus on relationship building, by the school leadership, influence school culture and instructional practice in a newly formed school?” I had to include my past experience. Since this
is a case study of my do over, my opportunity to do things differently, I used extant data from the first year in the newly formed school as well as what I learned from my experiences throughout my twenty three years in education. My experience guided my actions and without my prior experiences I would not have proceeded with my work in the manner I did. The findings section highlights examples and experiences that molded my approach and showcase the importance of how relationships aided in difficult situations. I then discuss my work as a teacher then administrator and the different district visions that accompanied each new superintendent. Included in the Results Chapter are the findings about school closures and the impact it can have on students, staff, parents and the community.

I also made the focus on grief and loss a priority and used the Resilience Framework to help frame my work. The Resilience Framework was chosen because, to me, it was necessary to acknowledge that grief and loss had occurred through the closing of the three schools. I wanted the staff to become more resilient and a focus on the six principles of the framework became an important piece of the case study. This ultimately became a case study of intentionally building relationships to build resilience which influences the school culture and instruction. The results section features a quick reminder of Chapter 2 Methods used throughout the case study along with what I did, what I learned and didn’t expect and finally what I’m going to next.

When I started working on this problem of practice I thought the data collection period began in May 2015 and ended in February 2016. As I reflected on my extant data and the results of the semi-structured interviews I realized my case study truly began in 1993 when I was awarded my first teaching position in a small urban Catholic School. This is important to include as it provides a frame of reference leading up to my context used in this work and my experiences that shaped my actions. I used the Resilience Framework as a guide but came to
realize my actions built resilience and created the environment that encouraged change in the culture and instruction not the activities and events as I had originally thought. It was the final piece of the puzzle but ultimately became a critical finding in my work.

**Findings from my Reflective Narrative**

The reflective narrative begins with my early stages in education as a teacher and then an administrator. The narrative moves chronologically through my administrative experiences in different schools and with different superintendents. I then discuss my current placement after the closing of schools and the reconfiguration of the district, the obstacles and triumphs as the Resilience Framework guides the work through the changes throughout the case study. The reflective narrative is a finding that materialized throughout the research process. I consider it a finding because my past molded my current actions.

**Catholic School**

As I think about my time in the Catholic School I think of it as the beginning of my teaching career but also the beginning of my formal education of how to be a better educator. I practiced instructional skills, communication and relationship building. I learned how to include parents and community in my work. I was a few years into my teaching career and I needed to return to school to earn 24 credits towards my Instructional II teaching certification. For me, going into administration made the most sense. I only had a few more months of coursework to complete my Masters in Administration and Supervision and I had recently secured a teaching position at the local public school.
Public School

Experience in the private school did not prepare me for the drastic differences I would encounter in the public school. I was a white girl from the South Hills teaching seventh and eighth graders, some of who were already sixteen and towering over me, and trying to figure out how to get the students to listen to me long enough to teach them something. Going into this I didn’t realize the importance of relationships but when the students were able to see I was listening to them and incorporating their likes into the school work, they became more willing to listen to me. An “ah ha” moment; building relationships helped make difficult situations go smoothly.

The building housed kindergarten through twelfth grade. To get to the faculty room you had to go downstairs through the high school. I was in the stairwell walking downstairs when a student came running by and almost knocked me over. I recognized him as a student I had at the Catholic School. I said, “Hello RS. It’s so good to see you”. He looked at me and was shocked I remembered him. My response to him was, “You always remember your favorites.” Well, it turns out this particular student had great deal of influence throughout the community. He would come to my room and make sure the students were behaving and made it clear to them if I let him know of any issues, he would pay them a visit later. There were times when he was not in school but he always made sure to send friends to check on me to make sure things were running smoothly. A larger number of children and parents began to rely on me and work with me.

The relationship I had with this student and then his friends taught me how to interact with people from various backgrounds. I had not learned this from home or in school; it was the right thing to do to make the school situation better for everyone. This was helpful when it came to the parents too. I could not relate too many of my students or their circumstances, so for me, I
had to really listen before I opened my mouth. I had to take the time to cultivate relationships. There was a particular occasion when this was beneficial. A parent came in and was very upset about how an issue was handled with her son by another teacher. I was asked to be a part of the meeting. Throughout the meeting the parent was very verbally aggressive with the other staff member and when she could no longer vent towards the other teacher she turned and pointed at me and said, “You need to be more like Ms. McAteer. She understands the black child.” I remember thinking, “I do?” but it was reassuring to me that people recognized I was someone that could be trusted, develop bonds and connections and offer care and support. I remained in the classroom a few more months then I was reassigned to the elementary school as the building principal.

Now I was not only in a position to influence my classroom students but an entire elementary school. This provided me the opportunity to have interactions with numerous people all day and to think on my feet. There are things they teach you in school and there are things you learn on the job. Building bonds is something you need to do to create the most conducive, productive learning environment. I became very good at calming parents down, listening, communicating, using resources that were not recommended in textbook, yet letting them know the expectations for behavior and academics. As I review my past I am noticing many times I incorporated the Resilience Framework in to my methods of communication and working with stakeholders, I just didn’t realize it at the time. I think that what made it more genuine and authentic. I really did not know what I was doing. My time at the public school lasted about two years and I was afforded the opportunity to move to an even bigger stage at another public school. This new opportunity was considered a suburban urban location.
Public school 2.0

I was thrilled with the opportunity to set out on my new adventure. My experience at the public school prepared me to deal with parents and children on a level I never expected to need. I learned to recognize that people come to us with varying degrees of baggage and the invisible story is the one we need to learn about and hear so we can be better at dealing with people and providing the supports needed to establish relationships. When I left the smaller public school for the larger public school I was not sure what to expect but I did feel equipped to deal with various personalities that I may encounter.

My new setting, a large kindergarten through third grade building in a suburban, urban district had a population of students from communities of varying economic levels. This new school was very established and settled with its staff, the students, parents and instruction. This afforded me the opportunity to continue to improve upon my skills with parents and staff members but the surprise I wasn’t prepared for was the changes in district leadership. I worked under three superintendents in the first nine years in the district and each had different visions. The superintendent that I feared working for, and had a very uneasy relationship with, had a plan that returned our district to neighborhood schools and returned the district to a segregated state. I was removed from the place I had very strong ties with and placed in an unfamiliar environment where I had few relationships. I did not approach this new opportunity with the same excitement I had approached my previous two administrative positions. With a negative attitude, and a difficult situation in front of me, I did not take the time to reflect on what had worked for me in the past. I did not take time to build relationships. At that time I believed the best approach was to clean house, bulldoze my way in and make changes without listening to the voices of the stakeholders. The school did experience some success but I often wonder if a different approach
had been used would there have been great success. The chance to try a different approach came in the 2015-2016 school year after another superintendent entered the district with another vision.

New Superintendent, new vision

The history of the district tells the story of several poor, predominantly African American communities that fought through the use of the legal system for better schools for their children. After a ten year long court battle the fight ended and a court ordered merger brought about change, but not necessarily the changes everyone wanted. With a great deal of human and monetary assistance from the state the district grew into a successful educational setting. Once the close monitoring and involvement of the state went away, unitary status was achieved and charter schools became an option, segregation began to creep back in and force another change.

The change this time was to remove the neighborhood schools and create two kindergarten through third grade buildings, one building that housed all of the fourth, fifth and sixth grade students, one school that had kindergarten through eighth grade and the high school would now be seventh through twelfth grade. This was an effort to streamline communities and resources. This also meant another chance for me to do things correctly.

New journey, new obstacles

When I received my staffing roster I knew I had work to do. I also knew I needed to approach this situation differently than I had in the past. When I took on my first administrative position I was in survival mode. The setting was so unfamiliar to me and I was learning on the job, every day. I began to build a bag of resources that would be used throughout my entire career. At my next position, I was the new person entering a situation that was established and successful. I had to work at building relationships and fitting in. I had to learn how things
worked there and then share that with the new staff that joined us. When I was reassigned to my second position in the district I went in to clean house and keep the school out of the media. By the time I got to this third administrative position in the district I was ready to approach it with the knowledge of the importance of building relationships but also with the knowledge of recognizing the loss everyone suffered. I knew I had to be intentional in much of what I did. The district had suffered trauma and loss with the closing of buildings and I felt this had to be recognized. This realization helped me formulate my research question; does an intentional focus on relationship building influence school culture and instructional practice in a newly formed school? Recognizing grief and loss also led to the use of the Resilience Framework as a guide to focus on building relationships.

**Resilience Framework**

The Resilience Framework provides a model that encourages six themes: provide opportunities for meaningful participation, set and communicate high expectations, provide care and support, teach life skills, set clear, consistent boundaries and increase social bonding. Each of these themes can be developed through building relationships and the leader of a school can be the person who puts these themes into action. The qualities of a successful leader mirror the ideas that are mentioned to be needed to experience success. To have a positive experience through a closure you need to build relationships and a successful leader is someone who takes the time to build relationships. The themes of the Resilience Framework focus on relationships so the best way to improve a school culture is through the intentional focus on building relationships.
Findings from the Case Study

While reviewing the extant data that were collected from May 2015 through February 2016 and consider what has unfolded in front of me as I assumed the role of participant observer I came up with the following observations: a group of teachers were removed from comfortable situations, put into an unfamiliar setting and as the year progressed became a functioning unit, a group of teachers who were not using the instructional framework to a staff that was developing curriculum, moving instruction forward and taking initiative, and a group of teachers who worked with parents and community members, but does all of this answer the question, does an intentional focus on relationship building influence school culture and instructional practice in a newly formed school? I don’t think that only an intentional focus on relationship building influenced school culture and instructional practice in the newly formed school. I think my actions, combined with a focus on relationship building and not events and activities influenced school culture and instruction practice in a newly formed school. I created an environment that gave the staff permission and the opportunities to create a positive culture and influence instruction. I created an environment that built resilience in my staff

Here’s what I did

When I began the dissertation journey and the doctorate adventure I was unsure what I wanted to pursue. I did not have a clear idea of a problem of practice or a research question. I began to read books and journal articles that pertained to school closures. The Joseph Peterson School District was in the beginning stages of discussing the possibility of closing buildings so I began to read information that could be beneficial to my work environment. I read articles about charter schools and how they have influenced the need for school closures to happen. I also read how school closures impact students, staff, parents and communities. The recurring theme
seemed to enhance the importance of building relationships and that relationships are damaged when schools close buildings. I also believed it to be beneficial to me to research leadership styles. Again, the more I read about leadership, no matter what type of leadership, the recurring theme circled back to building relationships and the importance of relationships, especially throughout the closing of schools. I felt I needed to read more because my theoretical framework was still not clear to me. We know students can thrive when resilience is developed within them, especially after any type of trauma. The staff, students and community members suffered a loss, a trauma by the closing of schools. After reading that resilience aids in working through trauma the Resilience Framework was decided upon to incorporate as my framework as I approached my newly formed school.

