

TRANSITION TO A NEW HIGH SCHOOL: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS  
REGARDING SECONDARY SCHOOL REORGANIZATION

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by  
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TRANSITION TO A NEW HIGH SCHOOL: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

REGARDING SECONDARY SCHOOL REORGANIZATION

Presented by Helen Mary Porter

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## **ABSTRACT**

Midwest Public Schools (MPS) restructured their entire secondary system in 2013 by building a third comprehensive high school, converting three junior highs to middle schools, changing middle school grade levels from grades six and seven to six, seven and eight, and shifting high school building grade levels from ten through twelve to nine through twelve. Victory High School opened in August of 2013 with all new teachers; most came from previous MPS schools. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the Secondary School Reorganization and how MPS, as a district, supported or hindered those teachers' transition to a new high school building.

Findings that arose from interviews and focus groups included: community building and culture, the importance of colleagues, principal leadership, the excitement of working in a new building, teachers' personal lives, inequity of resources and demographics, principal leadership, teacher choice, technology and continued professional development for problems that inevitably arise during the first few years of opening a new high school. The implication for a school district ready to embark on adding a new comprehensive high school and/or changing grade clusters is to overly communicate and take into account every aspect of a teacher's work day. Teachers must have buy-in to a new building or structure before that change will be successful.

## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

As educators wrestle with societal problems, many schools have found success by focusing on building relationships with students (Roybal, Thornton, & Usinger, 2014). Adolescents with too many educational transitions are less likely to form relationships with adults, as they are not able to bond and build trust with teachers, administrators, or support staff (Roybal et al., 2014). This contributes to an increased dropout rate because children are struggle with transitions (Roybal et al., 2014). The relationships educators cultivate are important to the creation of efficacious school change initiatives (Fullan, 2001). Teacher/student relationships are a key influence on student achievement (Hattie, n.d.). Effective schools work diligently to foster relationships between adults and students (Daggett, 2008). In order to increase the quality of relationships, schools seek to diminish obstacles to relationship-building.

As a result of this research on transitions and relationships, many school districts are either establishing smaller teams within larger buildings, or limiting the transitions between buildings and levels (Hattie, n.d.). Relationship-building is emphasized when schools focus on a few students in each learning community and smaller schools within a bigger institution (Daggett, 2008). Restructuring requires the piecing together of smaller entities within the massive framework of public schooling because schools with fewer students usually have less violence, operate smoothly, are more welcoming, and their students perform better than average academically (Kretovics, Faber & Armaline, 2004).

While change in organizations is often difficult, it seems particularly taxing in schools. Educational change may rely on the personal feelings of staff members rather than being dependent on what is most important to student achievement. Educational change literature reminds leaders to acknowledge the separation of emotions from reason and reality (Fullan, 1997a). Teachers' needs may be pushed aside because of policies instead of increasing teachers' capacity to accomplish high-quality instruction (Fullan, 1997a). Teachers involved in change are asked to adapt to transitions for the benefit of the school or district, but their feelings as professionals are sometimes overlooked (Hargreaves, 1997). This focus on the long-term student benefits of change is important, though educators' feelings and opinions must also be acknowledged.

In Midwest Public Schools (MPS), administrators and MPS Board Members were concerned with the relationships students make in their secondary school years, which may decay because of frequent school transitions (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). Before the 2013 school year, students transitioned four times in MPS, from Kindergarten to their senior year in high school (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). Students were in elementary school for grades K-5, middle school in sixth and seventh grades, junior high from grades eight through nine, and senior high from ten through twelve (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). It is important to note that all participants, schools, the school district, and the town have been given pseudonyms to protect them.

The focus and purpose of the Midwest Public Schools is discovered in their mission statement:

As reflected in the statement of philosophy of the (Midwest) School District, students are the first concern of the district, and must receive the primary attention of the Board and all staff members. In pursuing this primary goal, it is imperative that the welfare of the individual student be kept paramount and that each student be considered and treated with respect as an individual. To this end, the Board and staff shall work together to establish an environment conducive to the very best learning achievement for each student (Midwest Public Schools, 1997).

The MPS mission statement clearly reflects a focus on students and student learning.

This “primary goal” supports MPS school board decisions relating to student achievement, safety and respect. Changing school configurations could be seen as supporting this mission.

Community stakeholders, especially parents, were unhappy about the number of transitions their students went through from building to building (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). Many MPS parents complained to principals that the two years in middle school, coupled with the next two years in junior high, were unnecessary, especially as children this age are going through so many other mental and physical changes in relation to puberty (Midwest Public Schools, 2012). They thought the transitions students had to make from grades five through ten were excessive, and wanted a smoother transition for their children through the middle years, hence the focus on a true middle school model of grades six through eight (Midwest Public Schools, 2012).

With parental concerns, and the focus on the mission of MPS being student centered, it was necessary for MPS to reconsider the grade formation that made up eight secondary schools in the district (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). Midwest began the process of gathering committees to initially see

the potential for a third comprehensive high school as early as 2005 (Midwest Public Schools High School Task Force, 2005). That task force gave recommendations to the Ninth Grade Transition Committee, founded in 2008, which eventually developed into the Secondary School Reorganization Committee in 2011 (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011).

In the 2013 – 2014 school year, Victory High School became MPS's third comprehensive high school. The other two high schools, Elizabeth Bergman High School and Roseman High School, along with Victory High School, now house grades nine through twelve. This was a massive change for MPS, since freshman used to be in junior highs. The three junior highs, which served eighth and ninth graders, are now middle schools, and all middle schools housed grades six, seven and eight (Martin, 2012b). "For some students already in middle school, that mean(t) an extra year at their current school" (Martin, 2012c). There were also concerns about overcrowding: In 2013, Roseman had 2,001 students and Bergman High School had 1,839 students (Braden, 2013). When the third high school was built, each would house 1,700 (Braden, 2013).

In response to community input, MPS administrators instituted a Secondary School Reorganization effort occurring in 2013, with the stated goal of limiting student transitions to aid in creating comprehensive high schools and a stronger middle school program. This was the overall plan that was slated to take five years. The high school would be open in the summer of 2013 for summer school and then be operational with grades 9-11 (no senior class) in August, 2013 (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011).

The MPS Secondary School Reorganization process was in full implementation in the 2013 school year. While this was part of a five-year plan, the actual building site and personnel transition was a problem, because of the complexity involved in both opening a new high school and shifting three current junior highs into middle schools (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). The overall plan included these three new middle schools serving as feeder schools for the three high schools, with six middle schools total (Midwest Public Schools, 2012). In addition, the reorganization also required shifting teachers to different schools. About 600 secondary teachers were affected by the school reorganization (Midwest Public Schools (2012). One of the main reasons MPS took five years to develop this transition plan was because of the decisions teachers and administrators would have to make regarding staff transition (Midwest Public Schools, 2012).

Those who wanted to work at Victory High School left their colleagues behind in other buildings. For example, a complete grade level team of 30 teachers was taken from a former junior high and transferred to Victory High School (personal communication, February 10, 2012). As a result, some of the issues of the reorganization included management of staff and teacher placement.

When administrators started talking about changing the MPS structure, time and grade levels of MPS schools, some teachers were anxious that their job and their place in the district was in jeopardy (personal communication, February 10, 2012) “Changing the structures of time and space in schooling, along with the roles teachers play and the positions they occupy with those structures, has been at the center of worldwide efforts to



transform the most basic features of schooling in terms of classes, subjects, grades and departments” (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 58). Changes often make teachers apprehensive. Any school reorganization must take this into account and navigate the waters carefully around teachers, lest they add anxiety to an already anxiety-ridden profession (Fullan, 2003). Teachers need to feel supported if they are to be successful in school; any changes in regards to variation or transition have the possibility of deflating their confidence and efficacy (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Therefore, efforts were made by MPS to support teachers during the transition period of Secondary School Reorganization by seeking input from teachers on their school preference.

Changing schools requires a commitment and trust in a school district. Schools as institutions have long been interested in changing the way “we do” school, be it the infrastructure, the schedule, or number of days attended. During conversations and brainstorming sessions, members of the Secondary School Reorganization Committee indicated that MPS administrators took a risk to reorganize their brand of schooling and scheduling, or the way MPS “did school”. Many MPS stakeholders were concerned about the Secondary School Reorganization (Midwest Public Schools, 2012).

Many adults think they are proponents of change, but they might harbor a hidden agenda which prevents their true investment in any transition (Kegan & Lahey, 2011). Some MPS administrators saw this resistance to change as opposition to the district, which led to a feeling of competition or disloyalty (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Teachers had the competing commitment of being loyal to their peers and students, as well as their administrators, but also having a desire to work at a different

school. Resistance to change is about the situation, self, support and strategies (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006), which will be further discussed in Chapter Two.

There is a struggle between making teachers comfortable and doing what is best for students. This struggle could be caused by the conflict in differentiating emotion from effective practice (Kegan & Lahey, 2011). Schools benefit from teachers' investment in the culture of a school; change in schools may rely too heavily on the personal feelings of the staff rather than depending on what is most important to increase student achievement (Hargreaves, 1997). "People who are trying to hold on to the past while pieces of it are being cut away are anxious" explains Bridges (2009, p. 140), but those adult emotions cannot override what is best for students.

MPS administrators took the risk to change the district's structure for the sake of children, and tried to help the affected adults along the way (Midwest Public Schools, 2012). Schools should not be a place where just the adults feel comfortable, and all the changes are made for adults to remain in traditional roles and places (Midwest Public Schools, 2012). If the adults in a school do not feel supported, however, then that feeling of discontent will mar the students' chances of happiness, improvement and success (Marzano, et. al, 2005). Transition and change aren't easy, but Secondary School Reorganization in Midwest Public Schools was done with students' best interest in mind (Midwest Public Schools, 2012). In this exploratory qualitative study, change and transition constructs were assessed to see if they supported or hindered staff's successful

transition into a new school, and what the transition of Secondary School Reorganization meant to specific teachers in that specific school.

### **Problem Statement**

Changes can cause stress and disruption to schools, classrooms, students, teachers, and the very substance of schooling; these alterations to the fabric of U.S. schools can be jarring and disruptive to students, teachers, staff and parents (Muhammad, 2009). With change comes anxiety, and it is vital that educators understand how to positively handle stress, for themselves as individuals and to benefit the children they teach (Tennant, 2005). For a school district to achieve a successful transition to a new program, situation or policy, administrators and school leaders must consider the effect of the change on teachers and students. This study focuses specifically on teachers, however.

Because school change is often “handed down” by school boards or superintendents, many teachers and students do not feel like they are active and participant stakeholders in their future professional and educational lives (Schmoker, 2006). This leads to stress, which is harmful when an individual feels helpless and out of control (Tennant, 2005). These emotions, related to stress, can affect both the physical and mental wellbeing of people involved in uneasy situations (Tennant, 2005).

This stress also affects students as well as their teachers. Adolescents go through many changes during fourteen to eighteen years of age. These transitions range from behavioral, physiological and social (Rew, Tyler, Fredland, & Hannah, 2012, p. 205). Concerns teens have as they matriculate through high school include: making good

grades, getting into a college, relationships with parents, peers and significant others, identity and purpose, their appearance, spirituality, and dealing with some new-found freedom while being responsible for more aspects of their lives (Rew et al., 2012). Having a smooth and permanent transition to a comprehensive high school enables students to have some structure and stability at a time when so much else in their lives is changing (Midwest Public Schools, 2012).

Midwest Public Schools, in Halpin, MO, completed a full Secondary School Reorganization in the 2013-2014 school year. The opening of Victory High School enabled Midwest Public Schools (MPS) to convert all junior highs into middle schools, with a total of six middle schools serving students in grades six through eight. The ninth graders previously served at junior highs were moved to one of the three high schools: Victory, Elizabeth Bergman, or Roseman. In order to complete this transition, MPS went through the largest restructuring of its history. In many transition meetings, MPS leaders said they could not find specific research concerning school districts journeying through a comprehensive grade level redistricting (Midwest Public Schools Steering Committee, 2011).

MPS focused on the importance of planning during their transition (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Restructuring is important for schools, because reorganization and restructuring can help schools meet the goals of their mission and vision. Anything leaders can do to increase professionalism, and model teaching and learning, will impact this renovation of school (Hemmings, 2012). Leaders must value

collaboration when they schedule teachers and classes, and employ shared leadership (Hemmings, 2012).

Peterson, McCarthy, and Elmore (1997) studied restructuring labors in elementary schools and found that success depended on four things: a school mission related to student achievement, teacher collaboration, shared decision making, and successful and comprehensive professional development. The MPS transition, on the surface, had all these aspects in place; this study explored what that meant to a specific school building and specific teachers. “The organization or leader who takes on the sheer most number of innovations is not the winner” (Fullan, 2001, p. 35); in fact, the more an organization takes on the least likely they are to succeed in any aspect of transition, change or reorganization (Fullan, 2001).

There were many questions faced during the transition, including personnel issues such as sharing teachers across schools, relocating teachers, and adjusting school culture and climate after transition (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). Survey results also indicated issues with school and subject preference, influences from peers, respect or resentment toward established leaders, and fear of the unknown (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). These are all issues that might have affected the transition. There were also procedural issues that might have impacted the secondary conversion, such as new school schedules, moving supplies, and new technology adjustments (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). In addition, questions relating to the school calendar and moving to three-tier bus transportation system might have further complicated the transition and increased anxiety

among parents, patrons and educators (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011).

