Unite, Inspire, Lead
Our Students, Our Union, Our Future

Leadership in School Consolidation

Stephanie Marchbank, Ed.D.
NEA Strategic Goal and NEA Organizational Priority:

• NEA Strategic Goal
  – Strategic Goal 1: Strong Affiliates for Educator Voice and Empowerment
  – Strategic Goal 2: Empowered Educators for Successful Students

• NEA Organizational Priority
  – Early Career Educators
  – Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
  – Institutional Racism/Racial Justice in Education
COMPETENCY: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

- Sets the mission and establishes strategies necessary for a relevant and thriving organization; empowers, motivates, and fosters a pipeline of talent for the future.

NEA Leadership Competency progression level(s)

- Level 1: Foundational
- Level 2: Mobilizing & Power Building
- Level 3: Agenda Driving
• **NEA Leadership Competency themes**
  
  – Effectively executes governance and leadership responsibilities
  
  – Establishes and maintains collaborative, effective relationships
  
  – Advances the organization by internalizing its mission, vision, and core values
  
  – Sets strategic objectives to guide long term goals
  
  – Develops self and others as leaders
Background

Educator experience

School and Community

Leadership Program
Purpose and Significance

• To provide information and insight regarding the process and effects of rural school consolidation

• Can inform district/school leaders and provide recommendations
Research on School Consolidation

• History of school consolidation in US and in case study district

• Causes, considerations, and examples of school consolidation
History

• 1914 – Cubberly – bigger meant better; small schools/districts not adequately using resources for economy of scale nor preparing students for adult life

• 1930-70 brought large population shifts due to industry; and Conant (1950) and Sputnik reinforced idea of large schools promoting better education for international competitiveness

• Current school districts are dealing with dwindling budgets and updated buildings
Reason/Considerations

• Financial, population shifts, aging buildings, transportation

• Effects on students (curricular, extra-curricular, achievement, sense of identity), educators (resources, class size and content, identity), community (sense of identity/tradition/pride, economics, hostility/angst)
Examples, state laws, local history

• PA (one unconsolidated; one created a charter school), NJ, MD (avoided it)

• MD dictates process (7 factors – enroll trends/trans/age&cond build/finances/qua led pro/race/impact to com)

• Multiple consolidations and restructurings
Spector’s Change Theory

Purpose

Alteration of Behavior

Strategy

Shared Diagnosis

Mutual Engagement
Methodology - Mixed Methods

• Qualitative data
  – to understand the process of school consolidation, stakeholder perceptions, and student opportunities
    • Participant observer, surveys, interviews, and document reviews

• Quantitative data
  - to determine the level of success in student achievement
    • State-mandated assessment (HSAs) proficiency rates for English 10 and biology from all three schools
Results

• Increased choices and levels for curricular and extra-curricular opportunities
• Increased student participation in clubs and advanced classes
• Increased student achievement
• Change process components present
• Discontentment/angst present, but now most community members supportive of New School
How did the rural high school consolidation affect student curricular and extra-curricular opportunities?

• Results were mostly consistent with previous research from literature review
  – Increased opportunities
  – Student participation
    • Exception: sports teams
How did the consolidation affect student achievement?

• Inconsistent with research
  – Increased percentage of students passing AP exams
  – Statistically higher pass rates of state-mandated tests in Biology and English 10
How did the process used to create a change to schools and their communities conform to prevailing change theory?

- Strategy, purpose, alteration of behavior pattern (Components)
- Shared diagnosis
- Mutual engagement
How did stakeholders perceive the outcome of the consolidation?

- Most understood factors for consolidation and support the New School
- Participants listed the updated technology and the wider range and availability of classes, especially advanced ones, as benefits
- Several viewed the involvement of the communities as positive
What leadership strategies were used to facilitate this consolidation?

• Leadership stemmed from State Superintendent, Board of Education, District Superintendent and principal of the New High School
• Atmosphere of trust and openness
• Stakeholder involvement encouraged
Can consolidation of two rural schools, resulting in a new entity, offer a better educational experience and can such a controversial process be completed with concordance?

- Initial angst, but most view the New High School with dignity and respect
- This school consolidation positively affected student achievement as well as curricular and extra curricular opportunities.
Future Studies

• A meta-analysis of school consolidation studies to create a dynamic model that could be helpful for practitioners or policy makers

• A study of the economic impact on a community due to school consolidation
Implications for School Districts

• Leaders must create opportunities for shared diagnosis and mutual engagement.

• Decision makers should consider how to make a school consolidation a positive change and how to use components of change theory.
Implications for School Districts

• Generate trust and support through relationships and openness
• Role of the principal - a strong determining factor of success
• Atmosphere of smaller schools - allowed to persist in the larger, consolidated school
Conclusions

• School consolidation will continue to be a controversial
• Can be handled with concordance if community members and stakeholders understand, are a part of, and support the effort.
• Decision makers must consider the steps in a change theory, as well as the fundamental aspects and components of an organization undergoing change. Shared diagnosis and mutual engagement of all stakeholders must be continual throughout the process.
• Furthermore, a school consolidation can and should result in a positive educational experience that will benefit and please the communities who once felt disadvantaged. By engaging those people to assist in making pertinent decisions, behaviors will align and a common vision can be realized.
Session Outcomes

• Consider using the content from this session in the following ways in your current position/role:
  – District Administrator who will implement and lead a district-wide change
  – School Administrator who must lead and support a school community through a major change
  – Educator who will assist and transition a school community through a change
THANK YOU!!!

• Please complete the evaluation for this breakout session!

• Please visit the Leadership Development Resources website at
  www.nea.org/leadershipdevelopment