The Joseph Peterson School District had experienced school closures in the past and there were still wounds from each time it occurred. The context review reminds us of the history of the district, which resulted from a forced merger. Integration and its importance were also part of the history of the district. I was able to study the history a bit more closely and recognize the need to start my work with the teaching staff. I wanted to use what I learned through the literature about school closures and leadership style and apply it to the teachers through the Resilience Framework. When I had previously become the principal at other settings I did not intentionally focus on relationship building to influence school culture and instructional practice so I wanted to approach this newly formed school in a way I had not before. I wanted to approach my do over differently and to have success.

The data represented the two prong approach described in Chapter 2; review of extant data and semi-structured interviews in the role of an active participant. As a participant observer in this case study I also engaged in numerous Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles in my efforts to address
the research question that I had finally decided upon; “how does an intentional focus on relationship-building influences school culture and instructional practices in a newly formed school?” The use of the reflective narrative was instrumental in helping me identify previous mistakes that should not be repeated and the importance relationships have had throughout my career.

Here’s what I learned

The research question, “Does an intentional focus on relationship building, by the school leadership, influence school culture and instructional practice in a newly formed school?” was always at the forefront of my work and in my mind throughout my daily interactions. Based on lived experience within the Joseph Peterson School District I had some assumptions about the staff I was going to be working with in the newly formed school. The three assumptions I made first and acted upon were the staff is not a cohesive group, the staff is comprised of a lot of big personalities and there is a potential for poor relationships and a toxic culture and finally, the staff needed time to grieve and to build relationships.

Theme 1: School culture

When schools close and a new administrator is appointed, the school culture can be impacted. I knew there was a possibility for a negative school culture to surface if I did not address intentionally building relationships. My past experiences drove my actions and led me to the assumptions that the staff is not a cohesive group, the staff is comprised of a lot of big personalities and there is a potential for poor relationships and a toxic culture and finally, the staff needed time to grieve and to build relationships. The findings will show how the staff came together, became a unit and built resilience.
Finding 1: Bringing the staff together

I knew I had to minimize the fears of the new staff and knowing that guided my actions. My intentional actions began when the board voted to close six buildings and reconfigure the district, the staff rosters were put together by teacher preference and seniority. Due to the Collective Bargaining Agreement the administrators were unable to have input into the staff. Many of the staff members, over 50%, would be working together for the first time and there were cliques of staff members assigned to each of the newly formed schools. I wanted to reduce as much conflict and stress as possible and provide opportunities for input and collaboration. The staff rosters were set by May 2015 initial contact began through a survey. Of the 38 recipients, 29 responded. This gave me feedback and a plan was developed. The reoccurring themes that were evident in the results were the need from the administrator to provide clear expectations and time to get into the building to set up their classrooms since over the half the staff was new to the building. They wanted time to become familiar with their new setting and their colleagues. The teachers were provided with a move in date, their master schedule, the faculty handbook and instructional expectations before the end of June. These were all actions designed to build relationships and build resilience.

By mid-year a staff member shared with me:

The climate is way better. It was almost scary at the other building. I like that you’re always the same. You’re professional, like a man. You treat everyone the same. You’re just about the job. I love my colleagues. There’s collaboration. I think you’re more cohesive.

Another comment made to me about our cohesiveness came from one of the participants in the semi-structured interviews made the following observation towards the end of the school year:
I can’t tell who didn’t know each other. I wouldn’t be able to say, “Oh you were from here”, “You were from here”, can’t tell at all. It’s the (newly formed) staff. That’s their identity.

To demonstrate that unity was becoming evident the response of one of the participants in the semi-structured interviews stated:

I am starting to see that (coming together). Definitely separated at the beginning of the year, totally separated. There were 3 or 4 different groups. I can see it now. I don’t see people spread apart anymore. People congregating and talking. You see people smiling now that weren’t in the beginning of the year.

This participant also commented:

I know in the short time we’ve been in this building and it hasn’t been a year yet I can see the difference. It’s getting better and better and better.

Another staff member pointed out to me:

People last year were caddy and cliquish. People eased in nicely. Everyone is willing to pitch in and share ideas. You’re pretty positive and we know you will help us.

The staff knew they needed time to bond and connect which is a principle of the Resilience Framework. In previous years the district mandated teachers be involved in PLC’s. A PLC is a professional learning community and the goal is to increase student achievement. One of the PLC’s established was a Staff Morale PLC. The goal of the group was to recognize staff members and organize monthly team building events. This may not seem as if it would directly impact student achievement but when teachers feel appreciated they tend to be more productive. After the start of the school year the superintendent announced this year the staff would not be
required to participate in PLC’s. There was more than one established PLC that requested the continuation of PLC’s. This particular PLC aided in the bonding process and monthly luncheons, spirit days, theme days and celebrations were planned by this group.

Two events we had, one in October and one in November, that brought the teachers together in an unexpected way was through an assembly for the children and a staff basketball game against the third graders. The assembly we had in October was about nutrition and healthy living. The presenter used hip hop music to get his message across. He had the staff up and dancing with each and with the students. By the end of the, staff members were asking permission to text their friends in other buildings to let them know how much fun we having. The basketball game in November was another positive event we held. The staff all ordered matching uniforms, made signs and enjoyed playing together against the students. The students really had a good time playing in the game and cheering against the teachers. We may not have started out united but as the year progressed, the staff began to come together.

**Finding 2: Becoming a team**

The next assumption I had that directed my actions was the potential for poor relationships and a toxic culture due to staff unfamiliarity. When an administrator from Central Administration saw the staff roster he said, “Wow, you have a really toxic.” This was a terrifying comment to hear so I knew there was work that needed to be done. Some staff members that had remained in the building and worked for the previous administrator started the year with saying, “(Previous administrator) didn’t do it that way”. This was something that needed to be shut down early on. The staff needed to recognize she was gone and I was administrator. The main one who said this more than once had some one-on-one time with me, we discussed how and why it needed to stop and she made sure to share our conversation with
the few others. I didn’t have to have the conversation with anyone else. I do not like to conduct business in this manner but I will when it is warranted. The observation made about me by one of the semi-structured interview participants is what I prefer. This person said:

I think you’re friendly so it’s natural. You’re not like, “I’m the boss”. You kind of just blend in. Like if I walked in the building not knowing anything I would not, don’t take this the wrong way, I would not be able to say you’re the principal because you’re interacting with the kids the way teachers interact with the kids. It’s not like it’s, “I’m in charge” it’s more, “We’re part of a team” and so I think you have to because of the nature of the change. People are going to mimic what they see. I think that’s critical.

Another staff member who splits time in the other K-3 building came to me after a faculty meeting and said, “I hate being at (other school). You preach about being a family and figuring it out together. Teachers there are fighting, yelling at each other and it’s only Day 6.” It made me sad another building was struggling but it was powerful what he said about my approach. I didn’t realize it at the time but my words and actions influenced adult behavior.

Someone from Central Administration questioned me about one of my teachers. I responded with, “She’s great. She’s really taken the lead with our PBIS initiative and is good at building her grade level team.” The person was clearly shocked by response as the look on his face demonstrated. He said over the last two years he had been in more meetings with her and her previous principal for starting fights with her colleagues. This particular teacher and I work well together and her presence in the building has benefitted children, parents and staff members due to how she has presented herself through her words and actions.

A toxic environment was avoided and a participant in the semi-structured interviews commented:
It’s a very welcoming environment. It feels like an elementary school. There’s a perception of the district that it’s chaotic and bedlam and it’s not that. It’s orderly, it’s welcoming, and it’s very student centered. I would have to say in previous years it was more of a (long pause). It was stressful coming in. It wasn’t welcoming to administration. Definitely run as a dictatorship so it wasn’t welcoming. It almost felt like you were walking on eggshells and that you were invading someone’s space.

One of the approaches we took to become a team was to take advantage of events and celebrations. As a group, we donated to Breast Cancer Awareness and wore pink and denim on the same day, we donated to a staff member’s husband and his “Road to hope” foundation, the staff raised money for Project Bundle Up and wore Black and Gold for the Steelers home opener. To show school pride we designated a Friday to wear school colors and had monthly pot luck lunches. One staff member initiated a secret gift giving event and everyone participated in the Powerball because no one wanted to leave anyone behind if we won. We did not gel immediately, there was not always 100% participation in the events but the opportunity to team build was available. There will always be saboteurs in every setting but we continue to intentionally focus on relationship building in order to influence school culture and instructional practice in our school.

**Finding 3: Building relationships, building resilience**

The third assumption that steered my actions was to recognize the staff needed time to grieve. I wanted to ease the stress of the move and recognize the grief that accompanies a school closure so I wanted the new staff to feel comfortable, ease the stress of the change they were about experience and have access to their new classroom as early in the summer as possible. This was a tall order because the custodians and maintenance had the enormous task of assisting
with closing buildings, packing, moving materials and furniture and traditional summer work in a few short weeks. Fortunately the building was ready for the staff early in August and many took advantage of the time. It also allowed for them to come into the building and meet me as I had never worked with a majority of the staff before. Many took the opportunity to email, call and stop in to introduce themselves and spend time visiting. While reviewing the survey I noticed that many added appreciation for being asked for their input and many expressed excitement about building a new team. Upon further review of the responses, the tone was apprehension and fear. I needed to recognize these emotions and develop opportunities for collaboration.