Six hundred and ninety teachers were mailed letters on Friday, May 18, 2012, informing them of their assignment for the 2013-2014 school year (Martin, 2012a). Teachers interviewed for a newspaper article mentioned that they thought most people wanted their first choice to be in which school they would work, but most would be happy to work at any of the schools in Midwest Public Schools (Martin, 2012a).

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the MPS transition by examining faculty perceptions of the change process MPS utilized throughout the transition, which is ongoing, as of May, 2015. Though MPS examined patterns in its organization, foci in this study are structures articulated in a specific school. MPS has tried to change the ways schools are organized, thus possibly leading MPS teachers into the potential for an ethical, instructional and systematic quandary regarding transition. Questions to MPS staff related to perceptions of this transition.

### **Research Question**

Within the context of this study, the following research question was addressed:  
What are the perceptions and expectations of teachers in a Secondary School Reorganization?

## **Definition of Key Terms**

Educators often speak in their own confusing language of acronyms and technical vocabulary. The purpose of this section is to introduce limited terminology distinct to this study to reinforce meaning and provide transparency for the reader.

**Transition.** For the purposes of this study, the word “transition” is used to mean the process of shifting from one school building to another, or choosing another building in which to work. Scholars and researchers look at transition, change, reconfiguration, transformation, and reorganization interchangeably (Bridges, 2009). This study specifically refers to the idea of transition as moving from one teaching assignment in one building to another teaching assignment at Victory High School.

**Change theory.** The overall goals of this study will relate to change theory (Cuban, 2010) in general and transition theory (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995) specifically, as this study explores how these theories interact within the context of Secondary Reorganization. This change was dramatic for MPS, as change can be for any school system. Cuban (2010) states there are two types of change: incremental and fundamental. Incremental change consists of first order changes, with the goal to improve efficiency. First order change impacts existing structures of schooling, especially successful instruction. Fundamental change is second order change. The objective of fundamental change is to perpetually refurbish and renovate the principal context of an organization. MPS undertook a second order change during the period before the 2013-2014 school year.

**Secondary School Reorganization.** The term “Secondary School Reorganization” was coined specifically for the transition and conversion process MPS went through in the advent of a third comprehensive (grades nine through twelve) high school to serve the majority of the MPS population who are mainstreamed in their high school years.

### **Theoretical Framework: Transition Theory**

The study of the MPS transition was viewed through a context defined by Schlossberg’s Transition Framework. This was the most appropriate framework from which to study this transition because of its focus on adult transitions, especially those adults who are transitioning into new work arenas. Other factors taken into account, which amalgamate with this transition framework, included organizational culture, and research on change and transitions, specifically exploration of adult work transitions.

This Secondary School Reorganization and restructuring is specifically important to MPS’ change from a middle/junior high school model to a traditional middle school system. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) remind us that the perspective that adults have while going through transition focuses on specific life events that are changing, “...thus it is not the transition itself that determines its meaning for the individual; rather it is whether the transition is expected, unexpected, or never occurring” (Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995, p. 31). This transition was expected. MPS administrators were thinking of ways transitions affected the adults who work in school buildings.



Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) Transition Theory states that people's sensitivity to a transition is crucial when considering how that individual will be affected by it. This Transition Theory posits that people travel through three stages when facing change: endings, the neutral zone, and beginnings. School leaders must consider these transition elements to both support employees and sustain an effective change. If these emotions created by change are overlooked, teachers and staff might lack faith and assurance that the transition will end positively, and the actual transition application could fail.

There is much work regarding transition theories correlated to adults in work transition (Schlossberg et al.), but Schlossberg's Transition Theory most specifically concentrates on life events involving transformation (Schlossberg et al., p. 22). These theory tenets are: 1) Approaching transitions, 2) Taking stock of coping resources: self, situation, support, strategies, and 3) Taking charge – strengthening resources. This transition framework allows researchers to incorporate “both anticipated transitions – the scheduled, expected events that are likely to occur for the individual and that can be anticipated and rehearsed – and unanticipated transitions – the nonscheduled events that are not predictable” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 23).

While MPS tried to account for every conceivable event of change, administrators at the MPS Neal Board Office could not anticipate every possibility of transition. MPS claimed to have kept teachers' feelings in mind while anticipating problems and creating solutions in the 2013-2014 transition (Midwest Public Schools, 2012). Institutions

struggle to acknowledge that sometimes transitions lead adults through what they perceive to be a crisis situation (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Transition is considerably affected by perception. In Schlossberg's framework, transitions happen in stages: endings, neutral zones, beginnings. The end must come before the beginning, followed by the neutral zone, a kind of a limbo where nothing is what it was or what it will be, and the beginning, or new start (Bridges, 2009). This framework also considers the impact of a transition. "For an individual undergoing a transition, it is not the event or non-event that is most important but its impact, that is, the degree to which the transition alters one's daily life" (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 37). This is crucial to understand when discussing Transition Theory, because the experience of going through a change will be unique to each individual.

### **Significance of the Research for Leadership Practice**

This study is particularly timely because more American schools are struggling with inevitable and various changes, such as consolidations, redistricting, and the closure of entire school districts. This research could make a significant contribution to the literature. I have been told by administrators in the Midwest Public School district that they struggled finding literature to support a transition of this scale (personal communication, February 10, 2012). When MPS leaders prepared for the process of Secondary School Reorganization, they reported a significant gap in the literature (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). There were few instances of a transition of this kind on this scale in research texts; a prescriptive model

for how to implement a Secondary School Reorganization of this level and magnitude was not readily available.

This study can both define process and practice, as well as be used as a tool for reflection on transition and reorganization. This Secondary School Reorganization process will not be completely over for MPS for a few years. Midwest Public Schools will have a much clearer perspective, after a few years, to look at where they have come from, what they could have done differently, and how to help other school districts work through this process. The information in this study will be useful if other districts in Missouri or the United States are considering the stages of transition.

It is the researcher's hope that this study will make significant contributions to Midwest Public Schools. This will be helpful as MPS looks back on where they have come from and how they should carry on the process. A potential gain for MPS is handling other elements of transition, perhaps at the elementary level, with this knowledge. These findings could indicate that teachers' relationships with each other and their administrators are strong, but need some repair and modification, as well as a push to change constructs and policies which support MPS teachers.

## **Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The aim of education is to provide all PK-12 students with the opportunity to learn a variety of knowledge and skills to make them better thinkers, synthesizers, and citizens (Spring, 2004). To transform students through change, educators have to be ready to transform themselves. As Douglas Murray McGregor states, “we often sum it up [management’s task] by saying that management consists of getting things done through other people” (1957/2011, p. 183). Teachers and administrators have the challenging task of trying to get education “done” through children and teachers, but sometimes forget the obligation of changing and reflecting through one’s own conversion. Both leaders and followers are transformed, and student achievement benefits, if we are open to a positive and well-planned transition.

Given the focus of my study, I chose to look at research on school reconfiguration, consolidations and closings, demographics, boundaries, the middle school model, school choice, effective ninth grade transitions to high school, school restructuring, and teacher perceptions of school reconfiguration; I chose these topics to review because it lets me see the whole picture of school reorganization and refiguration, not just a limited view of opening a new high school in a single district. There is also a discussion on school change, leading change, fundamental versus incremental change, the Implementation Dip, top-down versus bottom-up decision making, teacher perceptions of school change, and leadership, which were topics I discovered having pertinence to my research question after interviews and focus groups were completed and the data was

analyzed. It concludes with a study of the conceptual framework of transition that guides this study, the lens through which I encountered the data amassed.

### **School Reconfiguration**

When trying to comprehend and examine the perceptions of teachers in a Secondary School Reorganization, one must recognize the part school reconfiguration might play on the hearts and minds of educators. Teachers are not robots or machines that principals and district leaders can pull out of one institution and place in another; teachers are primarily passionate and well-educated professionals who invest in a building and culture who may find it difficult to move or work in an overhauled environment. There are many ways that schools and school districts can reorganize and restructure learning environments, from busing one set of neighborhood kids across town, to closing down schools; from establishing specialty and charter schools, to changing boundaries.

### **School Closings**

There are many ways school districts can regroup learning situations. One of the most dramatic examples of school reconfiguration is school consolidations and closures. Districts undertake this fundamental change for many reasons, including insufficient financial resources, natural disasters, and population relocation (Jack & Sludden, 2013). Some schools are closed because their academic records are so poor that the state has to come in and reallocate the resources used by that school to mend the damage that has been done (Surface, 2011).

Reactions to school change range from the moderate to the extreme. Large school districts like Philadelphia, Chicago, New York City and Washington D.C. have closed an enormous number of schools, mainly because of an increase in charter schools, the lingering effect of the 2008 recession, and population shifts (Jack & Sludden, 2013). Philadelphia closed thirty schools between 2012 and 2013 because of financial shortfalls, displacing 15,000 students (Jack & Sludden, 2013). Chicago terminated over forty school buildings from 2000 to 2005, and New York City has closed over 160 schools in the last fourteen years (Jack & Sludden, 2013). While these closings might have implications for future cost savings, increased student achievement or a consolidation of costs to create efficiency, the students affected by these changes are going through substantial and perhaps stressful transitions (Jack & Sludden, 2013).

### **Demographics**

When school districts deal with issues of changing the structure of schools, they must also consider who is attending those schools. Students who belong to minority races or are of a lower socio-economic status than the majority of students in a district or school, are more likely to find stress and anxiety waiting for them in high school (Benner & Graham, 2009). Many high schools are not prepared to welcome, include, and cater to the specific needs of students from diverse backgrounds (Benner & Graham, 2009). Teachers sometimes lack appropriate professional development to understand, empathize and properly instruct students from diverse backgrounds (Benner & Graham, 2009).

The challenges students encounter because of racism is a threat to those students' academic success (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Educators are sometimes disinclined to

address students with diverse needs; it is an issue that is uncomfortable to discuss, and often leads to teachers blaming parents and students for the transgressions of societal discrimination (Singleton & Linton, 2006). The stress of joining a high school as an often- marginalized member of a group or groups is augmented by the specific developmental stages that progress through puberty; many students' developmental steps do not match up with the expectations of the school environment (Benner & Graham, 2009).

Issues of busing students from urban to suburban neighborhoods has fortified the need to study the inclusion of students from lower socioeconomic and minority status; the students going in to a new school are affected, as is the school itself (Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2014). While society as a whole might not be ready or willing to respond to changes in demographics, schools are "...often the first public institutions in suburban communities charged with responding to demographic change" (Holme et al., 2014). School and district leaders must consider the effect students from lower socio economic status have on the school, and the effect school has on them.

As America's Latino population continues to rise, Hispanics are continually and increasingly segregated in schools (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002). Studies have shown that almost all districts are actually decreasing in integration, of both Black and Hispanic students, rather than increasing (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002). Some feel that as America as a whole becomes more integrated, the issue of the importance of desegregation is becoming forgotten about. Schools with a high minority percentage are also those with an elevated poverty rate, lower degrees of parental assistance, fewer financial and tangible

resources, younger and less educated teachers, all of which combine to exacerbate educational inequality for minority students (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002). School and district leaders must remember that diversity advances the education of all students, not just those from a minority (Orfield & Lee, 2005). When districts change the structure of schools, they must never forget who is attending those schools and how demographics affect school reconfiguration.

### **Boundaries**

The question of changing or amending boundaries is a hot button topic in most American school districts. Boundaries generally mean which school district a home or residence is in, and within that district, which schools students attend. When faced with the “link between segregation by poverty, race and academic performance,” it becomes clear that starting a meaningful conversation about school and district boundaries is not only essential, but crucial (Orfield & Lee, 2005, p. 36).

School boundary lines can be defined by city, district or school logistics. Families tend to move to the suburbs to gain an increase in housing, space, and community opportunities (Baum, 2004). They also leave urban environments to decrease their association with failing schools, dangerous conditions, and sometimes fraternization with other races or socioeconomic levels (Baum, 2004). America’s high dropout rates are centralized on high minority schools in urban environments (Orfield & Lee, 2005). The issues of having clear and fair boundaries, as well as an appropriate percentage of representatives from different races, religions and socioeconomic statuses, increases the



chances of success for all students, not just those from a marginalized background (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

A constant source of frustration, for both MPS district leaders and parents alike, was the issue of boundaries – which students went to which Midwest Public School. Boundaries, in the case of Victory High School, were a great source of community contention, even from the very start of the process to find a site on which to build (Hull, 2012). Parents, students, stakeholders and Halpin citizens were divided on where to build a third high school, and the selected site changed a number of times. The boundary committee then assessed many propositions which sought to include demographic equity in boundary decisions (Martin, 2011). Three proposals were brought to the MPS School Board - all of them included the problem of northeast schools in Halpin having higher free and reduced lunch numbers than other schools (Martin, 2011). This was because the concentration of lower socio-economic status was geographically closer to the site of Victory High School (Martin, 2011).