While planning the back-to-school in-service days I took into consideration the staff wanted to get to know their grade level colleagues. I spent a great deal of time developing team building activities to engage the staff in over the course of the four back-to-school in service days. After the planning was complete and prepared we received a directive from the superintendent that we were required to give the staff time to unpack, attend a presentation at the high school, the report card changes and the new lock down procedure were all being introduced. This left about two and half hours over the course of four days to allow for building procedures and quick introductions. The staff was very disappointed to have lost the opportunity to make connections so I had to be creative in creating opportunities to bond.

Throughout the year the use of grade level meetings carved out time to work together. There were occasions when I would set the agenda and other times planning was the responsibility of the grade level. Grade level reflections were submitted and reviewed by the researcher. The comments indicated the time carved out for them was used to collaborate and
team build. For example the following comments were recorded on Grade Level Summary sheets that were submitted to the researcher after each monthly grade level meeting:

“The teachers shared center ideas”

“We are developing a positive attitude and school community”

“We will continue to meet and collaborate”

“There is ongoing sharing of ideas”

“We will continue to work as a team and share ideas”

“We will communicate with the PBIS team”

“Collaborate as a team to focus on being cohesive as a grade level”

Another time to focus on team building was during faculty meetings. Faculty meetings were used as an opportunity to work together: One particular faculty meeting was a success. Teams were assigned so the staff would be grouped with people they would not typically work with. Each team was given supplied and instructions to build a car with your team using the materials given to you. After five minutes the cars were raced the team with the fastest time won gift cards. A discussion on how we could incorporate, at each grade level writing, reading, math, social studies and science. The response to a faculty meeting conducted this way was overwhelmingly positive and some staff members took the time to email me and let me know how much they enjoyed it.

In-service days were another chance to relationship build. During an in-service day only first grade, a few special education teachers and my special area teachers were assigned to receive professional development at the building with me. There was breakfast together, work
on the instructional framework, criteria developed for learning centers and exploration of the SAS website. The first grade staff was receptive to this format. Staff members sent me emails about the in service and the comments included:

“I was going to email you last night and let you know how great the in service was. It was time well spent and informative.”

“Thank you for a great day. It must have taken you hours to plan.”

“Today went really well. I loved how you came in and took over, showing them things. They’re not used to that.”

Since work with kindergarten, second and third grade still needed to be done, substitute teachers were provided so each grade level could work with me. This was not as successful as the time spent with first grade but the focus on instruction was beginning to surface. The staff was beginning to come together and start to understand how I wanted to see instruction be delivered even though it did not start out that way.

By the end of the year, comments from a participant in the semi-structured interviews stated there were differences in instruction from previous years:

Yes, there is a major difference. Differences in approaches, what’s going on as far as academics are concerned and number two; there is a feel that kids are respected more than they had been in a previous regime. There’s an ability for kids to express themselves, ability for staff to express themselves that hasn’t been here, so yea, there is a distinct difference.

This was exciting to be told since my goal was to influence school culture and instruction in a newly formed school. The next set of information that guided my work revolved around instruction.
An unexpected event that increased our resilience came as a result of issues that arose in another building. The district experienced an unexpected obstacle when one of the buildings in the district came under fire for not disciplining students and staff members getting harmed. The focus of my staff became about what was going on in the other building. Staff members talk and the stories we were hearing were alarming. Many resources were provided to the other building due to student misbehavior and staff members getting physically hurt. This caused my staff to complain, feel slighted and begin to stray from our own team building and instruction. There was some definite unraveling that took place. The whole idea of one step forward, two steps back came to life right before my eyes. We had such a smooth beginning to the school year and it was in danger of coming completely apart because of what was going on in another building.

The staff felt slighted that human resources were being poured into the other school and we were not receiving any. I secured some things for the building and get us back on track but not until the entire month of November was consumed by the misbehaviors that surfaced in our building and the events occurring in our counterparts building. This was a definite test of where we are as a cohesive group. The potential for in house fighting and falling apart was a possible result of the negative events that occurred. We did work as a unit, with some disagreement and discussion but team work with grade levels aided in moving the building forward. It was our first test of problem solving and bouncing back; being resilient. With distractions eliminated and a focus on relationships and resilience we were able to begin to look at instruction.
Theme 2: Instruction

The next set of assumptions based on lived experience in this setting were around the idea of instruction. The assumptions that guided my actions included some of the staff being resistant to the Instructional Framework and uncomfortable with walk throughs and feedback. In this section the findings will reveal how the staff began to embrace both instruction and feedback and change how material was presented to the students.

Finding 1: A renewed focus on instruction

Not many of the staff members had worked for me before. I was under the impressions that everyone in the district was using the same instructional strategies and materials. I was surprised when I had to spend time reinforcing the use of the 90 minute reading block, differentiated instruction, leveled material and centers. As the year went on there was a noticeable difference in instruction.

This was brought to my attention by a staff member who works with several teachers. We were discussing the learning that is going on in the building and she made the comment that it almost seems like there is a competition among the teachers to be teaching and teaching well. She said whenever she goes into a classroom to get children the teachers are always teaching, the students are engaged and it appears that people are trying things they’ve never tried before. She concluded with the thought that the children are definitely progressing academically. I was pleased to hear this was going on and that it was being noticed by staff members.

Grade level meetings were not only instrumental in our team building efforts but also in the changes in instruction. The following written comments were recorded on the Grade Level Summary sheet after monthly grade level meetings and act as further documentation that instruction was changing:
“KEI results will aid in creating groups for small group instruction”

“Small group reinforces concepts previously taught”

“According to the data there is an overwhelming need to review before jumping into the X grade level curriculum”

“We have data about student achievement based on early intervention. The data will be used for future planning.”

“Teachers will pull guided reading groups and reinforce skills”

“By including various levels of activities at each center, all students will be challenged at their academic level”

“Implementation of modified centers to meet the educational levels of students”

“The objective is to be able to reach individual students at their level to achieve growth and/or mastery”

Some additional information that directed my actions came early in the school year when the staff was surprised that I conducted walk throughs and provided feedback. A conversation with a staff member demonstrates the unfamiliarity. I had been doing walk throughs and leaving feedback notes in teacher mailboxes. She approached me and said, “I heard you were doing walk throughs.” I asked how she knew and her response was, “Everyone’s talking about it. They’re not used to it”. As the year moved along the staff continued to enjoy the feedback notes and welcomed classroom visits. Staff would call the office to see if I was available or stop by my office first thing in the morning to see if I would make time to visit and see a strategy in use. This also took place with visitors to the school. A participant in the semi-structured interviews commented about the staff: They’re very welcoming and always want to tell the good things
they are doing. They invite you in the rooms; “Hey, look at this”, “I have this kid doing this”, “Stop in to my room”. As the staff became more comfortable, they began to take ownership and initiative with instruction.

One of the pieces of information that presented itself after a review of extant data were test scores on an assessment. The chart shows the number of students in each grade level who took the assessment in September 2015 and the number of students who demonstrated growth during the second administration of the assessment. The results indicated third grade made the least amount of progress.

![Academic Growth Chart](image)

*Figure 3. Demonstration of student academic growth. This figure illustrates the number of students who took the G-RADE in September of 2015 and the number of students who demonstrated during the second administration in January 2016.*

After continuing to review the extant data and the results of the semi-structured interviews, the second theme, presented itself and showed: A group of teachers who were not using the instructional framework to a staff that was developing curriculum, moving instruction
forward and taking initiative. It was encouraging to see the professional growth and changes in instruction happen in such a short amount of time. The next set of assumptions that were a focus were about parent and community involvement.

**Finding 2: Risk takers emerge**

The staff began to take risks and ask questions and I was thrilled. This led to three pairs of teachers requesting to be trained in and use the co-teaching model. The six teachers attended professional development workshops at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, planned together, and co-taught throughout the year. It was so successful that two more pairs of teachers requested to attend the training in the fall of 2016.

Teachers were also requesting substitute teachers so they could write curriculum. There were three third grade teachers and a coach who worked with the curriculum team at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit and developed text sets for the entire school year to be shared with and used by all third grade teachers in the district.

Another group of teachers in the building began to research and advocate for a new, updated reading series for the upcoming school year. The teachers recognized the gaps in the student learning and the resources we had available. The series they located has been purchased for the 2016 school year.

It did not stop there. Even though the PLC’s were not mandated another group wanted to continue to create a Maker Space and introduce STEAM. The teachers got to work on clearing out a space, the custodian pitched in, we sent out donation request letters, the district sent someone to build tables and shelving and we were on our way to a Maker Space. By February the space was being used regularly by staff and the students know it is a special place in the building where you can’t screw up, you build and you make.
Staff members approached me and inquired about grant writing. The special education teachers wrote and received a grant that introduced their students to community jobs and life skills. I worked with another team of teachers and we secured the Education Partnership grant for the 2016-2017 which provides teachers with classroom supplies and materials.

One of the questions I asked during the semi-structured interviews asked if there were visible changes in instruction compared to previous years in this building. The response was:

Yea. I think they all came in with a different mindset. They all worked under different administrators with a different thought process. Some of them are ingrained in their own methods. They’re not going to change easily. However, because they are coming from five different buildings what they are learning is they do have to collaborate, they do have to pull together, they have to understand the leadership expects things done in a different way then they’re used to and the kids learn in a different way today. So very pleased with some of the maker stuff your teachers are doing inside the classroom. To have the surgeon gowns and band aids and cut on (paper) bones to make contractions. First graders aren’t going to forget how to make contractions. They were the surgeon that performed the operation that took two words and made it into one word. When you see that kind of growth from a thirty year veteran, I mean really something tremendous.

This participant also added:

Yea, I think the emphasis on the instructional framework is really key because without the emphasis on the instructional framework and the forty five minute weekly professional development and the encouragement of the coach to get in there because often times as principal you don’t get the opportunity to see but you’re not afraid to walk around the building and stop in classrooms. Just the knowledge you have and to just
show up at any time keeps people on their toes, instructionally. It is always a good thing to have high expectations, know that you are pushing toward some sort of shared goal and you understand the goals of the district. They are pretty simple stuff when you come down to it and that’s what you look for and the true problem any principal has is carving out that time to make people know you’re present and available and you still want to see certain things and hold people accountable and you’re pretty good at that.