### **Charter Schools**

There are many ways school districts reorganize and restructure learning environments, and these are sometimes influenced by the community around them (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011). Many parents and communities have supported the introduction and foundation of charter or independent schools (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011). Those who believe they have the right to use their taxpayer money to influence a school's culture and establish a focus for a school have long fought to open charter schools (Frankenberg et al., 2011). Parents yearn for an

opportunity to choose their children's school, while the prospect of focusing on a core content, like Science or Math, or an artistic focus, like a charter school which specializes in music, is especially sought-after (Frankenberg et al., 2011).

Charter schools are more segregated than public schools (Orfield & Lee, 2005), as they are fundamentally more racially isolated than traditional public schools (Frankenberg et al., 2011). The moral question again becomes how to diversify every school, not just public and private schools, to ensure a richer and more varied setting which will enrich the lives of all children who attend. School choice, especially in the context of opening a new comprehensive high school, brings about emotions from stakeholders in relation to ownership and internalization of the bond between student and school. Connecting these emotions from families, as well as the need to keep schools someone evenly diversified, can be a hot button issue for communities (Martin, 2011).

### **School Restructuring**

Peterson, McCarthey, and Elmore (1997) studied restructuring labors in elementary schools and found the success of these restructurings depended on four things: a school mission related to student achievement, teacher collaboration, shared decision making, and successful and comprehensive professional development. The MPS transition, on the surface, has all these aspects in place as of right now; this study will explore what that means to a specific school building and specific teachers.

Some would argue that there is no point in restructuring schools; what educators really need to do is reculture, or change their perspectives, views, and philosophy about the mission and vision of a school (Fullan, 2001). Unless a district or school takes into

account the actual change of the fiber of the building or district, restructuring will be a superficial and meaningless charade (Fullan, 2001). School restructuring, or reculturing, depends on integration of ideas at the core of the change, focused goals centered on results, and emphasizing instruction as the primary objective of the educational system (Fullan, 2001).

### **Effective Ninth Grade Transition Programs**

Another issue regarding school reconfiguration is an effective ninth grade transition program. Some believe the core of MPS restructuring was to place ninth graders in a nine through twelve high school building (personal communication, February 10, 2012). In all of the literature regarding transition, it is important to focus on ninth grade transition, in particular, because of the fragility of the age and the stress of change on 14 and 15 year olds. There is a wide gap in the structure and culture between a middle school and a high school (Roybal et al., 2014). High school freshman are more likely to fail if they do not feel like they fit in to school (Roybal et al., 2014). Freshman who have not established a connection to school, or have not forged strong bonds and relationships with teachers, administrators, and classmates, are more likely to have lower attendance, poorer grades, and a more stressful high school experience (Roybal et al., 2014).

Freshman are also more likely to drop out of high school if their grades are poor, they associate with negative social groups, are below the poverty line, and have experienced supervision of juvenile offices because of illegal activities (Roybal et al., 2014). Students from diverse backgrounds find anxiety when they reach high school and realize their ethnic representation is lower than they have previously encountered (Benner

& Graham, 2009). Minority students, as well as freshman who have adverse social factors in their lives, are more academically successful if they feel connected to school and have positive adult relationships with students and teachers (Roybal et al., 2014).

### **Middle School Model**

Educators have long been concerned with the issue of giving students the academic structure and support that is in accordance with children's developmental progress. Middle school students are usually going through puberty, increasing in brain development, and making choices regarding nutrition, relationships, and school connection, all while undergoing extreme development in both their physical and mental states (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). "Surviving adolescence is no small matter; neither is surviving adolescents" (Atwell, 1987, p. 25).

Parents and educators alike can be concerned when the restructuring of a school district occurs; they want their students and children to be protected, cared for and nourished academically, socially and behaviorally (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). The Middle School Model encourages building relationships, giving freedom with responsibility while also building in limiting factors in relation to teaming and courses, and constructing the foundation for a successful high school career (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011).

The Middle School Model suggests that grades six, seven and eight are a time of extreme stress and rebellion in a student's life (Raphael & Burke, 2012). A strong middle school includes attention to students' emotions, academic success, and social needs (Raphael & Burke, 2012). Relationships between students and teachers are also

significant to improving students' middle school experience, and are one of the tenets of a successful Middle School Model (Raphael & Burke, 2012).

### **Teacher Perceptions of School Reconfiguration**

School reconfiguration affects mainly teachers and students. There are many facets to the changes teachers endure, and if a school or school district does not invest in a smooth transition, students' well-being may be at risk (Konu, Viitanen, & Lintonen, 2010). A school's community and utility is a vital feature of school staff's professional happiness (Konu et al., 2010). Leadership that provides backing for staff-initiated changes, arranges and supports the encouragement of staff decision-making, and encourages teacher autonomy all contribute to the self-efficacy of teachers, and therefore increases teachers' attainment of successfully educating students (Konu et al., 2010).

The literature around school reconfiguration has shown many different facets to consider when studying educational reorganization. This literature provides context for this study of teacher perceptions and expectations regarding Secondary School Reorganization in Midwest Public Schools. There is a gap in the literature, however, when it comes to the question of getting to the core of teacher perceptions regarding change, in particular, in a secondary schools setting.

### **Organizational Change**

A substantial revolution must occur before a learning organization can dramatically change the way it does its work. Marquardt (2011) reminds us that there are four significant aspects of that change: "vision, culture, strategy and structure" (p. 61). The employees of an institution are crucial for the transition, as they are the ones who

have the capability of learning (Marquardt, 2011). Organizations embarking on change must empower their employees, help with the learning in regards to change, and advocate for their workers (Marquardt, 2011).

### **School Change**

While change in organizations is often difficult, it seems particularly taxing in schools (Hargreaves, 1997). This could be caused by educators' personalities, school affiliation, or the struggle in differentiating adults' emotion from effective practice. Hargreaves states, "The literature and practice of educational change tend to treat emotional states as accomplishments to rationality, not as integral to reason itself" (1997, p. 19). Change in schools often relies too heavily on the personal feelings of the staff rather than relying on what is most important to student achievement. The conceptual level of change from an administrator view is far different from the accountability level at which teachers are expected to perform (Hargreaves, 1997). Teachers involved in change are asked to put aside their own feelings for the betterment of the school or district.

Schools can be overwhelmed with improvement and reform systems, however, and a linear, clean focus helps maintain the integrity of purpose and planning (Fullan, 2001). Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) Transition Theory states that people's sensitivity to a transition is crucial when considering how that individual will be affected by it. Considering leading employees through the process of transition, starting with endings, going through the neutral zone, and then ending at beginnings, can modify the way people think about change (Schlossberg et al., 1995). This journey through

articulated and categorized transition stages might be the difference between a transition failure and one of success.

### **Leading Change**

Another crucial element to discuss regarding organizational or school change is that of the actual leaders taking people through the change. A successful transition from one way of operating to another has as much to do with the people in charge as it does those going through it. Kotter (2011) states there are eight stages of transformational change, which include a sense of urgency, a guiding alliance, a strong vision, clear and constant communication, empowerment of others to support the vision, short-term wins, improvements that lead to more changes, and new approaches consistent with the new vision (p. 2). Leaders must appreciate these tenets of change, while also avoiding the pitfalls of transformational change, which include underestimating employees, not placing importance on team leadership, launching a complicated vision, assuming everyone knows the meaning of the vision without communication, and supporting people who do not maintain the new vision (Kotter, 2011). Leaders must listen (and not just hear) the complaints, concerns and questions their employees have regarding change (Kotter, 2011).

School leaders in the United States often rely on Fullan's explanation of successful change governance (2003). Fullan states that there are barriers to change that are imposed upon leaders and also self-imposed. School change is affected by leaders who are overloaded, do not learn themselves, or employ the fatal flaw of "If-Only Dependency": the theory that everything else around us, the government, school board,

constituencies, students, must change before we are allowed to do our jobs (Fullan, 2003, p. 19). Leading change is often difficult when faced with an amassed community through which transformation must be driven.

### **Fundamental vs. Incremental Change**

The way an organization goes through change has a lot to do with what kind of change they are actually making. Larry Cuban's (2010) work on Incremental vs. Fundamental Change is key to understanding school redistricting and the teacher perceptions that accompany restructuring. Incremental Change requires a soft approach and cannot be rushed, hastily put together, or the process taken for granted (Cuban, 2010). Those who invest in Incremental Change believe that schools are not broken, they just need to be amended to successfully educate all students (Cuban, 2010). This is also known as First Order Change (Marzano et al., 2005). Incremental change examples might include modifying a curriculum to include supplemental units, editing and adding assessments, or establishing a new teacher evaluation tool (Cuban, 2010). Others call this Technical Change, which has become increasingly popular in public schools in the wake of the 2001 policy No Child Left Behind (Muhammad, 2009). The danger with Incremental Change is that if a leader does not monitor the change closely, it will be diluted and become either an afterthought or not implemented at all (Cuban, 2010).

Fundamental Change relies on the notion that schools, and how we manage schools, are completely broken and defective (Cuban, 2010). In Fundamental Change, it is better to completely overhaul the entire academic system and start over than it is to change bits and pieces of it. Fundamental change examples might include founding



charter schools, closing down an entire school, or opening a school devoted to the arts. Others call this Cultural Change (Muhammad, 2009), or Second Order Change, which is much harder to establish than any other kind of change (Marzano et al., 2005). If stakeholders are not supportive of Fundamental Change, the mobilization and adaptation to this change will fail or become Incremental Change (Cuban, 2010).

### **The Perils of the Implementation Dip**

Fullan (2001) cautions school and district leaders to acknowledge, and be wary of, the Implementation Dip, encountered during Fundamental or Incremental Change. The Implementation Dip is a decline in labor efficiency and self-assurance as teachers (or any employee) work through a transition that requires new expertise and new ways of thinking (Fullan, 2001). School leaders can assist teachers if they know that the Implementation Dip is a product of fear and lack of confidence, as educators no longer think they know what to do to be successful (Fullan, 2001).

Principals and district leaders can help teachers through the Implementation Dip in various ways. Leaders must listen to those who are against the plan (resisters) to fully understand the issue and also gain political capital by pulling the resisters over to participate in and support the change. Leaders must also remind and support the learning institution going through change to anticipate and acknowledge the Implementation Dip. Leaders model respect of differences while also pulling the institution toward a positive and collaborative goal (Fullan, 2001).

## **Top-Down Change vs. Bottom-Up Change**

Successful school and district leaders know that change comes, and must be supported, from within. Administrative mandates, like those from a school board office, which dictate how, what, and when things should be done, rarely are met with enthusiasm or effort from school employees. Fullan (1997b) reminds school leaders that to change anything in schools, they must rely on allies, a strong foundation of curriculum, instruction and assessment, and to remember there is no “Silver Bullet” to cure education (p. 41). Change will only be effective when teachers are empowered to maintain and sustain the change in relation to improved student achievement (Muhammad, 2009).

Top-down edicts, while convenient for managers and leaders, rarely, if ever, actually result in sustainable change. Whether the change is fundamental or incremental, the ownership has to come from within the polis of employee momentum. Successful leaders embody humility and personal strength, and do not lead to extinguish the ingenuity or creative harbors of others (Collins, 2011).

## **Transition Model Tenets**

There are many examples and variations of transition. The transition model as stated by Goodman, Schlossberg and Anderson (2006) is: trigger, timing, source of control, concurrent stress, and previous transition experience. These characteristics are also linked with salience, balance, resilience, self-efficacy, and meaning-making (Goodman et al., 2006). Although this model relates broadly to adults making work transitions in the business world, it can also be associated with school transition. Leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century need to have the skills to know when and how to make changes

happen (Goodman et al., 2006). Schools are sometimes inconsistent and slow to make changes; the responsibility lies with educators and administrators to learn the skill of transition.

School districts do not make changes in a vacuum; students, teachers and staff are important parts of that change. In relation to the Human Resource Model, districts, like companies, must understand the personnel approach to transitions (Bolman & Deal, 2008). District educators are people first and teachers second. Successful change includes the realization of balance and salience: “the interplay of work, love and play is what we mean by balance; the place of work in one’s life has been called its salience” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 154). The importance of person, workplace, friend groups, community, partner and family relationships are the forces that drive people, and these relationships are key to a successful work transition (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 155). The change that teachers and students faced with the opening of Victory High School had to be tempered with resilience, the capability to rebound from chaos and deal with changes, without bringing turmoil and disorder into their own lives (Goodman et al., 2006).

The importance of empowering students and imparting responsibility and resiliency is of key importance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Schools engage in conversations and thinking around student success in relation to Bandura’s “self-efficacy” model (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 160), but to the extent to which teacher and employee self-efficacy is strengthened can make or break any change. Self-efficacy involves being able to believe in oneself, and it is the confidence needed to complete tasks and move toward goals.

## **Teacher Perceptions of School Change**

The literature around school reconfiguration has shown many different facets to consider when studying school change. This literature provides context for this study of teacher perceptions and expectations regarding Secondary School Reorganization in Midwest Public Schools.

Enlightened academic institutions give power to teachers and invest in their growth. Progressive organizations also inspire and support independence and team-work, promoting consensus and equality (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Successful leaders share power so that students and teachers are invested in school. Educators and administrators can benefit when long term policies are considered, not just a reliance on short-term strategies to get a school or group of students through the next week or month or year (Marzano et al., 2005). Employees' understanding and appreciation of the transparency of change can lead to a healthier and more sustainable change (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

As we look at the foundation of power, Bolman and Deal (2008) ask us to consider a concentration on agenda setting. Agenda setting is important to include when thinking about teacher perceptions of school change because it provides a vision, a timetable of activities through which to attain that vision, and lets all parties know what is on the table for consideration (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This agenda for change balances two parts: long-term benefits, and vision setting within the parameters of conflict from contained and outside forces. A focus on a change agenda creates transparency in the organization, which increases positive teacher perception of that change (Fullan, 2003). Fullan (1997a) adds to the concept of transition and change by writing that we cannot

wait for an organization to fully function before employees can actually work; while one depends on the other, neither one can wait for the other to decide to show effort.

Teachers' perception of change is quite different from employees involved in industry, since school in the United States will begin every August whether the teachers, school and students are completely ready or not. The more transition changes a professional's life, the longer it may take to cope with that change and the more resources it requires (Schlossberg et al., 1995). This study investigates what teachers have been through and what more the MPS district can do to support them.

### **Leadership**

Studying and implementing appropriate school leadership is the most appropriate way to address student achievement. While thinking about leadership is sometimes a daunting task, it really comes down to who one is and where one wants to be, through education and practice. Leadership is not bought or owned, but is a highly sought-after resource (Northouse, 2010).

Successful leaders understand that student achievement is attained by making sure students are safe and have a sense of belonging: treating the organization like a family. Self-efficacy must be at the priority of a leader's to-do list, both for students and for teachers. We are reminded that the zenith of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is self-actualization, becoming the best we can be (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Efficacious leaders focus on a sustainable mission and vision. Administrators are reminded by Kouzes and Posner (2002/2010) to inspire others and reward them for a job well done. Effective leaders share an inspired vision while listening to others and letting

others share, in some part, in the leadership (Kouzes & Posner 2002/2010). Successful school leaders encourage active stakeholder participation. Enlightened leaders empower employees, and encourage active participation in the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Student achievement rises when students feel safe, have a sense of belonging, and can actually see themselves achieving. Effective and efficient school leaders recognize this hierarchy and plan accordingly (Roybal et al., 2014).

### **Conceptual Framework**

There is a wide variety of research on school change and transitions in general. To have specific and successful change, an organization must alter the way they do things and their protocols. Structure changes around reconfiguration are pivotal phases of transition (Fullan, 2001). MPS is overhauling its essential way of doing things, but this study's focus is how this translates to teacher perceptions about transition. MPS administrators started with district transition, but what matters most for educators is what is going on in the building in which they teach. This connects to the research question regarding what teacher perceptions are regarding change and transition during reconfiguration of a secondary school in Midwest Public Schools, how change and transition constructs support or hinder staff's successful transition into these new structures, and what does the transition mean to specific teachers in a specific school.

### **Transition Model**

The Conceptual Framework model used in this study is Bridges' Transition Model (2009). This concept breaks down the human response to transition by stating that people journey through three phases when processing through change: endings, the

neutral zone, and beginnings. This model is the best fit for this study because of its linear application – MPS dealt with one major transition: Secondary Reorganization. Leaders must understand these points of transition to both support employees and also sustain a successful change. If these human tendencies are overlooked, employees could lose confidence and succumb to anxiety, and the actual implementation of the change could fail. Because this study focuses on human work transitions, this framework is appropriate to use to study teacher perceptions related to the Secondary School Reorganization in Midwest Public Schools.

### **Adult Work Transitions**

Although there were many facets in the MPS' Secondary School Reorganization regarding students, this study focuses on adult transitions, especially those made by certificated teachers at Victory High School. Fullan's Implementation Dip, described earlier, is a start for a discussion regarding Adult Work Transitions, as it deals with the moment when the perseverance of change is weakened by human interaction with the change. Again, the Implementation Dip is when productivity and confidence decline as a result of a change which requires new learning and thinking (Fullan, 2001). The Implementation Dip is a product of fear and lack of confidence (Fullan, 2001), and is directly correlated with the problems which occur during adult work transitions.

Choosing which teachers went to which school caused much consternation for MPS educators who were anxious about their placement, mainly because "...clients experiencing bad times may be too frightened to consider anything but their immediate needs for security" (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 151). Teachers who were secure in their

teaching and future with the district were not so concerned, as they had transferable skills that translated from one job to another, like communication, work ethic, and teamwork (Goodman et al., 2006). Teachers who were insecure about their teaching were prone to experience more anxiety.

There were also a great number of teachers who had been in certain buildings for a long time in Midwest Public Schools. They were not used to change, and did not have career maturing, a phrase that “has been used to describe workers’ readiness to make a “good” career decision. Today’s world makes such concepts obsolete for adults, as most will return to the decision-making process many times during their work lives, making new choices each time” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 158). This caused another level of anxiety for these teachers in that they were not used to thinking about a change in buildings, grade level, and perhaps changing curriculum. “Individuals who must change jobs have more control over the situation if they are adaptable. Similarly, they have more control over the transition if they have a good network, are healthy, and are not members of a group often discriminated against in the workplace” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 153). For the participants in this study this meant their transition success depended on the social networks they had created in their old schools, and those they were willing to create in their new ones.

### **Transition Theory In Consideration**

MPS had to consider balance, salience and resiliency as they planned the task of Secondary School Reorganization. The critical factors for psychological and physical health include empowering optimism, creating a sense of meaning, and determining



purpose (Goodman et al., 2006). The MPS district was charged with generating excitement for the change in students and teachers, as students and teachers must be dedicated to the work of learning. Schools must be a place where stakeholders feel a sense of focused perseverance, and the persistence to motivate and achieve a common goal (Lips-Wiersma, 2000). Teachers usually have this sense of purpose ingrained in their work lives, but lack of planning and support could extinguish this fire of purpose and meaning if transition was not handled correctly to support all stakeholders.

William Bridges (2009) discusses the fatal flaw in which enterprises engage during transition: the failure to remember that in order to begin something anew, we must end something people cherish. They might be willing to meld the new with the old, but there is still a loss of their former reality. Situational change is important to recognize, when things are altered at a business or school. Transition is different; transition is psychological, and it is a process people go through starting with endings, then through the neutral zone, then to the beginnings (Bridges, 2009). This Transition Theory stipulates that the end must come before the beginning, and all employees need assistance getting through the change if that change is ever going to work (Bridges, 2009).

Bridges theorizes that there are three phases of transition: the ending, or the letting go of the past; the neutral zone, a kind of a limbo land where nothing is what it was or what it will be; the beginning, or a new start (Bridges, 2009). This new way of thinking about the human side of transitions is key to successful changes, because the

process of transition is the shift from one world to another, and starts with an ending but ends with a beginning (Bridges, 2009).

Change is difficult, no matter what stage of life one is in, because irrespective of the philosophy or character of those engaged in change, flourish or fail based on if people actually do anything differently (Bridges, 2009). It is unusual to think about change backwards, with the ending at the beginning and the beginning at the end. Few organizations are able to start with the end and finish with the beginning. “Transition is different. The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome but the ending that you’ll have to make to leave the old situation behind” (Bridges, 2009, p. 7). Adults in transition (and those who require transition of others) benefit from the realization of psychological and mental implications of change - and plan accordingly - to help employees let go of the past.

The importance of these three areas of transition are much like the stages of grieving. Leaders might mistake a drop in morale, or pessimism, to laziness or apathy, but these symptoms are usually related to confusion, anger, fright, or despair (Bridges, 2009). What did MPS do to help teachers through the grieving stage of saying goodbye to a known and familiar school and saying hello to the complete unknown?

Organizations do not reach fruition until their employees are allowed to travel through these three stages (Bridges, 2009). School districts cannot assume that all employees or students will journey through these transitions in the same way, nor can they think that everyone knows which way to go; organizations must be able to forecast what actual changes to behavior their employees will go through, and what changes to

approaches and their mindset they will have to make (Bridges, 2009). Groups embarking on transition may realize the need to articulate what will stay the same and what will change during the organizational evolution (Bridges, 2009).

District administrators should use transparent communication to determine the right way, order and purpose to talk about change and overtly connect the reasons for transition, as “people aren’t in the market for solutions to problems they don’t see, acknowledge, and understand” (Bridges, 2009, p. 16). Leaders need to understand that transitions are difficult for people, especially a lot of transitions all at once; if leaders push for change but forget the human side of that change, catastrophe may occur (Bridges, 2009). Forgetting how people respond to change can be disastrous, as “it isn’t the changes themselves that the people in these cases resist. It’s the losses and endings that they have experienced and the transition that they are resisting” (Bridges, 2009, p. 24).

### **Approaching Transitions – Endings**

Administrators and human resource professionals are advised to start change with an ending (Bridges, 2009). When leaders don’t consider how adults handle transitions, the entire enterprise of transition can be ruined, as “the failure to identify and get ready for endings and losses is the largest difficulty for people in transition” (Bridges, 2009, p. 8). Bridges also suggests that letting go is the first step of transition, but it must be accompanied by understanding what happens next. It is uncomfortable to be in limbo between the end and the beginning but it is necessary to go through this process to come out the other side with a new sense of distinct organizational character (Bridges, 2009).

Transition experts have many pieces of advice for those leaders embarking on a transition. Team meetings are key for a successful transition, thinking about what new space in the institution you will need for new people (Bridges, 2009), and using agenda setting to solidify and streamline the transition process (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The humanization of transitional change must also be noted. Instead of sending memos and emails dictating the tenants of change, a more personal method is suggested, as the purpose of memos and letters are to protect the sender, not necessarily to notify the receiver of any substantive information (Bridges, 2009). We are encouraged to be honest about change and the chaos that comes from change, and what that might do to some members of an organization; leaders also teach themselves about what transition means to the stakeholders in an institution (Bridges, 2009).

Bridges reminds us that, “before you can begin something new, you have to end what used to be. Before you can learn a new way of doing things, you have to unlearn the old way. Before you can become a different kind of person, you must let go of your old identity. So beginnings depend on endings. The problem is, people don’t like endings” (Bridges, 2009, p. 23). The ending of a previous structure, culture, or way of doing things, like having only two comprehensive high schools, is a mourning period for those who have worked under the old system. According to Bridges, leaders need to ask themselves, what is actually ending, and who is losing what? If one is in the planning stage, these questions can be answered in the following sequence, as Bridges, 2009, notes (pp. 25-26):

1. Describe the change in as much detail as you can...

2. What are the secondary changes that your change will probably cause?
3. Who is going to have to let go of something?
4. Notice that many of these losses aren't concrete. They are part of the inner complex of attitudes in our heads. These inner elements of "the way things are" are what make us feel at home in our world. When they disappear, we've lost something very important, although to someone else it may seem as though nothing has changed...
5. Is there something that is over for everyone?

Many administrators were also dealing with their own losses in parallel with being the harbingers of the new change. Bridges (2009) advises to avoid arguing with the possible negative conversations one might hear. The talk will stop and you will lose any information you might have learned. People go through transitions in different ways. Loss is an independent and subjective experience, and leaders might be coming at the transition in an objective way (Bridges, 2009). Leaders' feelings are sometimes irrelevant, as adult employees might go through transition in many different ways. Leaders benefit from becoming better attuned to their employees, as every one of them will handle transition differently. There is no prescribed way to grieve a situational change (Bridges, 2009). Skimming over people's emotions in favor of a quick change with momentum is also seen as damaging, because people react to losses, and those losses are infinitely personal to those people (Bridges, 2009).

It is only when leaders are overt about talking about loss in relation to change that compassion and understanding can override hurt feelings of their subordinates. Many

leaders might shirk away from this plan, but studies on loss teach us that people recuperate more quickly from grief if they can actually talk open and honestly about the loss (Bridges, 2009). Administrators also need to realize that a token of appreciation or trust will go a long way. “The question to ask yourself is: What can I give back to balance what’s been taken away? Status, turf, team membership, recognition? If people feel that the change has robbed them of control over their futures, can you find some way to give them back a feeling of control?” (Bridges, 2009, p. 31).

If we think about an ending as the first transitional consideration, we realize that with change and transition comes misunderstandings and confusion (Bridges, 2009). People are in mourning, they are disoriented, and they have so many questions about the change. One of the ways leaders can help is “putting into words what it is time to leave behind” (Bridges, 2009, p. 33). Employees can react in ways that might surprise a leader, namely doing all the old things and the new things together and not discriminating between them, picking and choosing what they want to keep and what they want to get rid of, or getting rid of everything and having nothing left (Bridges, 2009).

Employees cannot be simultaneously made to forget about their present. While it is tempting to denigrate and demonize the past, especially when leaders are encouraging people to be hopeful and excited about the future, doing this will put employees at a disadvantage. People identify, connect and feel safe with how things used to be. Leaders fuse the opposition against the transitional shift by criticizing the past (Bridges, 2009). If employees feel it is safe to remember the past with fondness and happy memories, they might be more likely to celebrate the future, as endings are easier if people can honor and

respect their past by being supported in its memory (Bridges, 2009). If teachers can take a little bit of their previous school or experience with them, they are more likely to celebrate the changes of their new familiarity. “Whenever something that is viewed as a break with the past turns out successfully, people forget the loss they felt when the change happened and begin to celebrate it as a ‘tradition’. But the status quo is just an innovation brought about by a transition that people have forgotten” (Bridges, 2009, p. 36).