This participant concluded with:

I think any time you’re looking for successful change first and foremost you have to keep the budget in mind and with our budget problems I think you’ve done a wonderful job. Look at the Maker Space. That’s a pretty cool situation and people are starting to buy into that. The engagement is there. When you do things like coding and you see how engaged in it, it doesn’t matter that you don’t have a great big budget. Those are things that you went out, solicited donations, used a free program and you got kids moving on that. Innovation is really key and these are just a few examples of innovation and collaboration. It always has to be people working together. It can’t be one person’s vision. It always has to be everyone’s vision and one thing that you’re pretty strong at is you keep people on track. You stay the course. You know it’s not going to happen overnight. Making this building a real building that has the feel of maybe an (other building) of the past will take a couple of years but you know it’s going to happen. That I’m pretty sure of just because of who you are and you’re not afraid to hold people accountable and you’re not afraid to be accountable. You’re not afraid to change things and be innovative. You know the direction the district is going in, you know the goals, the vision. It’s all about the kids.
MY DO OVER

It was rewarding to observe instruction moving in such a positive direction. As a building we were ready to add on the next layer needed for a successful school and begin to get parent and community involvement.

Theme 3: A strong school community

I know the importance of parent and community involvement and I know in the past parent involvement was not promoted in the previous school. Literature tells us parent and community involvement are key to a school’s success. The next set of assumptions involved parents and community members and their lack of involvement in previous years and the teachers’ lack of access to parents and community members. It also includes a significant revelation about actions. The findings found here showcase parent and community involvement developing and strengthening the entire school community and actions speaking louder than activities.

Finding 1: Parent involvement begins

The previous principal did not permit parents or community members in to the school. A PTO was another support that was not present in the school but we were able to build one this school year and it was quite by accident. The event unfolded as follows:

A woman came into the building because she saw a car out front and couldn’t get anyone at the administration building to answer the phone or return the messages she had left. She looked at me and asked, “Who are you?” I let her know I was the new building principal and asked how I could help her. She was the council president and needed to speak to someone at administration about joining her in fighting against drilling going on in the community. I said I would pass along her information. Then she asked me if I was going to let volunteers come in to the building because the previous principal never
allowed it. I told her, “Absolutely! You can help me start a PTO.” She was in and I had myself the makings of a PTO.

She helped me put together a functioning, productive PTO and assisted with recruiting other parents. The mom that volunteered to be the PTO president provided the staff and children with extras this year that they had not had. A PTO wasn’t permitted by the previous principal either. The staff was so appreciative and she and I can’t wait to see how we can continue to improve upon it. The PTO president has also been instrumental in our Positive Behavior Intervention and Support efforts which are key to providing high and clear expectations for staff and students which circles back to the Resilience Framework.

Finding 2: Community involvement begins

The involvement of community members is important to a school culture too. We were fortunate enough to establish ties with community members and organizations. In this section I will talk about some of the organizations and how they impacted our school. The OASIS program brings in senior citizens to work one-on-one with struggling readers. The OASIS tutors come in once a week for the entire school year. The teachers enjoy the support of another adult and the students benefit.

We were also fortunate enough to benefit from the involvement of the local police department and a local church. Both provided gifts for almost one hundred children at Christmas time. This was something else not previously permitted. The police brought in assemblies and programs and would come to the school and walked through the building to ensure a safe environment.

My school librarian approached me and asked if she could invite a librarian from one of our communities to come to the school and have a discussion about a possible collaboration.
The librarian was a great support for the staff as I had worked with at my previous building. They developed a great relationship and extended the relationship to another librarian at another public library in another one of our communities. Together they built a Lunch Bunch group that read and critiqued books. This is a relationship that will continue and the staff and students enjoyed.

The other outreach program that was initiated this year was through the Allegheny Health Network. An asthma clinic is being developed that will work to identify students in need of addressing medical concerns and proving the service at the school.

For all the things that went smoothly this year, there were definitely bumps in the road and events I did not expect.

Finding 3: Actions speak louder than activities

I didn’t realize how much my words and actions influenced the tone and mood of the building until I reviewed the anecdotal records of my findings. Some of the exchanges with stakeholders were shared with me and the following is from a participant in the semi-structured interviews.

I think that you’re very adept at that. That’s something you’ve always had an awareness of. Your background, your principalships. You’re pretty much aware that a building takes on the leadership’s mentality towards what’s important and laying out what’s important is really key. You know it’s not about the third grade test. It’s about building the skills in the kids so it doesn’t matter what the task is, they’ll do fine. It’s about opening up doors, especially for our kids and I think you understand that and how we do that. Your past success show that. In the long run we’re still a people business. There’s going to be shortcomings, there’s going to be tremendous successes. The little guy you
were just talking to. He’s here for a reason and probably a behavior reason and yet when you asked him about the assembly the other day he knew key points that are really key points. Maybe not the best behaviorally but he’s learning. That type of experience he had with that assembly, they’ve never had that before. Obviously with is behaviors he learned something and that’s good.

Another random, unexpected visit came in October. She was dropping her granddaughter off at school and asked if I had some time to talk. I invited her back to my office and her comments included: The tone is different. You talk to your teachers. The mood is nice, everything is open, don’t sense frustration in the teachers and the children are happy.

Something that speaks to the idea of us coming together was during the month of April when transfer requests took place. Over 20 staff members from the building that was in turmoil requested to come to our school. Teachers from there would stop my husband and tell him, “I put in a request to be at your wife’s building?” His response was always, “Why? She has the same kind of kids and crazy parents”. The response was always, “She takes care of her teachers and handles her business.”

The last day of school brought about another defining moment. Before the students arrived I was paged to a classroom. When I walked in there was a teacher dancing on a desk, the Promethean board had the song, “We are family” playing, teachers were taking pictures of themselves, dancing and chanting, “(the name of the school)”. Perhaps this was a complete inappropriate use of school resources and time but it was the end result I was hoping for. My goal was for the staff to come together as a team, have strong bonds and move forward as a unit.

**Key Findings Summary**

The key findings that came about through the case study are:
School culture: began to be developed by bringing the staff together and becoming a team.

Building relationships aided with building resilience.

Instruction was impacted by the renewed focus on instruction and risk takers among the staff emerged.

A strong school community was initiated through the involvement of parents, community members.

Actions speak louder than words

The reflective narrative was a critical finding.

The ability to go back and reflect on what I did, what was successful and what I would do differently next time is an advantage that I will use in the future. I would have engaged more people in my efforts and shared with more people what my work was. I kept a lot of my work close to the vest because I had not yet built relationships with people or established a team of people I could trust. Also, the staff knew I was in school and I never wanted anything I did to make them feel like they were part of an experiment. I wanted the things I did to be done for the betterment of the staff. Now knowing the staff much better I can rely on them to help me continue to intentionally focus on relationship building, to influence school culture and instructional practice in our school. The final chapter will lay out my agenda for moving forward, My Do Next.
Chapter 4: My Do Next

The final chapter presents my leadership agenda and what I will do as I move forward. The chapter includes two examples of improvement inquiry. The first is based on an article where a school chose to focus on math instruction and the improvement inquiry was principal driven. The second example, a personal example in the newly formed school that is at the center of this work, also focuses on math instruction, building resilience and building relationships and culture and was teacher initiated. Following the personal example of what recently occurred I show how I plan to continue to demonstrate a connection between my current work and my future work and keep the themes of Improvement Inquiry, Building Resilience and Building Relationships and Culture at the forefront in an effort to continue to improve our schools.

Actions speak louder than words

According to the MacConnell and Cailler article, “Getting Better Together”, a team of teachers at High Tech Elementary Chula Vista, worked on a school level math weakness specific to their school. The staff identified a math need; “wanting to increase students’ use of ‘how’ and ‘why’ language to articulate their thinking” (p.17) and used improvement science to make changes. The staff reflected on the following questions:

- What are my dreams for our school and for my students?
- How do I grow as an educator over the next year?
- If equity is at our core, what areas-in my practice and our school-are ripe for improvement?
The teachers used their responses and reflections to identify four topics that would improve student achievement and also designed their own theory of action. The teachers used the Plan-Do-Study-Act model and developed a driver diagram to drive their thinking and came to understand:

- Improvement science fosters reflective practice grounded in evidence.
- Improvement science helps teachers take action.
- Improvement science facilitates collaboration and sharing.

The staff also saw gains and improvement in the use of “wanting to increase students’ use of ‘how’ and ‘why’ language to articulate their thinking” (p.17). The use of improvement science to improve math instruction was used successfully by the High Tech Elementary Chula Vista staff and initiated by the principal. The staff in the newly formed school that was at the center of this work also used improvement science. The difference was, this improvement inquiry was teacher initiated. The staff has worked to develop relationships and this has enabled them to create opportunities for meaningful participation among themselves; a principle that is highlighted in the Resilience Framework.

The specific example that occurred in the newly formed school demonstrates the use of improvement inquiry, the Resilience Framework, relationships and the improvement of culture.

I was recently impressed by my first grade team of teachers. I gave the teaching staff the task of administering a brief math assessment to the students in kindergarten through third grade. Each grade level has an assessment that monitors student understanding of what has been taught in each grade level up to this point in the school year. The staff was also expected to review the results and make instructional decisions. A few days after I issued this task a first grade teacher
came to see me with a document she had developed. The teacher asked me to review the template and also asked for permission to share it with the first grade colleagues. She had developed a template for an item analysis. I gave her permission to share the document and by the end of the day the six first grade teachers came to me with a revised version. The first grade team was able to determine if the mistakes the students made were a grade level issue, materials concern, instructional misstep or a student need in a universal way using the same form and same vocabulary. The teachers were then able to develop small groups for guided math instruction and create learning centers and interventions that attack the areas of student need. The teachers were also able to determine if resources were needed to fill in the gaps for the students.