Leaders realize that no one likes saying goodbye, but transitions are necessary and they are not meant to leave people unhappy and despondent (Bridges, 2009). When we forget to mourn and celebrate the past, we negate the human side of transition. The biggest reason change fails in an organization is because the leaders forget about celebrating endings and leading their employees through the transition to a new beginning (Bridges, 2009). People are, by nature, able to make transitions, but need support to make those transitions stick. Leaders sometimes forget that the first mission of transition is to get people to leave what they are comfortable with (Bridges, 2009).

### **Taking Stock – Neutral Zones**

The neutral zone is the period between endings and beginnings, and if leaders don’t acknowledge the importance of the neutral zone, the tendency is to rush past or totally ignore it, which does not work. (Bridges, 2009). There is a time between transitional endings and beginnings, which can be confusing if not handled in the right vein. People don’t often truly understand what the limbo experience is they encounter between an ending and a beginning. If we think of our own history of loss, perhaps the

most significant and depressing time was that neutral zone, the period of uncertainty when loss was not tempered with resilience or hope.

Many employees are more anxious in the neutral zone than in the endings or beginnings phases. Workers could be scared of the neutral zone and give up, metaphorically running away from any change they perceive as frightening or full of despair (Bridges, 2009). Those who do not embrace the neutral zone and try to evade it will “not only compromise the change but also lose a great opportunity. Painful though it is, the neutral zone is the individual’s and the organization’s best chance to be creative, to develop into what they need to become, and to renew themselves” (Bridges, 2009, p. 9).

This period between endings and beginnings is also an opportune time for renewal or an organizational renaissance (Bridges, 2009). Dangers in the neutral zone include a rise in anxiety, a decrease in motivation, and a tendency to miss more work than normal (Bridges, 2009). Employees feel overwhelmed with change while still trying to do the work for which they were hired, and gossip about the many nuances of drama that come from change (Bridges, 2009). Management and care during the neutral zone is the most successful way of traveling through transition and ending up unbroken on the other side (Bridges, 2009). There is nothing like having to initiate a change again, but Bridges claims that managing this transitional period saves time because the change is moving through and forward (Bridges, 2009). Leaders must optimize the neutral zone and ensure that employees think about their situation, self, support and strategies for approaching transitions (Goodman et al., 2006).



Leaders can counsel, guide and instruct their employees through the neutral zone. People don't always understand what is going on in the neutral zone, as they expect they can move straight from endings to beginnings (Bridges, 2009). Leaders must remember this if they are going to successfully travel through the neutral zone, taking into account that "Moses took care of transition's ending phase when he led his people out of Egypt, but it was the 40 years in the neutral zone wilderness that got Egypt out of his people" (Bridges, 2009, p. 43).

### **Taking Charge – Beginnings**

Finally we arrive at beginnings, the third phase of transitional management. Beginnings are a mental state, initiated by a surge of new vigor on a new path with a new identity (Bridges, 2009). Just like the other two areas of transition, institutions have to make it through the desert, through the messy emotions and hard conversations, to emerge victorious on the other side (Bridges, 2009). If an organization can successfully make it through the neutral zone, they have potentially amassed a stockpile of good will that can carry them through the transition and support them in a new beginning, be it a new building, structure or philosophy.

If employees are able to move through endings and the neutral zone, they have a better opportunity to work through beginnings. Leaders are cautioned to not follow a distinct timetable to initiate complete beginnings; they are controlled by the mind and heart and are not congruent with a schedule (Bridges, 2009). Even though workers might have seen the light at the end of the change tunnel, leaders might still see some resentment and resistance to the beginning of the transition. Some people will resist the

new beginning, however, even though the promise of something new can be exciting. Just because employees have gotten through the neutral zone, doesn't mean beginnings will be an easy undertaking. Beginnings reactivate some of the old anxieties that were originally triggered by the ending. In the eyes of employees, the new way of doing things could be risky, a new prospect or policy might not work, or they could think the organization is fine the way it is in the neutral zone and change is unnecessary (Bridges, 2009).

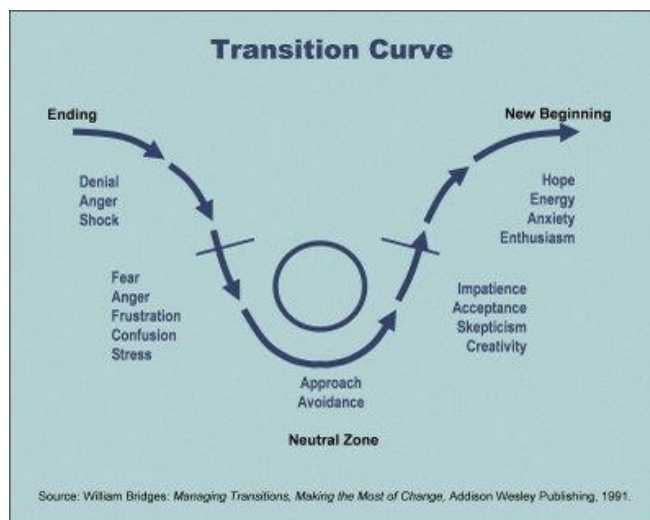
Anxiety could decrease as people enter the beginning stage of transition. Planning for beginnings must be overt and planned to make the most of the impact of the transition (Bridges, 2009). Administrators can do a lot to help teachers get through this last stage as well; by nurturing and nourishing the change, leaders bolster and support employees (Bridges, 2009). Leaders can explain purpose, the picture, the plan and the part they will play in the changes (Bridges, 2009).

### **Teacher Perceptions of Transition and Change**

If teachers perceive they have administrative support, they are more likely to positively participate in transitions and change, and be successful in those pursuits (Price, 2015). When teachers perceive their leaders, or principal, to be focused on helping them through transition or change, they will be more likely to trust in the process and the change itself. Teacher perception of the value, consistency and competency of principals and school leaders relies on seeing these leaders consistently do the work to support transition, day after day (Marzano et al., 2005). Teachers who work for school leaders they feel comfortable with, and can easily access, have a positive perception of their

leaders and students' commitment to school, and a better chance of journeying through a transition efficaciously (Price, 2015). Teachers' perceptions of change are strengthened by their belief in the capacity of school leaders (Marzano et al., 2005).

Bridges illustrates perceptual changes by explaining the Transition Curve. This demonstrates what adults go through in transition from the ending, which includes feelings of refutation, rage and surprise, towards the neutral zone, where feelings of unease are mixed with evasion but also approval, to the new beginning – where emotions range from optimism to apprehension, and eagerness to uncertainty (Bridges, 1991).



**Figure 1 – The Transition Curve**

This Transition Curve (Figure 1) is another representative of the conceptual framework. Bridges' explanation is sometimes more poignant in a visual form. The Neutral Zone may remind some of Fullan's Implementation Dip – both refer linguistically and visually to a slump, decline or downward slope. The Transition Curve and Implementation Dip chart the journey through change or a transition in the work

place. The symbolic circle in the middle of Figure 1 represents a turn in thinking, something to be dealt with, and a curve in the path of transition.

The literature around school reconfiguration shows many different facets to consider when studying adult work transitions. This literature provides context for this study of teacher perceptions and expectations regarding Secondary School Reorganization in Midwest Public Schools by reminding the reader of the importance of support during transitions, even for adults.

## **Chapter 3: RESEARCH DESIGNS AND METHODS**

### **Design and Methods**

Scholars must decide the appropriate design, methods and procedures when attempting a research study. Factors involving the research question, the target population, and environmental or structural concerns must also be considered. For this research study, an exploratory, qualitative study was the most appropriate. While descriptive, qualitative studies are informative and important to the literature, the true heart and meaning of this study was something quite new, thus a subtraction of the descriptive and an addition of the explorative was necessary. Exploratory research focuses on topics previously unstudied, or understudied (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

The objective of research is to define an occurrence, or manifestation, and its features, so it is necessary to observe, survey and interview participants to gather data on that occurrence (Nassaji, 2015, p. 129). An exploratory, qualitative study demands that the researcher: focuses on connections among the factors being studied; looks at people's perspectives, not just numbers derived from surveys or data sets; explains and describes how people observe and reflect upon their own experiences about a specific thing; describes and tests associations between variables (Arnold, n.d.). Exploratory research focuses on topics previously unstudied, or understudied (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Exploratory, qualitative studies ask questions to introductorily gain understanding and awareness into significant topics from people experiencing the issue first hand (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

This study asked what teachers' perceptions and expectations were of the Secondary School Reorganization process of Midwest Public Schools. In the Application to Practice section of this chapter, this study addressed how this question was answered, and how those answers can help other districts going through a complete Secondary School Reorganization. The research methods and design query of the study will positively contribute to the goals of the institution's agenda.

This research study was an exploratory qualitative study. Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004) remind scholars that qualitative research enables social program evaluators to think about the environment and latitude of problems, "feasible interventions," and whether a particular intervention is reaching its "target population" (p. 3). The strategies for data collection in this study included teacher interviews and focus groups, comprising of a total of twenty teachers. The interview and focus group guides included questions on the issue of perception of change. Questions focused on procedural, emotional and support changes made in MPS during the last five years.

Sandelowski, Barroso and Voils (2007) remind researchers to look at the findings as a big picture rather than the simple categorization of data; tallying or labeling the research and looking at the meaning and groups it creates is most important. This leads to a focus on application to practice, or, more specifically, how research can help others. This relates to an exploratory, qualitative study, in that the focus should be on results and implications for practice, not just research for research's sake.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

A qualitative approach was necessary in this study because participants' perspectives were needed to answer the research question, not just their answers to a questionnaire. Creswell (2009) informs us that the qualitative method indicates factors like a "participatory worldview, narrative design, and open-ended interviewing" (p.16). Tellis (1997) says that the researcher should not and does not have any control over the events being investigated. This made me particularly appreciate and respect the qualitative process, as there are reflexive safeguards in place to circumvent bias or researcher partiality.

I used an exploratory qualitative study with a constructivist approach to study teacher perception of Secondary School Reorganization in MPS. Using a constructivist approach, I made meaning from what was presented in the research, not looking for the meaning I thought already existed. This was particularly interesting since I conducted interviews and focus groups with Victory High School faculty. Victory High School (VHS) is a member of the Midwest Public Schools, and I am familiar with this group of people and organization. It is the only school I focused on because of its origination that was a direct result of Secondary Reorganization.

This study of teacher perception regarding Secondary School Reorganization is a previously under-researched topic, mainly because the school is such a new one, but also because the staff was 100% new in the 2013-2014 school year. I wanted to gain understanding and perspective into teacher perceptions and expectations in Secondary

School Reorganization and ask teachers to reflect on their own experiences in this transition.

I used two data sources, interviews and focus groups, as these solidified my research foundation and removed the reliance on a single piece of data (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) states that researchers who use a qualitative approach usually collect data where the participants experience the issue related to the study. I focused on VHS, as it is the only truly new school in MPS, and all interviews and focus groups were conducted at Victory.

### **Research Context**

This study was conducted in the Midwest Public Schools district, at Victory High School. Midwest Public Schools is in the town of Halpin, Missouri. Halpin has been increasingly influenced by larger towns to the east and west; poverty, minority representation, and students with special needs, mainly Autism, have increased in the last ten years (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Many residents believe that Halpin's low cost of living and robust social services have led to this increase (personal communication, February 10, 2012).

The U.S. Census Bureau provides precise and timely statistics on many financial and population trends. The total population of the state of Missouri is 5,595,211 as of the latest data collected in 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Of that total population, Missouri is 84.9% white, 11/2% African American, 0.4% American Indian and Alaska Native, 1.1% Asian, and 2.1% Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).



Halpin, MO has a population of approximately 115,000 people. The city of Halpin is 63 square miles, with 1,720 people per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Halpin is 79% white, 11.3% African American, 0.3% American Indian and Alaska Native, 5.2% Asian, and 3.4 Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). As of 2013, the percent of persons below the poverty rate was 24.5%, or roughly 28,175 of Halpin's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The percent of residents under 18 years is 18.8% of the population, or 21,850 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides precise and timely statistics on educational data within the state. Midwest Public Schools has 62.2 percent white students, 20.1 percent African American students, 6.1 Hispanic and 5.1 Asian, with 40.1% of these students qualifying for free and reduced lunch (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014).

Victory High School is on the east side of Halpin, MO, and has a total enrollment of 1,080 students (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014). Victory students are 53.3% white, 30.8% black, 6.4% Hispanic, 1.9 % Asian, and their free and reduced lunch rate is 50% (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014).

### **Sample Population and Participants**

There was much informal background talk involving personnel issues before Victory High School opened, which influenced my decision to choose this research site. Teachers knew that the six future middle school and three future high school principals were involved in conversations known internally as “The Draft” (personal

communication, February 10, 2012), which will be more fully explained in the Findings section. “The Draft” were meetings where principals and human resources personnel considered every employee at the secondary level and placed them in a secondary school, taking into account teacher preference, certification, and school needs. In this particular case, teachers were the ones most affected by Secondary School Reorganization, so they are the ones I focused on for this study.

I used Typical Case Sampling (Patton, 1990) to substantiate that the population would be a representative section of the faculty as a whole. It is important to note that while I did not conduct a case study, I did use a whole-school typical case sampling, which was appropriate in this situation. The reason I believed this to be appropriate is that the school as a whole was made up of 100% new teachers to the building, and I had to consider them as a whole because they shared the experience of being new to VHS in the 2013-2014 school year. They were all equal in that regard. Typical Case Sampling explains or illustrates what is representative and standard in a population (Patton, 1990).

For this study I interviewed twenty teachers, and teacher leaders, and conducted three focus groups, which included ten teachers. Qualitative research pursues understanding about the world from the perceptions of those working, living, and experiencing it. “It is axiomatic in this view that individuals act on the world based not on some supposed objective reality but on their perceptions of the realities that surround them” (Hatch, 2002, p. 7). It was necessary that I talked with these twenty teachers who had gone through and continue to experience Secondary School Reorganization. I wanted to know their perceptions regarding the MPS transition.

Because participant opinion was important in this study, relating to feelings of transition and change, my focus was on teacher interviews and teacher focus groups. Other staff members, however important to the function and operation of a school, did not go through the same rigorous sorting and reallocation process as certified teachers. Hatch (2002) advises that researchers should invest time in interviewing and observing participants in the setting in which they work. This helps researchers understand the perspectives and perceptions that participants use to construct meaning in their lives (Hatch, 2002). This constructivist approach assisted in my determination of questions related to Secondary School Reorganization and transition.

The population sampled included twenty current Victory High School teachers. They were all new VHS teachers, since Victory High School did not exist in previous years, but not all were necessarily new to teaching. The sample population represented many different curricular areas: Science, Mathematics, Language Arts, Social Studies, Practical Arts, Fine Arts, World Languages, Special Education, Guidance, and EEE (gifted education). The teachers were chosen because of their background in different specialties, but also because of their former school setting. They were from two former middle schools, three former junior highs and the other two high schools, all in MPS. These teachers represented ten curricular specialties and seven former schools. The teachers were between 23 and 55 years of age.

In addition, most VHS teachers are in some sort of leadership position because the need for leaders is so great in a new school with new staff. Therefore, the teachers interviewed were also involved in many different and varied leadership roles, from

building department chairs to executive council members; university mentor teachers to club sponsors and athletic coaches. These are incorporated in a detailed chart in Appendix D, including the pseudonym used, their former grade level, their subject area, sex, leadership status, and if they were an academic leader, department leader, or extracurricular (ECA) leader. Also noted is whether participants were in a focus group (and if so, which one) or individually interviewed.

### **Sampling Procedures**

I sent an email to 40 VHS teachers to individually recruit them for my study, and received responses back from twenty. It is interesting to note that the teachers who responded to my email asking for their input were evenly distributed between curricular areas and former grade levels and schools. It was important to have a variety of backgrounds and specialties, because I wanted all perceptions and perspectives to be demonstrated through the research and represented in the study findings, as indicated by Typical Case Sampling (Patton, 1990). There were limitations, however, as VHS began with only three grades and an incomplete slate of teachers, so there were not as many educators working at Victory in the 2013-2014 school year as there are in the 2014-2015 school year, when the grades have expanded to include seniors (Appendix D).

### **Data Collection**

The interviews and focus groups for this study were conducted by myself as the sole researcher during fall of 2014. All responses were recorded on an iPad and also a tape recorder or video camera. Participants were asked to review the consent form and to sign it if they agreed with the terms listed. I then thanked all participants for their

contribution to the study, and I reminded them that I would take notes using my personal iPad or a notebook. Focus group conversations were also audio recorded. I then downloaded these files, and electronically sent them to a transcriber, who emailed me back the transcripts.

### **Focus Groups**

I engaged three focus groups in this study. Krueger and Casey (2009) say that the focus group approach can assist research when there “are concerns about employee morale and motivation, incentive and barriers to productivity, influence of merit pay and compensation procedures, concern about how welcoming the environment is of different kinds of diversity, and a host of other topics relating to human resource development” (p. 11). Krueger and Casey (2009) warn that when people get together in a focus group, they tend to portray themselves in a positive light, and can demonstrate contrived reflection and stature. While I was concerned about participants giving a shinier view of the Secondary School Reorganization process, I was also interested in how their answers might be different from those who were engaged in individual interviews.

I utilized a focus group protocol to collect dissertation data (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The focus groups were conducted at three different times and my goal was to include five people in each focus group; I had two focus groups of three people and one focus group of four. This was a function of the times people were off on their conference or planning hour. I arranged people based on the Victory High School master schedule; I invited those who had a conference hour scheduled together to participate in a focus group. Those who were separated by the conference time they had free were asked to

participate in an interview. Each focus group lasted about one hour. I reminded the focus group participants the day before that they had agreed to meet with me, and sent them an email of the time and place we were to meet.

When crafting my focus group questions, I constantly referred to the purpose of my study and what I wanted to find out. My instructions to the focus group participants were introduced by explaining my research question: What are teacher perceptions regarding change and transition during reconfiguration of secondary schools in (Halpin) Public Schools? This later changed into an edited version of the same question, namely: What are the perceptions and expectations of teachers in a Secondary School Reorganization? The research question changed but the answers to my focus group questions, even phrased with the original question, answered the revised query. I realized that the first question was not getting at the true heart of the study, and the revised question more concisely asked for the information I sought.

At the beginning of each Focus Group I told the participants that they would be given pseudonyms and I would protect their identity, in accordance with IRB protocols. I asked them to tell me their name, title and/or role, and how long they had been with (Halpin) Public Schools.

1. Tell me in general how you feel about the school reconfiguration plan.
2. What are some of the positive characteristics of the recent (MPS) transition? Why? What are some of the negative characteristics? Why?
3. Think back to when you first became aware of the potential (MPS) transition to six middle schools and three comprehensive high schools. What were your initial impressions? Why?

4. What kind of support did you receive during the change and transition into this new configuration? What were obstacles or difficulties during the change and transition? What was particularly helpful about the transition process? What was particularly frustrating?
5. Do you think this change has been successful? Why or why not? What would make this change successful? What more do you think (Midwest) Public Schools needs to do through this change process?
6. What are the most significant issues about the reconfiguration?
7. If you had a chance to give advice to other school districts going through a similar process, what advice would you give?
8. Is there any additional information you would like to offer to help me better understand this district reconfiguration and your perceptions about it?

I was curious how teachers made their choice to transfer to VHS, and how Victory High administrators and the Midwest Public School district supported them, both in their decision to move and in their first year at VHS. What personal and professional transitions did they have to make, how did those transitions affect them, and what else did they need from their school and district? I asked teachers how the expected culture of (Victory) High School affected their decision because I wanted to know if they were drawn to VHS for its culture, its administrators, or the people they knew who would also be employed there.

I expected the focus groups to be slightly negative, because in my experience, if people discuss a subject that has connection to emotions, the group tends to start complaining. I understand this is my own bias. I was surprised that the focus groups were equally negative and positive, and the focus groups tended to reveal more inferential reflection because of the opportunity to bounce ideas off one another. As I reflected over

the process, I was very glad to have both focus groups and interviews from whom to draw and gather information. I found people to be much more open when talking and sharing within the focus groups. They displayed relief when others' views, emotions and reflection matched their own, and there were many instances where their thoughts and comments were spurred on by others' observations and reflections. The focus groups were a significant and rich source of data for this research project.

### **Individual Interviews**

Along with focus groups, it was important I complete individual interviews because "in some communities there can be long-standing issues relating to trust, respect or past experiences that are critical for the researcher to understand" (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 165). I was concerned that the only data I would collect would be influenced by focus group peers, and I decided I needed to conduct interviews to internally believe that my data was congruent, a complete representation of the VHS staff, and believable. There are potential pitfalls with focus groups, and Krueger and Casey (2009) warn researchers that we "...should consider when and where people talk, who is present during discussions, who is entitled to ask questions and what protocol is used when asking questions" (p. 165). This is the reason I decided to conduct individual interviews, as well, so I could counterbalance any issues that might be created by only talking to people in groups. Some individuals remarked, off the record, that they were glad to be talking to me one-on-one instead of in a group. They told me they felt they could speak with more freedom and honesty (personal communication, October 7, 2014).



The interview guides, and the questions I asked, were consistent with my research question: What are the perceptions and expectations of teachers in a Secondary School Reorganization? Creswell (2009) suggests using an interview protocol, which includes a heading, instructions, questions, follow-up questions, writing space, and a statement of conclusion. Creswell reminds interviewers, “Even if an interview is taped, I recommend that researchers take notes, in the event that recording equipment fails” (p. 183). When crafting my interview questions, I constantly referred to the purpose of my study and what I wanted to find out.

At the beginning of each interview I told the participant they would be given a pseudonym and I would protect their identity, in accordance with IRB protocols. My instructions to the interview participants were introduced by explaining my research question: What are teacher perceptions regarding change and transition during reconfiguration of secondary schools in (Halpin) Public Schools? This then changed into an edited version of the same question, namely: What are the perceptions and expectations of teachers in a Secondary School Reorganization? The research question changed but the answers to my interview questions, even phrased with the original question, answered the revised query. I asked interviewees to tell me their name, their title and/or role, and how long they had been with (Midwest) Public Schools. Then I asked them the following questions:

1. What considerations did you take into account when you decided to work at (Victory) High School?
2. How did (MPS) prepare you for this transition?

3. How did your colleagues' choices affect your decision?
4. How did the expected culture of (Victory) High School affect your decision?
5. What was done by (Victory) High School administrators to help you feel a part of this new team?
6. Now that you have been a part of (Victory) High School for a year, what else could the school district have done to help your transition?
7. What was the biggest personal transition you had to make to work at (VHS)?
8. I appreciate your help today. Is there anything that I missed? Is there anything that you came wanting to say that you didn't get a chance to say?

I was curious how teachers made their choice to transfer to VHS, and how Victory High administrators and the Midwest Public School district supported them, both in their decision to move and in their first year at VHS. Thinking of my research question, "What are the perceptions and expectations of teachers in a Secondary School Reorganization?", I wanted to know what personal and professional transitions teachers had to make, how those transitions affected them, and what else they needed from their school and district. I asked them how "expected culture of (Victory) High School affect your decision?" because I was curious if they were drawn to VHS for its culture, its administrators, or the people they knew would also be employed there.

I used interview protocols to conduct the interviews. I interviewed ten people, each for twenty to thirty minutes. I did interview ten VHS teachers individually. Follow up interviews were to be determined by the snowball technique. "Interviewers enter interview settings with questions in mind but generate questions during the interview in

response to informants' responses, the social contexts being discussed, and the degree of rapport established" (Hatch, 2002, p. 23). If more topics of interest were generated, I was open to hosting auxiliary questioning sessions to include in the final data analysis. I did not find that necessary, however.

The data and responses I received from individual interviews were, in some cases, not as rich or plentiful as that which occurred through focus groups. The interviews tended to be shorter, and individual interviewees, for the most part, seemed more timid or unsure of their answers, perhaps because they felt more on the spot without colleagues to provide a more natural conversation. There were some teachers, however, who seemed to regard the interview as therapy. They offered the most opulent and interesting reflections, in the researcher's opinion, of what it was like to really live through Secondary School Reorganization. Those interviews solidified the importance of the two distinctly different methods of collecting data: interviews and focus groups. Both provided different and meaningful feedback to better answer the research questions, as the interviews tended to be more back and forth, with straightforward answers, while the focus groups answers included deeper reflection.

### **Data Analysis**

I identified and classified as many themes as I saw emerge, then continued the documentation of these themes through interviews, and focus groups, paying close attention to the chronological sequence of the data. The data was coded by theme and also by time, so as to recognize changes and patterns in attitude regarding the transition (The Center for Evaluation and Research, n.d.).

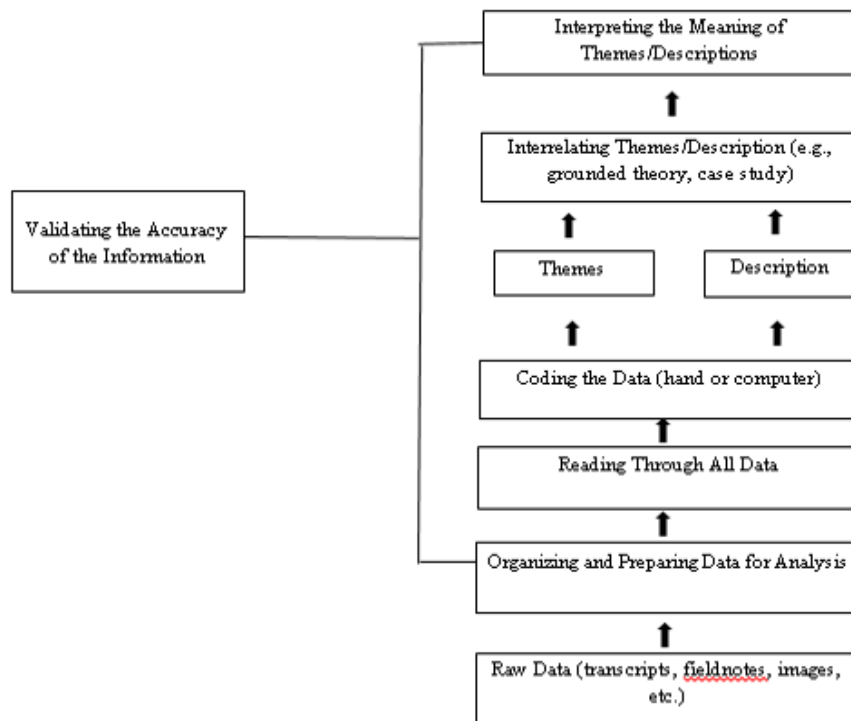
My process was to sort the data I collected into a manageable form, but I found myself trying to fit data in categories into which didn't naturally go. I needed help to clarify my thinking and classification method. The Center for Evaluation and Research's (n.d.) pamphlet, *Coding Qualitative Data*, offers advice in the analysis of data by saying that there are many ways to code, but coding usually requires researchers to allocate a word or number or symbol to an explicit category, and then continue with the next category, methodically. Their advice also relates to making the codes fit the facts, rather than the other way around. If researchers look at the data through a preconceived lens, or predetermined context, the value of the data and findings will not only be diminished, it might also be tarnished by the brush of prejudice.