The other grade level teachers asked if they could borrow the template and customize it for their specific grade level. This was an example of the use of improvement inquiry, building resilience, and building relationships and culture. A teacher noticed a problem, worked on a solution and discussed it with me. The teacher was comfortable enough with her colleagues to share her form and discuss it. She also had strong enough relationships with her team to accept feedback and suggestions. The current culture is one that allows for an opportunity for meaningful participation, a principle of resilience. The act of conducting an item analysis and pinpointing needs will strengthen the instruction and student achievement. The culture of the building will continue to improve because now the expectation to conduct an item analysis after each math assessment has been established. The creation of the item analysis document was an excellent example of Improvement Inquiry and the staff has taken steps to continue to improve our school.
**Improved Leadership**

As I continue to grow as a leader I want my leadership agenda to reflect what I have started in this work and frame future work through three lenses; Improvement Inquiry, Building Resilience and Building Relationships and Culture. I need to continue to focus on these elements and engage the staff in each so that system capacity is built, sustained, and nurtured. I want the staff to be able to identify a problem of practice within their class and have the knowledge base of how to use improvement inquiry and Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles. The item analysis template is an example that the knowledge base is developing and is being applied to improve instructional practice. I want them to use the six principles that accompany Resilience and use it within their approach with instruction and building relationships. The legacy I hope to leave is that improvement inquiry is used, resilience is the framework that guides problem solving and relationships are developed. It is my hope there is an improvement in the culture of the organization and an improved school.

**Improvement Inquiry**

The improvement inquiry approach is an approach that I found to be effective. Through improvement cycles I was able to plan an action, implement an action, and monitor the results and makes changes. An example of an improvement cycle that was initiated was the use of a survey when the staff roster was announced. I planned a series of questions and allowed a section to be used for comments, questions and/or concerns. I also included times during the summer I would be in the building so staff could stop by and introduce themselves. I sent the survey through a Google doc which gathered all of the responses into one document. Once the responses were received I was able to review. The overwhelming response given was the staff
wanted time to get to know their new colleagues and time to get in to the building to arrange their classrooms. I was able to work with my custodian and arrange a schedule that allowed for the staff to get into the building three weeks early. At the time I didn’t realize it but the staff were very nervous about the change. Many would be in a new building and away from familiar students, staff and leadership. The staff needed the principles of the Resilience Framework provided for them in order to feel confident coming into their new environment.

I want to continue to improve as a leader and I want my staff to improve as educators so that we can continue to improve our school. In an effort to initiate the inquiry process with the staff and collect more data I would like to use the work of Bill Hobrecht and his adapted Feedback Framework for Leaders. The questions will offer feedback about the areas I want to continue to focus on throughout my agenda moving forward, My Do Next. The questions in the Performance Area of Leadership and My Message focus on Resilience and providing opportunities for meaningful participation and setting and communicating high and clear expectations. Relationships are crucial to answering the questions because I want honest feedback that can be used to change my leadership and approach in a positive way.

The questions in the Overall Perception category and the Strengths and Impact category of the questionnaire also focus on the principles of the Resilience Framework and also on building relationships and building culture. When I have a clearer picture of what the stakeholders perceive to be both successful and failing I will be able to develop realistic and high expectations for myself and others. The Performance Area on the questionnaire that investigates the area of Improved Effectiveness and Impact would elicit responses about how the actions I have taken should be improved upon in order to make gains in the gaps that continue in our school, whether the gaps be relational, instructional, or with the culture. The final piece of the
questionnaire invites advice. I think this portion, and the level of honesty that will accompany the answers, is based on relationships. If there is true mutual respect and care the answers will reflect that and give advice on how to improve so the entire school community benefits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Area</th>
<th>Specific Performance Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and My Message</td>
<td>What do you believe I have been conveying as two or three of my priorities for our school over the past year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What evidence have you seen that indicates that these priorities have been translating into action and improved results?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In your opinion, have these been the right areas of focus? If not, what do you think the two or three priorities should have been?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you feel should be one or two key priorities for me to address?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Perception</td>
<td>In your eyes, have I been successful as a leader? In what areas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where have I failed as a leader (or where I have been only marginally successful)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths and Impact</td>
<td>What are two or three strengths that you see in my actions and behaviors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How have these areas of strength enabled, encouraged, or achieved success for our school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Effectiveness and Impact</td>
<td>What are one or two areas where my actions or behaviors should be improved or corrected?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What has been the impact that these gaps have had in constraining the performance of individuals, teams, or our school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Advice to me</td>
<td>I want to be successful in this school as your principal, and certainly want our school to be successful. What advice do you have for me that might help me achieve increased success?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire encompasses Improvement Inquiry, Building Resilience and Building Relationships and Culture and can be used to address the various areas of my leadership performance. The feedback will inform me about my performance and their perceptions about me but the Resilience Framework principles of meaningful opportunities for participation and setting high and realistic expectations will be afforded to the staff. It will provide data for me to use as I continue to conduct PDSA cycles and continue to improve the school community.

**Building Resilience**

Throughout the process the six principles of the Resilience Framework were used and I need to continue to help the staff become more resilient. One example, that has been previously mentioned, is the use of the introductory survey used when the staff rosters were announced. The action of sending a survey that solicited input demonstrated to the staff I was interested in building relationships, I wanted to know about them and was excited to work together with them. Each staff member experienced grief and loss through this transition and that had to be recognized and acknowledged in order for us to move forward as a team.

Another example of how the Resilience Framework was used during the first year of the newly formed school came during a faculty meeting. The beginning of the year in –service days were packed with back to school information and little time was left to team build. I planned a faculty meeting early in the school year that encompassed team building, building relationships with a focus on instruction. The staff worked in teams to build a car with minimal materials and a discussion about cross curricular strategies was the end result. Many ideas were generated that day. I received feedback from the staff that they enjoyed the format and would prefer more professional development opportunities presented in that manner.
As trust among the staff began to grow and the focus on instruction began to emerge, three pairs of teachers requested to co-teach and attend co-teaching workshops. The Resilience principles of increasing bonding and connectedness, providing care and support, and setting and communicating high and realistic expectations were evident by this action. The staff wanted to work together, with each other, on instruction that would benefit children. The bonds were strengthening and resilience was developing.

Another example of the principles of the Resilience Framework in use came through the formation of a social committee. The staff instinctively knew relationships were critical to our growth. A few staff members developed a proposal including the need, the function and the purpose of a social committee. The group planned monthly luncheons, theme days for the staff and events outside of the school day. The laughter, opportunities for bonding and the relationships that were developed as a result of the social committee were invaluable to our newly formed staff.

I must continue to provide opportunities for meaningful participation, increase bonding and connectedness, provide care and support, set and communicate high and realistic expectations, and set clear and consistent boundaries. The feedback form is one tool I can use to collect data but continuing to emphasize relationship building will also influence resilience.

A school will always experience loss of some kind and we were no exception. Loss will come in both mild and extreme form. The loss of teachers due to retirement is an impact schools deal with but the grief most likely will not be insurmountable. It does need to be recognized that staff will be missed and the loss is real but there are new team members to work with and build relationships. There will also be extreme loss like when a school loses a student or staff member to death. When students and staff know a classmate or staff member will not be joining them
during the upcoming school year we need to be mindful of this and continue to strengthen the protective factors for staff and students. Relationship building is important to resilience and is also necessary when improving the overall culture of an organization.

**Building Relationships and Culture**

One of the opportunities for improvement I would like to further develop combines building relationships and improving culture along with an improvement inquiry approach. The idea of a mentoring program for new administrators is something I would like to pursue. There is a new principal at one of the elementary schools and I am assisting him in every way I can. There are many questions he has and I want to formalize the things he and I are doing so that anyone new can have an easier transition.

When a school assigns a new administrator in a leadership position it is a change to a setting that should be recognized. There will be staff members that welcome the change and staff members that fight it. As I have found, through building relationships, the culture can be positively impacted. I found that it takes for relationships to form and I knew once there were connections and trust established the instructional piece would follow. I have learned through the use of the Resilience Framework and its six beliefs that resilience can be developed. It is important to provide opportunities for meaningful participation, have clear and high expectations, provide care and support and also increase bonding and connectedness, set clear and consistent boundaries and teach life skills. The lessons I have learned can be shared with administrators experiencing loss, trauma or change. The lessons learned can be communicated through professional development, workshops, and articles. Building relationships is done through using improvement inquiry to engage stakeholders (teachers, students, parents,
community members) and focusing with laser-like attention to building relationships with the school in order to create a culture that supports improved instructional practice.
References


Cerra, K. personal communication, December, 2015.


www.pacode.com/secure/data/022/chapter403/chap403toc.html.


Appendix

Appendix A: Assessment results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>G-RADE Form A</th>
<th>Number of students that demonstrated growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First A</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First B</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Numbers indicate the number of students who took the test in September and also in January.

The numbers do not indicate the classroom size.

Students performing at a higher level tend not to move.
Appendix B: Timeline

January 2015

- School board votes to close three schools and reconfigure the district from kindergarten through sixth grade buildings to a K-3, 4-6 and 7-12 at the high school
- Principal assignments determined and staff submits the preference sheets prior to the principal announcements

May 2015

- Staff rosters announced
- Email and survey sent to new staff (38 respond)
- Attend building PTO meeting
- Email sent to staff about Preview Night
- Preview Night held for parents (first time meeting many of the staff)
- Following day received emails from new staff about Preview Night

June 2015

- Reviewed surveys from staff and parents
- Based on survey information, handbook, special area schedule, and instructional expectations were emailed to the staff with a Welcome letter
- Organized new office
July 2015

- Met with the Township Commissioner who had previously been denied access to the building
- Met with a Township Police Officer
- Met with parent about bringing a basketball program to the elementary school
- Met with retired district teacher
- Met with another retired teacher who wanted to volunteer

August 2015

- Physical changes made to the office
- ALICE training
- Met with parent of child with an anxiety disorder
- Real estate luncheon
- Dr. and the potential asthma clinic on site
- Teachers stopping in to introduce selves
- Met the Chief of Police Department
- Back to School Night (survey given)
- Met with Commissioner and Councilwoman about volunteering
- First in-service days (survey given)
- Kindergarten Orientation
MY DO OVER

- Monthly calendar distributed

September 2015

- Staff and parent surveys reviewed
- Met with council, community members and parent volunteers; PTO established; first PTO in years
- 3 pairs of teachers attended co-teaching training
- Social committee established and first luncheon planned/monthly event
- Teacher story about another building
- Children returned from Propel
- National Crème Filled Donut Day celebrated
- PLC’s not required but staff asked if they could continue
- Donations of uniforms from Kmart
- Librarian from Library collaborates with school librarian (not permitted before)
- Reading Block and centers expectations/memo
- Met with Allegheny Health Network to continue discussion of possible asthma clinic on site and how it could grow to include family-based services with a pediatrician
- Walk throughs
October 2015

- Team building faculty meeting and the request for more with this type of format
- Discussion with guardian about positive changes
- Sterlan Barr assembly (teachers shared event with other building even though they aren’t to text on work time)
- In-service day with first grade team
- October calendar distributed
- Rumors coming out of another school, increases need team, bonding
- Breast cancer awareness, denim and pink day with staff; raised over $200 to donate
- Monthly luncheon
- Staff members “Boo” each other
- Professional development day
- Walkthroughs
- OASIS tutors begin to volunteer (currently 9 intergenerational tutors working with students)

November 2015

- November was a difficult month due to the events at other school and I was concerned with morale. School was in turmoil and started to receive additional supports that we weren’t, but needed. Many mental health and behavioral issues began to surface and it was very stressful and draining on the entire staff. It was our first obstacle where we
could have fallen apart but worked to get through it. This was when staff members began to use tactics I don’t agree with and other staff members did not either. There was a scheduled meeting with the union president because some staff members felt things were not being handled. Other staff members stepped in and refused to participate. The meeting was canceled but it made me refocus attention on the potential toxic staff members and be more aware of them. It was interesting to watch the staff rally to stop what they felt was unnecessary. As a result we were able to obtain a security guard and establish a resource room that is assisting with some of the behaviors.

- meteorologist visit; loose change collection brought in $315 to donate to Project Bundle Up, luncheon
- “I’m thrilled to pieces to work with each of you”
- PTO meeting held
- Book Fair (first one in years and it was run by the PTO)
- In-service
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Visit to the Educational Partnership
- PBIS training
- Established a Leadership Committee
- December calendar distributed
December 2015

- I made the conscientious mind shift to put November on the past and move on. Focus on staff and instruction had to be the spotlight.

- Secret Santa

- Staff breakfast

- Positive email sent to staff

- National Pastry Day celebrated

- Sing Along

- Basketball game against third grade played

- Walkthroughs (staff inviting me in, requesting feedback;

- Police and church donated gifts for over 60 children for Christmas

January 2016

- Together the staff raised $205 for a teacher who raising money for her husband’s charity bike ride, “road to Hope Foundation”

- Black and Gold Day for Steelers

- Grade level meeting to work on writing goals/focus

- Walk throughs
• 100% of the staff participated in the money collection for the lottery. We all kept saying we didn’t want to leave anyone behind. People chipped in money for staff members that were absent and didn’t have cash with them.

• Personal communication with staff member on January 6, 2016 about her students and G-RADE testing

• PTO meeting held on Thursday, January 7, 2016. I asked parents to help me with the Title I Parent Policy and they have several fund raisers planned. A teacher attended and the PTO president asked her to be a teacher liaison for the PTO and she agreed. She also verbalized how excited the staff was that there is a PTO since there hasn’t been one for years.

• personal communication received about the change in culture in the building

• Black and Gold Day for staff and students

• Tier meetings taking place throughout the month

• Personal communication with staff member about the feel of the building, climate of the building, staff being welcoming (January 27, 2016)

• Leadership Committee established and meeting began; will continue to meet the third Thursday of each month. Focus: Climate of the building for the students

February 2016

• Reminder email sent about walk throughs, focus on the instructional framework

• DIBELS data reviewed at the faculty meeting. Data did not reflect what I had hoped for; teachers informed they will be conducting more frequent progress monitoring
• Walk throughs have indicated guided reading and learning centers are being used

• Rain forest assembly

• A staff member placed a Valentine treat in everyone’s mailbox

• Mardi gras was celebrated; staff member brought in beads for everyone and we wore green, purple and gold

• Thursday, February 25th there was a meeting about PBIS. I was out sick and the staff met to discuss some changes. It got ugly from the reports I heard. In a way I was ok with the direction it went because I feel like it was coming and they needed to get it out of their systems. I put together a memo that outlined what they could and could not do. We will revisit during the March in-service.

• Alignment proposal/grade level checklist accepted and planned for February 29, 2016. This meeting went well. The staff will begin to work monthly on this project. It became glaring that it was needed. This is an effort to create consistency with instruction.
Appendix C: Transcription of Interviews

Interview #1

When you walk into the school, what does it “feel” like? If you were here previously, is there a difference? It’s different every day—it seems to me there are good days and bad days. There are 500 something kids, behaviors, all kinds of things happening. It feels like a school is supposed to I imagine. I mean that’s my guess.

How are you treated by the staff? Is that different than before? Wonderful! I didn’t really know many people from xxx but I knew people from other buildings (from subbing). I get along with everyone. Well, xxx was special. Those people were wonderful. It’s getting like that here. When I first got here it wasn’t like that but it’s getting there. It wasn’t home. Talk about that. At I enjoyed going to work every day. It felt like a family down there. When we first got here everything was separated and you could feel the tension. But now it’s starting to feel good. It’s starting to feel like home again.

What do you think the focus of the school is? I don’t really know what the focus is. I know everyone goes above and beyond for the care of the kids. I can see that. It’s hard. It’s hard to deal with some of the kids. You can see the patience a lot of these people have. You have to have a lot of patience.

Do you think the “pockets” of teachers that came together from other buildings are starting to interact with staff members from other buildings? I am starting to see that. Definitely separated at the beginning of the year, totally separated. There were 3 or 4 different groups. I can see it now. I don’t see people spread apart anymore. People congregating and talking. You see people smiling now that weren’t in the beginning of the year.
Do you think the relationships among the staff members are improving? Yes, absolutely! I think because it was new and change is scary. No one likes change. I think it was more fear about what was going to happen. Then it came back to normal like a normal routine. I think the change of being new just had people on their heels, nervous.

Have you seen changes in instruction? What are the contributing factors to the change or lack of change? I really don’t get to see much of that. I’m not really in the classrooms much. But you are in the hallways. I can see the different things the teachers are trying. I see the furniture change, I see kids sit in different places.

Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to build relationships? I think the principal is wonderful. I’ve been working with for 15 years. Trust me I don’t think I could do this if you weren’t the principal. You let me do my job. You do that with everybody. People realize that.

Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to address school climate? To me it seems like you’re a people person. You’re hands on and I always see you try to make things better. You’ve always done that as long as I’ve known you.

Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to change instruction? Absolutely. You’re always looking for new things to better the school, the staff, the parents. You get along with the parents and that’s not an easy thing to do.

Any additional comments you would like to add. I know in the short time we’ve been in this building and it hasn’t been a year yet I can see the difference. It’s getting better and better and better. So, it’s not just my imagination? No, it’s not your imagination. I can see it just getting better and better. Nothing to keep from getting better. Big change from the beginning to now. Not just a little but a big change. I feel it’s going to continue that way. I’m glad things are
going in the right direction. I see it just getting better and better. I think it’s going to be good. I think that next year is going to be even better. I think it’s going to be a real good start to the year. I think that could have been part of the problem. We got off to a bad start. Nobody was comfortable, no one wanted to leave and then we came and invaded someone’s building so now that’s over with and everyone will come back in after the summer and I think it will be wonderful.

Interview #2

When you walk into the school, what does it “feel” like? If you were here previously, is there a difference? There’s always a culture inside every building and because I get an overview of many buildings you can see distinct differences even though curriculum might be the same, even though you’re looking at materials and teaching staffs that are relatively similar the culture is established from the top down. It tends to be, then builds from within. That’s the deal with relationships in particular. Culture—you can pretty much spot it within an hour of being in a building.

Yes, there is a major difference. Differences in approaches, what’s going on as far as academics are concerned and number two, there is a feel that kids are respected more than they had been in a previous regime. There’s an ability for kids to express themselves, ability for staff to express themselves that hasn’t been here, so yea, there is a distinct difference.

How are you treated by the staff? Is that different than before? I’m so old they have to treat me well. It’s kind of intriguing because as you’re aware I’m going on leave here shortly and I have had people come up to me and say the district is half terrified I’m leaving because a lot of the academics we have I have pushed in some manner, shape or form. So I tend not to get the same attitudes that maybe other administrators get because I have worked for the staff, tried to
develop the staff and it’s not necessarily always a supervisory role so they’re a little more open with me and the people who report to me have kind of been handpicked so that I have the right people in the right places.

**What do you think the focus of the school is?** I think there are two things that jump out. The first is making sure kids have the ability to learn and about the academics. The academic focus, the economic disadvantage of the building, shows through automatically from the time they get on the bus to the time they get off the bus you can see the need. The areas the kids are coming from, most of the areas are pretty poor and so some of the simple things that often times taken for granted or needs right off the bat, you can see what is as simple as getting food, you know some of the kids only get the breakfast and lunch you provide—so consequently what I think you’re looking at is a situation where kids are taken care of and then academics are always pushed forward. So those are the two focuses/foci.

**Do you think the “pockets” of teachers that came together from other buildings are starting to interact with staff members from other buildings?** Yea. I think they all came in with a different mindset. They all worked under different administrators with a different thought process. Some of them are ingrained in their own methods. They’re not going to change easily. However, because they are coming from five different buildings what they are learning is they do have to collaborate, they do have to pull together, they have to understand the leadership expects things done in a different way then they’re used to and the kids learn in a different way today. So very pleased with some of the maker stuff your teachers are doing inside the classroom. To have the surgeon gowns and band aids and cut on (paper) bones to make contractions. First graders aren’t going to forget how to make contractions. They were the surgeon that performed
the operation that took two words and made it into one word. When you see that kind of growth from a thirty year veteran, I mean really something tremendous.