Regarding codes, Saldaña's (2009) advice is this: "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). It is also recommended that the researcher looks at the data second time, but contemplate coding a different way to confirm an exhaustive assessment of the codes (Saldaña, 2009).

Saldaña (2009) mentions that searching for patterns might also turn up data that has something in common with an already established code, only because often we see similarities and differences in the same light; patterns can be created by how often we see a similar pattern, how often we don't, and the way the two correlate. Researchers must be aware that data can lead to connection or disconnection after codification. Coding, Saldaña states, is the practice of arranging data in an order and thinking of that data as

part of a whole, especially in relation to how it reacts, corresponds, or associates with the whole. Then a researcher can categorize and classify it (Saldaña, 2009). The researcher’s goal is for codes and groupings to become more distinguished and polished, and to understand and anticipate that one must always consider the possibility of subcategories or changing the content and substance of a category to fit the data, not the other way around (Saldaña, 2009).

### Coding the Data



**Figure 2: Data Analysis in Qualitative Research (Creswell, 2009).**

I investigated the interview and focus group responses by using Creswell’s (2009) “Data Analysis in Qualitative Research” model (p. 185). In Creswell’s book, *Research Design*, he stresses the Data Analysis in Qualitative Research model when coding

qualitative research, which I used when coding my data. This model gave me a template and foundation from which to organize the hours of collected data. Its linear form made sense in relation to the data collected and provided structure to start establishing trends and categories.

Using the umbrella of Saldaña's work, and Creswell's (2009) data analysis model as my organizational systems, I began my coding with the raw data (Creswell's Step 1). After I prepared the raw data, I consolidated and formulated the interview and focus group data for examination (Creswell's Step 2). I went through each interview and focus group transcript to look for accuracy; most were immaculately correct, but some had proper names misspelled or misinterpreted. Even though I had Saldaña's overarching advice to researchers fresh in my mind, I made the conscious decision to start from scratch, as Creswell (2009) recommends, with new eyes, and not jump ahead in the steps, to guarantee a thorough coding sequence.

When I started on the second step I realized the way I engaged with the data would heavily influence how I read through it. I was interested in Juanita Johnson-Bailey's (2002) coding procedure of understanding qualitative data, the "sans question" technique, and thought this could be folded into Creswell's model of "Data Analysis in Qualitative Research." Taking each interview and focus group transcript one at a time, I deleted all names and also all questions. The transcripts then read like a narrative from one person (interviews) or a conversation with two or three people (focus groups). Johnson-Bailey (2002) reminds researchers that the focus of research should be on the interviewees' responses, not the questions of the interviewer.

Following Creswell's coding model, I then instigated the process of "Reading Through All Data" once to both remind myself of what was there and also begin the foundation of trying to truly understand it (Creswell's Step 3). While coding the data, Saldaña advises researchers that, "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (2009, p. 3). Patterns can also be found in data, whether they are patterns of variance or likeness, because "...paradoxically, that commonality consists of differences. A pattern can be characterized by: similarity, difference, frequency sequence, correspondence, causation" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 6.). According to Saldaña, coding is to organize in a methodical order, to make sense of arrangement and categorization (2009). Scholars must also be aware of the coding itself changing the way they look at the data (Creswell's Step 4).

Using Saldaña's (2009) technique, I went through all the interview and focus group transcripts and read them. Then I read them again and pulled out recurring themes, descriptions and comments that were particularly apparent (Creswell's Step 5). I took out the speaker names and questions on the interview and focus group transcripts, per Johnson-Bailey's (2002) sans question technique, and then used the margins to note anything that stood out to me or that I perceived might be a recurring theme.

I retrieved six hundred and twenty one comments from the interview and focus group transcripts, then entered them into an Excel document and organized them alphabetically. The amount of data seemed overwhelming and I didn't know where to start. I began reading over the items I had drawn out, over and over again. I started a list

of what I thought were the overarching themes, based on those items, and then coded each Excel entry as one of these themes. I then sorted them alphabetically to see what had not been identified.

I was concerned about being biased toward one theme, or trying to contrive themes out of the interview and focus group transcripts based on my own experience with the MPS Secondary School Reorganization process. I purposefully left a month between the completion of interviews and focus group conversations and coding the data to cleanse my mental palate. It was interesting to discover that the themes I pulled out before I reread every interview and focus group became more concrete and solidified after I revisited the transcripts. “The researcher’s goal should be for codes and categories to become more refined” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 10), and to appreciate and anticipate that some categories might be split into subcategories of themes, which is exactly what happened when I looked into the category of inequity (Saldaña, 2009).

The themes that were sifted through this process began to emerge, and as I added themes (and took some away), the data became clearer to me. It was a long and sometimes confusing process, but in the end the themes and descriptions started to shuffle their way into complete and succinct categories. Key words determined these themes, and I started by looking at all my notes, forming categories, looking for the patterns and how they related to my conceptual framework and research model (Creswell, 2009).

I realized that some of the non-identified comments for which I could not locate a category were nomads because of my own perception. I went back to the transcripts and re-read the sections from where the comments were taken. Looking at the quote or



comment in a larger context helped me realize that all the “orphans” in the Excel spreadsheet really belonged in an already-created category.

Once I determined how the themes connected to my research question, I realized that “Finding themes and descriptions” changed again after the synthesis of each section (Creswell’s Step 6). I find myself, even still, going back to “Interpreting the meaning of themes and descriptions” (Creswell’s Step 7), because perspectives change based on what MPS is still discovering from the transition, and how that affects me as both a member of the MPS administrative team and as a researcher. The constant effort to “validate the accuracy of the information”, which is Creswell’s way of reminding the researcher that it will never really ever be over with or finished, is always on my mind. The thematic analysis focused on change, adult learning, teacher support and the overall emotional evaluation of transition, in order to share information with this district and others experiencing institutional change. The conceptual framework regarding adult work transitions was also instrumental in providing a lens through which each theme was considered.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Before addressing issues of ethics and trustworthiness, I must inform the reader of my own job and history with Midwest Public Schools. I have been employed with MPS for eighteen years. I was a student teacher, teaching fellow, Language Arts teacher, university mentor, department chair, assistant principal, and am now the principal of Huff Middle School, at which a great number of Victory teachers taught before VHS opened. The new principal of Victory employed me in a number of these jobs at Huff, including

hiring me as her assistant principal. I was able to apply and obtain the job of principal at Huff Junior High (now Huff Middle School) because Dr. Jennifer Rudy (a pseudonym) was named the principal at Victory and her job became vacant. I was close friends with many teachers who moved to Victory, and remain close with a few of them.

There is great concern that the researcher does not bias the study data through positionality and partiality (Creswell, 2009). My tendency is to assume that the Secondary School Reorganization process was created and implemented using care and consideration of teacher feelings and preference. This predisposition is most likely a result of my job as an MPS secondary administrator. I was involved in all meetings to determine teacher placement in relation to educator strengths and weaknesses, and the needs of particular schools. I could have unintentionally influenced the answers to the participants' questions by how they relate to me as an administrator, a former boss, or their friend. They might have also held back if they had a truth to share which would be seen as negative or a professional or personal slight towards me. Because of this, it was imperative I "include(d) statements about past experiences that provide background data through which the audience can better understand the topic, the setting, or the participants and the researchers' interpretation of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2009, p. 176).

I was advised by university faculty representatives to also look at the positives, however, of my job with MPS. I know everyone interviewed, and it is my hope they trusted me to protect them and their identity, as well as being honest with me about the process of Secondary School Reorganization in regards to their relationship with me. I assured them that I would use pseudonyms to protect their identity, that the interviews

would be stored in a secure area, and in no way would I reveal their participation in this study. The only way someone could have found out that they participated is if they had seen the interviewee or focus group member in my presence when I travelled to Victory High School to complete my research. I told participants that this research was not about me or their new principal, but about their perspective in regards to the transition.

### **Ethical Issues & Trustworthiness**

I made sure to take into account ethical issues and the issue of trustworthiness to safeguard quality of data and data analysis. The qualitative method I used to interpret the data included a simultaneous and continuous process (Merriam, 1998). I was the “researcher as key instrument” (Creswell, 2009, p. 175), as Creswell advises researchers to do the research themselves and immerse their lives in what they are researching (Creswell, 2009). This had implications for ethical issues as I was an “insider”, and this immersion into the lives of VHS teachers could have biased my results or affected my participants.

There were many steps I took to protect my participants through this process. I told them I would give them a pseudonym to protect their identity. This is important because I wanted them to both be honest about their thinking and be secure enough to trust that their opinions would not be used against them if anyone from the MPS district office read this study. Any identifiers used in this study will be their alias name, but I have compiled and catalogued all referenced materials.

In order to combat any bias or prejudicial effects I created or implanted as the researcher, I ensured credibility, reliability, validity, dependability, transferability and

confirmability. Hatch (2002) maintains that credibility can be established with the following advice: “transcribe your interviews right away” as “they give a sense of confidence to researchers as they continue data collection or create a sense of disequilibrium that ought to lead to changes in research implementation” (p. 116). On this issue of dependability, triangulation is the “verification or extension of information from other sources” (Hatch, 2002, p. 92). I confirmed information and inferential analysis using a number of sources, both from individual interviews and focus groups.

**Transferability.** Another concern was transferability, which defines the procedure of relating the results of exploration in one circumstance to other comparable circumstances (Merriam, 2002). Transferability is partnered with confirmability and trustworthiness. Hatch (2002) prompts researchers to remember that understanding and constructing implications and meaning from data is affected by your own extrapolation. My interpretations were based on data collected in relation to my research questions. It was my aim to honor the true intent of the research, and I truly believe that “...trustworthiness is established when findings as closely as possible reflect the meanings as described by the participants” (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006, p. 444). Lietz et al., (2006) give researchers pause in regards to building meaning in or through a study with the researcher as part of that meaning.

A never ending and dynamic progression can be set off if the cycle of research is perpetually restated or reengaged. If the person doing the study doesn’t step back and allow the data to speak for itself, there is no end to the interpretations that could be made (Lietz et al., 2006). Furthermore, “...rigor in qualitative inquiry does not have to be an

inflexible set of standards and procedures...but instead involves engaging in efforts that increase our confidence that our findings represent the meanings presented by our participants” (Lietz et al., 2006, p. 443). This is another element of trustworthiness, that the interpretation matches the data input (Merriam, 2002). I did not engage in member checking, which is reviewing with the participants that what you have interpreted from their responses is compatible with what they meant to convey, because of time constraints on their part (Merriam, 2002), but would consider that strategy in another study.

**Protection of participants.** Other proper ethical considerations include protecting research participants, personal disclosure, and professional conduct (Creswell, 2009). One of my main concerns was trust when it came to interviewing former colleagues who remain district employees. Creswell (2009) says that dishonesty may occur when the participants are under one set of assumptions but the researcher has another set of expectations. I made every effort to be clear, upfront and forthright in delivering the message of purpose, confidentiality and using pseudonyms to protect these professional teachers. If I had not addressed these issues clearly, my data would have been skewed.

Institutional Review Board approval was granted on August 6, 2014. A copy of the approval form can be found in Appendix C. IRB approval is vital for protecting participants and assuring an ethical study. It is important to note that all participants, schools, the school district, and the town have been given pseudonyms to protect them. I conducted the interviews on site at VHS in order to provide comfort and familiarity to the participants. The teachers included in these interviews and focus groups responded to an

email request from me and answered my questions with the understanding that their names would be changed in my report. I did not ask participants to partake in member checking because I felt this would create a new layer of research on top of what had already been discussed; the very conversation during a member check could potentially change their opinion of the research question itself.

**Intrusiveness.** This issue of intrusiveness was a real concern for me. Many of the people I interviewed who are now at Victory High School are former colleagues. Hatch (2002) mentions that the purpose of observation is for the researcher to comprehend and internalize the culture, climate and social structure of the environment under study by the participants. I made sure my own relationships did not skew this study's research by interviewing individuals and conducting focus groups in their school environment. I also considered the phenomenon of "backyard research", which comprises doing research on the researcher's own work environment (Creswell, 2009). I can imagine that a transgression in this arena would negate credibility and trust.