**Do you think the relationships among the staff members are improving?** Yea, you’re always going to have, any time you look at a staff, four quadrants. Those that will do everything they possibly can and it doesn’t matter, they’re going to give you their best. Then there’s those that will give you what they can because it’s what’s expected. There’s those that are going to comply and there’s those that are going to go their own way. Not as strong professionally, do not understand the rigors of instruction. Those are the people you have to pick out. I think the first year of anything is on the job training. So many of them learned that it has to be something different and the changes will always continue and over the course of the next ten to fifteen years it’s going to have to become personalized learning more and more.

**Have you seen changes in instruction?** This year I think I see a little bit more use of technology probably because everyone does have their own laptop and they do understand we put in an investment in technology. So I do believe we are going to, we have seen some steps forward as far as technology is concerned. They’re starting to get the notion reading isn’t from a textbook or reading series. Today you have to expose children to as many different genres as possible and our kids with their oral language gap becomes pretty important to get them phonics and phonemic awareness, more words, vocabulary building, so yea, there’s improvement there.

**What are the contributing factors to the change or lack of change?** First and foremost the awareness there is change in education taking place. Technology has opened doors. A textbook that says George Bush is president or Pluto is still a planet—those were in use ten to fifteen years ago. Now you can just say, “Hey Google” and you can get an answer you want and kids are adept at that. Kids are growing up with that. Technology makes them less of a worker because
everything is at their fingertip but it also forces teachers to become the worker for the kid; to show them how to find answers. The real big change teachers are facing is they have to teach learning for learning’s sake, not content for learning’s sake. It needs to become learning how to. Not about strictly ABC’s or how many presidents of the United States there have been. It’s learning how to learn.

**Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to build relationships?** Yes, I think everything the principal does builds relationships. Just by the way you run faculty meetings, by the way you treat your staff; past years it’s always been dictatorial. People that were in in this building understood they wanted to be on the favorable side. You tend to approach things where everybody gets treated as equally as possible, but you treat them individually as individuals and that kind of builds a sense of comradery. There’s many more smiles in this building than there has been in the past. There’s still some people who haven’t bought in to the total vision yet but they will. The first year lays the groundwork and you build from there. Yea, there’s definitely change.

**Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to address school climate?** I think that you’re very adept at that. That’s something you’ve always had an awareness of. Your background, your principalships. You’re pretty much aware that a building takes on the leadership’s mentality towards what’s important and laying out what’s important is really key. You know it’s not about the third grade test. It’s about building the skills in the kids so it doesn’t matter what the task is, they’ll do fine. It’s about opening up doors, especially for our kids and I think you understand that and how we do that. Your past success show that. In the long run we’re still a people business. There’s going to be shortcomings, there’s going to be tremendous successes. The little guy you were just talking to. He’s here for a reason and probably a
behavior reason and yet when you asked him about the assembly the other day he knew key
points that are really key points. Maybe not the best behaviorally but he’s learning. That type of
experience he had with that assembly, they’ve never had that before. Obviously with is
behaviors he learned something and that’s good.

**Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to change instruction?** Yea, I think
the emphasis on the instructional framework is really key because without the emphasis on the
instructional framework and the forty five minute weekly professional development and the
encouragement of the coach to get in there because often times as principal you don’t get the
opportunity to see but you’re not afraid to walk around the building and stop in classrooms. Just
the knowledge you have and to just show up at any time keeps people on their toes,
instructionally. It is always a good thing to have high expectations, know that you are pushing
toward some sort of shared goal and you understand the goals of the district. They are pretty
simple stuff when you come down to it and that’s what you look for and the true problem any
principal has is carving out that time to make people know you’re present and available and you
still want to see certain things and hold people accountable and you’re pretty good at that.

**Any additional comments you would like to add.** I think any time you’re looking for
successful change first and foremost you have to keep the budget in mind and with our budget
problems I think you’ve done a wonderful job. Look at the Maker Space. That’s a pretty cool
situation and people are starting to buy into that. The engagement is there. When you do things
like coding and you see how engaged in it, it doesn’t matter that you don’t have a great big
budget. Those are things that you went out, solicited donations, used a free program and you got
kids moving on that. Innovation is really key and these are just a few examples of innovation
and collaboration. *It always has to be people working together. It can’t be one person’s vision.*
It always has to be everyone’s vision and one thing that you’re pretty strong at is you keep people on track. You stay the course. You know it’s not going to happen overnight. Making this building a real building that has the feel of maybe an (other building) of the past will take a couple of years but you know it’s going to happen. That I’m pretty sure of just because of who you are and you’re not afraid to hold people accountable and you’re not afraid to be accountable. You’re not afraid to change things and be innovative. You know the direction the district is going in, you know the goals, the vision. It’s all about the kids.

Interview #3

When you walk into the school, what does it “feel” like? If you were here previously, is there a difference? It’s a very welcoming environment. It feels like an elementary school. There’s a perception of the district that it’s chaotic and bedlam and it’s not that. It’s orderly, it’s welcoming, and it’s very student centered. I would have to say in previous years it was more of a (long pause). It was stressful coming in. It wasn’t welcoming to administration. Definitely run as a dictatorship so it wasn’t welcoming. It almost felt like you were walking on eggshells and that you were invading someone’s space.

How are you treated by the staff? Is that different than before? They’re very welcoming and always want to tell the good things they are doing. They invite you in the rooms; “Hey, look at this”, “I have this kid doing this”, “Stop in to my room”. I didn’t have too much walking around the building last year but like I said it was almost like I was imposing and it’s not like that at all anymore.

What do you think the focus of the school is? Students, student success. That should be the only focus. It’s not about the teachers. It’s about the kids and are they getting what they need from the teachers. Sometimes people have the perspective, “we need to see what teachers are
I don’t want to look at that. I want to see what they are giving, what the kids are receiving. **Does it look like they’re giving differently than before or do you not have much to base that on?** I think it is because it is so new. It’s a fresh start. I think people were more willing to try new things because there wasn’t a perception of “this is what I did before”. We’ve given them a little more resources and the implementation is better because we went from six principals, essentially, to three in the elementary setting so it’s the same message and I think that’s appreciated. There’s definitely a little difference in how things are being implemented.

**Do you think the “pockets” of teachers that came together from other buildings are starting to interact with staff members from other buildings?** I know through the coaches we have that going and I know they’re doing the grade level writing checklists and I know there is collaboration there. I know we did groups last year so I hope Schoology is helping with that so hopefully there is collaboration with lead teachers. But I think again because there’s not a lot of variation, because there is a small amount of leadership in terms of numbers of elementary staff things are more uniform which I think is critical to what we are doing and the change we implemented. **What about when you walk through here? There are teachers from six different buildings.** I can’t tell who didn’t know each other. I wouldn’t be able to say, “Oh you were from here”, “You were from here”, can’t tell at all. It’s the staff. That’s their identity.

**Do you think the relationships among the staff members are improving?** I think it is and I think the message from me is, “We are. This is what we do. We are “” and I think the pockets and the animosity, “I was at “”, “I was at this building” is disappearing. You still have, you still have but now it’s branded on the buildings as. It might seem insignificant but coming into your workplace and it says, “” is different and I think that creates a sense of “We’re” instead of “We’re segments of a community.”
Have you seen changes in instruction? What are the contributing factors to the change or lack of change? Yes, a lot of that was top down but a lot of that is implementation. I’m not sure there was instructional leadership here before so now with principals owning more of the instructional piece, and we’re going to keep giving you guys more of that, I think that’s critical so that will definitely change and I think teachers can appreciate what they’re told to do because you have now become an expert in what they are told to do. You know the curriculum. It’s not and I standing in front of the staff telling them what to do and I have never liked that when it was like that before. I never want to stand in front of the staff, unless I have to. It should be the principal generating this is what we’re doing, this is the instructional framework, these are the modules, these are the units, this is the reading program, this is how we do x,y,and z. It’s such a stark contrast between you and the previous administration.

Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to build relationships? I think you’re friendly so it’s natural. You’re not like, “I’m the boss”. You kind of just blend in. Like if I walked in the building not knowing anything I would not, don’t take this the wrong way, I would not be able to say you’re the principal because you’re interacting with the kids the way teachers interact with the kids. It’s not like it’s, “I’m in charge” it’s more, “We’re part of a team” and so I think you have to because of the nature of the change. People are going to mimic what they see. I think that’s critical.

Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to address school climate? Yea, the consistency with how you deal with kids and what you’re implementing, resources you’re giving teachers. I think it’s critical and changing a school climate is difficult. We all have a lot of work to go because I know there are still teachers that still say “those kids” and they’re our kids and I think it’s very difficult to change. It’s going to take years but I think if we have
stability within administration they’ll understand your style and that will gradually change and I think also there’s a PTO, there’s parent involvement. I think you get more community involvement. I think it will get better because there’s such a wide range of communities here.

You have literally the poorest community and the wealthiest in the same school but you are getting a different breed of parent in terms of resources they have not in terms of how they care about their kids. Everybody loves their kids. Nobody wants their kids to mess up so I think you’re getting the sense that shared ownership and maybe parents can start reaching out because their kids are in class together. I think that is kind of where that will also be a springboard.

Culture is related to discipline, which is related to instruction so if you become, you’ll never be the end all be all instructionally unless you, anybody, improves as an instructional leader. Instruction will improve, when instruction’s better, discipline is better. When discipline is better, school climate is better and it’s just a cyclical thing that happens. I think the foundation is there.

A little layer was laid this year and it will just keep building.

**Do you observe the principal doing anything intentional to change instruction?** You have to because we tell you to (laughter). **But people didn’t in the past.** Right, you’re not afraid to ask a question on how to do things. You don’t have too much pride in, “I’m not going to ask”.

Some people won’t ask which is detrimental to your career. So you’re very open with central office and the mandates, the frameworks, things that come out of curriculum or wherever. You do that well because you have to but you’re not afraid to say what you need. The only thing I would say is you have to be more confident in your skill set because you have a very, very, very deep wealth of knowledge and you have an excellent skill set. But sometimes it’s like, “Jeannie do what you want. You’re the principal.” You know what I mean. You’re the principal. I’m the same way. **I think it’s the permission thing…** Yea, you don’t need permission to be the
instructional leader in the school. You’re the principal. You make decisions. Do what you feel is right because at the end of the day I can’t tell you what’s right. You have to do what’s right.

**Any additional comments you would like to add.** The only thing I would say is and this is everyone, but particularly here and [xxx], you need to get a better handle on how we do the SAP process, how we do the special ed process, how we communicate and I think this is where we are weak. How we communicate to the teachers what the process looks like. If a kid has an IEP you can’t just send them somewhere. There is due process, manifestation determination, RR, all of these things and I think teachers are getting frustrated because again they would love if you crucified someone in the front lawn for everyone to see. I think we need to get a better handle on that. A more systematic approach to what we do and also with what we want to put in with PBIS. I think the restorative justice thing, the peace circles that we want to do, we have great ideas but we fail on the implementation. It’s nobody’s fault but in hindsight, 20/20, we didn’t realize the dynamic we were creating when we put all these buildings together so that’s a learning curve. I just think that all of us need to manage better and with that open lines of communication better with the parents. If we have to call you every day, even if it’s positive, it’s something so they can understand that. It’s critical. I think we can always get better. We need the systematic approach to discipline and placement an when kids come back from placement it needs to be defined and better communicated because they are coming back. We don’t ship you off the island forever. You’re coming back because you deserve an education. **Anything I should be doing?** Just do what you do but keep doing it better. Just keep working, you don’t need to work harder, just smarter. That’s for all of us.
Appendix D: Anecdotal Notes

The following are some anecdotal records that speak to observed changes:

- A parent anecdotal record from 10/13/15 asked if she could speak to me because she wanted to point out the changes she had noticed. Her comments included: The tone is different. You talk to your teachers. The mood is nice, everything is open, don’t sense frustration in the teachers and the children are happy.

- There were comments made by staff members after an in-service day 10/20/15:
  - Staff member A: I was going to email you last night and let you know how great the in-service was. It was time well spent and informative.
  - Staff member B: Thank you for a great day. It must have taken you hours to plan.
  - Staff member C: Today went really well. I loved how you came in and took over, showing them things. They’re not used to that.

- A staff member from administration was in the building for a meeting (1/27/16) and came to find me to tell me that the feel of the building was completely different than before. Previously it had been chilly, wasn’t inviting or warm and now it was completely different.

- As I review the extant data and the semi structured interviews the results of this case study are unique to my situation. The staff went through change due to the closing of three buildings and the reconfiguration of the district and staff. As we moved through the year the foundation to a positive school culture was being laid. Some staff members welcomed the change and were excited to get out of the situation they were in while others were very comfortable with where they were and were not at all happy about the closures of the schools.
Unfortunately the beginning of the year did not allow for time with new colleagues so we had to work around that obstacle. Time had to be built in to the work week. Fortunately, the teacher contract allows for forty minutes per week to be spent on meeting time. Each month the staff had at least forty minutes carved out for them to spend together. There were times when I needed to schedule the topic and other months they were permitted to develop their own agenda. After each meeting, each grade level was required to submit notes from the meeting. I conducted a review of the notes and noticed the following comments:

- The teachers shared center ideas
- We are developing a positive attitude and school community
- We will continue to meet and collaborate
- There is ongoing sharing of ideas
- We will continue to work as a team and share ideas
- We will communicate with the PBIS team
- Collaborate as a team to focus on being cohesive as a grade level
- It seems they know the importance of working together and that will result in an improvement in student achievement. The comments listed below relate to student achievement:
  - KEI results will aid in creating groups for small group instruction
  - Small group reinforces concepts previously taught
  - According to the data there is an overwhelming need to review before jumping into the X grade level curriculum
  - We have data about student achievement based on early intervention. The data will be used for future planning.
Teachers will pull guided reading groups and reinforce skills

By including various levels of activities at each center, all students will be challenged at their academic level

Implementation of modified centers to meet the educational levels of students

The objective is to be able to reach individual students at their level to achieve growth and/or mastery

The written comments expressed in the meeting notes match the responses of the semi-structured interview responses to the question about the focus of the building. All three responded to that question that the students were the focus of the school. The first interview responded with, “I know everyone goes above and beyond for the care of the kids. I can see it.” The second participant responded to that question with, “The first thing is making sure kids have the ability to learn and about academics. So consequently what I think you’re looking at is a situation where kids are taken care of and then academics are always pushed forward.” The third responded with, “Students, student success”.

As the year progressed I checked in with the staff to see how things were progressing in the eyes of the staff. Below are some of their comments:

Staff member D: My previous school had a negative environment. It was rough for me. I’m really happy, even though it was scary since I was the only one coming from (another school in the district).

Staff member E: I was unhappy that my school closed but I was hoping you would be here. You don’t micromanage me.
One of the responses from the semi-structured interview matches this because the participant made the comment, “You let me do my job. You do that with everybody. People realize that.”

- **Staff member F:** Everybody is working to build relationships with each other. When the workplace is good, then it’s not work. A positive environment and work place is good.

- **Staff member G:** There are not many miserable people. People seem to be happy. There are things to look forward to here.

- The comments from staff member G and H coincide with what two of the participants that were interviewed stated. One said, “(In the beginning of the year) totally separated. There were three or four different groups. I can see it now. I don’t see people spread apart anymore. People are congregating and talking. You see people smiling now that weren’t in the beginning of the year.” Another responded with, “I can’t tell who didn’t know each other. It’s the (building name) staff. That’s their identity.”

- **Staff member H:** People last year were caddy and cliquish. People eased in nicely. Everyone is willing to pitch in and share ideas. You’re pretty positive and we know you will help us.

- **Staff member I:** The climate is way better. It was almost scary at the other building. I like that you’re always the same. You’re professional, like a man. You treat everyone the same. You’re just about the job. I love my colleagues. There’s collaboration. I think you’re more cohesive.

As I review the extant data and the responses to the semi-structured interviews in an effort to tell my story of the 2015-2016 school year and the changes that have been made and the growth we have experienced I am impressed with how far we have come. The anecdotal stories, the field notes and semi structured interviews point to the importance of intentionally creating
opportunities. The theme is that change occurred and it was a forced change. Some welcomed it and others did not. The change came in many forms; change in the location of where staff worked, change in grade level colleagues, change in administrator, and change in the clientele of students and parents. One of those changes would be difficult but all of us experienced at least three of the changes within the last twelve months. It was overwhelming and imperfect but on the right track. We gave ourselves permission to take it slow and not rush relationships and teams. We started off fragmented but slowly became a unit. I recognized there would be grief and wanted to be intentional in my approach in dealing with the new staff. The Resilience Framework provides us with factors that build resilience and assist with mitigating risk factors. Typically resilience is focused on in children but I wanted to see if there was a benefit to using the framework with adults who were experiencing loss, grief and change. The loss of one’s workplace is traumatic and I wanted to treat it as such.

I like to think I did a good job with providing clear expectations but as we moved through the year I know there were things I forgot. With the coming together of the staff there were things I assumed everyone did in previous buildings/knew so I know I wasn’t clear with everything. I feel by providing the handbook, the master schedule and instructional expectations I communicated my expectations but without time to unpack them as a staff there were some things that did not translate the same way to everyone. The survey did invite everyone to participate and opened the lines of communication. Some staff members stopped by throughout the summer, called and emailed. The communication and visits allowed for bonding and it let them know I was available to support them.
As the year progressed I spoke with staff members and received communication from others about how things were moving along. Some spoke to how the staff was coming together and others spoke about instruction. (Comments above)

I conducted three semi-structured interviews that were taped with an audio recorder, transcribed and reviewed. Interview 1 shared that at the beginning of the year people were uneasy and not interacting with staff members from other buildings. The staff seemed to be divided into three or four groups. By the end of the year it was visible to participant Number 1 that relationships were forming and staff members were interacting. “People congregating and talking. You see people smiling now that weren’t in the beginning of the year” and the staff is beginning to feel like a family, there is a level of comfort developing. Responder Number 2 also made reference to people smiling as this person had not seen smiles in this building in previous years; “There’s many more smiles in this building than there has been in the past.” Trust in the workplace improves the organization.

What also was key in the review of the responses of Interview 1 is that the students are taken care of by the staff. The response from Interview 1 was that “everyone goes above and beyond for the care of the kids. I can see that. I can see that. It’s hard. It’s hard to deal with some of the kids. You can see the patience a lot of these people have.” Responder 2 and 3 agreed. Responder 2 commented the staff takes care of the students and make sure they have the ability to learn while always focusing on the academics and Interview 3 stated when walking through the building it is evident students are the focus.

A comment made during Interview 1 was the importance of me allowing faculty and staff to do their job, there is a level of confidence instilled in the staff and they know I don’t micromanage but will support and provide feedback. (aligns with comments made by staff members)
Participant 2 noted the “feel” of the building is different than in previous years. There is a change in instruction and the ability for both students and staff to express themselves that was not there before. This coincides with the statement that Interview 3 made when it was reported that, “They’re very welcoming and always want to tell the good things they are doing. They invite you in the rooms; “Hey, look at this”, “I have this kid doing this”, “Stop in to my room”. I didn’t have too much walking around the building last year but like I said it was almost like I was imposing and it’s not like that at all anymore.” It was also said, “It almost felt like you were walking on eggshells and that you were invading someone’s space.”
Appendix E: Building Resilience in the Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Provide meaningful opportunities for participation</th>
<th>Set and communicate high and realistic expectations</th>
<th>Provide care and support</th>
<th>What actually happened: Building relationships, school culture, or instruction</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey emailed to new staff</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Building relationships</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Building relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email sent to staff about Preview Night</td>
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<td>Preview Night for parents</td>
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<tr>
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<td>PLC’s eliminated but staff want to continue</td>
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Appendix F: Mitigating Risk Factors in the Environment

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<th>Events</th>
<th>Increase bonding or connectedness</th>
<th>Set clear and consistent boundaries</th>
<th>Teach life skills</th>
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