I also did not want to bother the teachers too often. When I had spoken to twenty people, either in interviews or during focus groups, I began to see patterns emerge. That is when I knew I had enough data, and when I was finished with the last focus group, I felt I had data saturation: no new themes were emerging (Merriam, 2002). Data saturation is when you encounter comments and themes over and over again; the patterns emerge and are solidified with every conversation (Merriam, 2002). I did not feel the need to speak to anyone else or member check because of the nature of the study. I wanted to

concentrate on the initial perception of their perspectives regarding Secondary School Reorganization in Midwest Public Schools.

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

Many limitations and assumptions are present in qualitative research, no matter how careful the researcher is in the areas of credibility, trustworthiness, and internal and external validity. For example, interviews and focus groups help the researcher examine multiple perspectives, but the process itself has limitations. Based on Creswell's (2009) recommendations, credibility and internal validity, dependability and reliability, and transferability and external validity, come from having a reasonable sample size and multiple data points.

**Limitations.** As well as structural and procedural limitations associated with interviews and focus groups, another limitation was my personal association with the interviewees in my study. These are mostly people I have worked with at some point in my career. When one has been employed by a school district for eighteen years, these relationships and associations are unavoidable. My passion was the study of Secondary School Reorganization, but with that zeal came the realization that my own perspective might be coupled with the research subjects' actual responses and their own position within the change. Their perception might also be completely different in five to ten years, as might my own.

There was also the limitation of studying one issue in one community. If I had found other examples of Secondary School Reorganization and other issues in relation to transition and reorganization, or studied urban versus suburban school change, and

compiled that data and then analyzed it, I might have found another set or subset of inferences with which to examine and discuss. The limitations brought about by studying one set of teachers in one school and in one town could be seen as restricting my research scope.

**Assumptions.** My assumptions beginning this research were based on a constructivist lens. Driscoll (1994) collected five constructivist circumstances for gaining knowledge. They include authentic and multi-faceted learning, social cooperation, multiple learning styles, reflection, and student centered learning. My research reflected this, and I assumed my interviewees and focus group participants also came from this perspective. I depended on social cooperation to enable focus groups to open up and share their communal experiences. Reflection and student centered learning were also key, as without them participants would have no way of answering the open-ended questions they were faced with.

Although constructivism is a predominant philosophy among educators, there are exceptions for which I had to guard against. I warned myself to be on the lookout for participants who do not share this constructivist view, so that I was able to still value their contributions and but not misinterpret their worldview. In my estimation, I only encountered one non-constructivist research participant. That interview was still revealing and relevant to my research, however, as the questions asked were about his perceptions. It mattered not that those perceptions seemed to be from an anti-constructivist background; they were still useful in thinking about teacher perception of transition.



My personal assumptions coming into this study included a positive background experience about Secondary School Reorganization, the assumption that all educators want to do what is best for all students, and that teachers work for the good of Midwest Public Schools as a district, not individual schools. These assumptions might have proven precarious, as I anticipated learning that not all transition experiences were pleasant; people wanted what was best for their families first and jobs second, especially when the latter impacted the former; educators developed fierce allegiances to a building, not necessarily seeing themselves concretely as a member of a district workforce.

This is what I was most concerned about in regards to my study: what personnel or political factions would like to guide my study to support one way or another way of thinking? What do I assume about the transition since I have been working in it for five years? This transition was as emotional as it was mentally taxing, and my worry was that individuals would try to sway the exploratory qualitative study results through the research process in a way to highlight their own agendas. I was also concerned I would miss something vital because I had been professionally and socially immersed in this Secondary School Reorganization for so long. I was almost numb to the Secondary School Reorganization process before the research started, but as soon as I began interviews and focus groups, I felt an internal metamorphosis and excitement to begin the study. I made sure to mentally check my bias before I entered the Victory High School building every time I visited for my research purpose.

## Summary

The most appropriate methodology for this research was an exploratory qualitative study. This was most beneficial because of the historical component of the study, and it also allowed freedom in compiling multiple perspectives and perceptions. Descriptive qualitative studies also take into account Rossi, et al.'s (2004) suggestion of being on guard for personal agendas. An exploratory qualitative study mitigates some prejudicial agendas and biases. One of my many assumptions is that all teachers who went through the transition process would report similar experiences, feelings, support and anxiety. It was my hope that this assumption was tested and tempered with accurate data and information.

The interviews and focus groups reinforced my previous assumptions about Secondary School Reorganization, such as opinions of leaders, the district, and support overall, and also offered great insight into topics I had not appreciated or understood before, like moving supplies, resources, and the excitement a new building can create. I was passionate about this topic because in many transition meetings, MPS leaders said they could not find an abundance of research concerning a school district that had gone through a comprehensive grade level redistricting.

## Chapter 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

A reminder that for this study, my focus is on adult transitions, especially those made by certificated teachers at Victory High School. Fullan's (2001) *Implementation Dip* is a start for the discussion regarding Adult Work Transitions, as it deals with the moment when the perseverance of change is weakened by human interaction with that change. The research findings are also framed through the lens of starting with endings, going through the neutral zone, and ending at beginnings (Bridges, 2009).

From the arduous but enlightening coding task I was able to sort each entry from interviews and focus groups into one of the following proprietary themes: community building and culture, colleagues and opportunity, perception of student benefits, excitement of a new building, emotions and personal life, inequity, leadership, teacher input into choice and change, supplies, start time, technology, and professional development. Then I realized, after counting each category, that while start time and supplies were significant problems to some of the participants, they really fit into the "emotions and personal life" and "inequity" categories, respectively. I recognized that, for the most part, these themes and categories could be sorted again into a positive column and a negative one. There was only one theme regarding teacher input about choice and change, which stood out as having an equal amount of both positive and negative attributes.

I also realized I needed to sub-categorize the "inequity" category. Inequity turned out to be such a broad grouping when I looked at it closely. I sub-categorized it into the

following broad classifications: class size of 18, curriculum/course conflict, resources, socio-economic status (SES), and supplies and moving.

## **Participants**

Data from participants are a mixture of personal emotions, opinions on administration and infrastructure, and a reflection on the past and their future mission as educators. The participants were a blend of former middle school and junior high teachers, former high school teachers in other secondary buildings, and first year teachers. The chart in Appendix D will help the reader see the participants in the context of their job, sex, leadership role, and department, as well as their former school level.

The participants were equitably spread between content areas and backgrounds, which helped me be confident in an accurate combination of ideas and opinions. Data from participants are a mixture of reflection, looking to the future, and happiness with the current reality of their situation. I noticed a difference between focus groups and interviews, and I attribute this to the setting of focus groups and interviews, as well as the context of interviewees speaking on their own or focus group members speaking in front of, and in reaction to, their peers.

## **Individual Interviews**

The reason I initially decided to complete individual interviews was to get concepts out in the open from single members of the Victory High School teaching community. I wanted to guard against the group think that sometimes occurs from being a part of a focus group, as well as the tendency for focus groups to portray themselves, as individuals, in a much more positive light than what is actual reality (Krueger & Casey,

2009). It interesting to note that during interviews, participants stuck very closely to the questions asked and didn't often deviate from the core and heart of the question.

Interviews are also a good fit with focus groups; one doesn't supersede the other (Krueger & Casey, 2009). It would be interesting to individually interview all participants and then include them in a focus group, or even two or more focus groups, to see how linear their answers are, the changes that occur from interviews to focus groups, and how answers differ when individuals are grouped with others (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

### **Focus Groups**

The reason I decided to add focus groups to my research was to encourage focus group members to bring concepts out in the open with their peers. I wanted to capitalize on the group think that sometimes occurs from being a part of a focus group. Krueger & Casey (2009) suggest that "focus groups have proven helpful mostly because they provide an interactive environment", and participants can bounce ideas off of one another (p. 12). It interesting to note that during focus groups, participants did not stick very closely to the questions asked and often deviated from the heart of the questions. This enabled them to bounce ideas back and forth between each other while also extemporaneously reflecting on their transition perspective with peers.

Focus Group 1 was comprised of a Special Education teacher, an outreach counselor (with a degree in Social Work), and a Social Studies teacher. Their former schools were two different junior highs. Focus Group 2 included a Language Arts teacher, the Band director, a Spanish teacher, and an Industrial Technology teacher. They were from junior

highs and Elizabeth Bergman High School. Focus Group 3 included a former Middle School Language Arts teacher, and a former ninth grade Science teacher and a second year Language Arts teacher, both who taught the previous year at Huff Junior High School (HJHS) (see Appendix D).

### **Interrelating Themes/Description**

When themes did not exclusively align between focus groups and interviews, I noted it in the course of the transcript. There were not large thematic differences between focus groups and interviews, but where there were, I discuss in the transcription.

While coding the data, I remembered to go back to the purpose of my study and the framework and research design I intended to use. There are many transition theories related to adults in work evolution, but Schlossberg, et al.'s (1995) Transition Theory most specifically “focuses on life events entailing change” (p. 22). The three beliefs of this theory are:

- Approaching transitions (endings)
- Taking stock of coping resources: self, situation, support, strategies  
(neutral zones)
- Taking charge – strengthening resources (beginnings)

This context allowed me to understand the integration between “both anticipated transitions – the scheduled, expected events that are likely to occur for the individual and that can be anticipated and rehearsed – and unanticipated transitions – the nonscheduled events that are not predictable” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 23). While MPS tried to account for every conceivable change, the district could not anticipate every possible

problem of Secondary School Reorganization. The capacity for major organizations to recognize that “transitions often involve significant life events that require coping with what is perceived to be a crisis situation” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 23) is often a struggle.

### **Themes**

The themes discovered through this exploratory qualitative study were around the research question relating to perceptions and expectations of teachers in a Secondary School Reorganization. The purpose of this section is to organize the elements from interview and focus group conversations that pertain to insights and anticipations of secondary teachers in relation to the reorganization in Midwest Public Schools in the 2013-2014 school year. Themes include: community building and culture; searching for colleagues and opportunity; perceptions of student benefits; excitement of transitioning to a new building; following the leader; committees, surveys, community voice, and “the draft”; inequity among schools; technology and the need for professional development; emotions of transition and the effect on personal life.

#### **Community Building and Culture**

Teacher perception from focus groups and interviews indicated that the community building during “one year out” meetings prepared them for the “we’re all in this together,” and “It’s going to be OK” mentality of starting a third comprehensive high school in MPS. Bolman and Deal (2008) remind us that successful and progressive institutions give power to their employees (p. 149). Successful leaders, in both individual schools and school districts, share power to boost community so that students

and teachers are invested in school. When trying to comprehend and examine the perceptions of teachers in a Secondary School Reorganization, one must recognize the part school reconfiguration plays on the hearts and minds of educators. There are many ways school districts can reorganize and restructure learning environments to support community and culture.

Community building and the shaping of community culture was one of the first themes that appeared during data analysis. It also includes facets of communication, changing culture, and training, or professional development. Interviewees and focus group participants recalled the importance placed on community building and creating the culture of the newly formed Victory High School. They mentioned the time investment, which was a priority for leaders, and how this community and culture building made their choice to transfer to Victory High valued. A Math teacher stated:

I think it was a comfortable decision. I think it was probably like a ... I don't want to say it was a deciding factor, but it definitely made it an easier choice over like (Elizabeth Bergman) or (Roseman), where I didn't have a clear sense of their culture, and all I knew was kind of hearsay, and my impressions of those schools versus (Victory).

I also think that after that it was an exciting thing to know that I could affect it. So, I don't think that's an opportunity many teachers get in a career. Like, I can actually make an impact on how that culture is built, so I think that was definitely cool. That was definitely a plus one (Thomas, personal communication).

Being able to create the culture themselves solidified that culture in the minds of new VHS teachers. While they could have come into an established building like Bergman or Roseman, the appeal of creating that culture and community from scratch, with their coworkers, was appealing. Shaping the culture and setting the tone for Victory



High School was important to incoming teachers. Even though they reported being anxious at the beginning, teachers reflected on how important community building and school culture were to them in relation to their own feelings of safety and security in a new building, including this Language Arts teacher:

Okay, still kind of scared...but as time went on that wore off, and I have a lot of friends that I never knew before moving to Victory and that's great. That community building (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

While many VHS teachers made the exodus to Victory High School with Huff Junior High School colleagues, there were still others who came from a variety of other schools, including those who made the choice to leave the two established high schools for a fresh start at Victory. The importance of starting new and either establishing or re-establishing relationships was important to the climate and culture of Victory High School teachers.

School staff at VHS recognized the district's intentional investment in community building, and structuring teacher relationship building while cultivating a culture of connection, as Trevor, a World Language teacher, mentions:

One of the big things that I definitely saw when we were re-districting is that they spent a lot of time building community amongst the staff when that transition happened. I know I came late on into the community building of (Victory) High School, but as the transition happened, there was a lot of talk between faculty, and a lot of time spent together. There's a lot of community building, so I think they did a really good job of doing that, even though a lot of people were going into a very new situation that they were teaching, and they hadn't taught things that they're going to teach before, and in buildings that had never been there before, I think that they felt like they were becoming part of something as they were creating something at the same time (Trevor, personal communication).

Victory teachers recognized the emphasis that VHS building leaders and MPS administrators placed on the importance of taking time to build community, team, and culture.

Teachers at VHS were asked to reflect on the team-building exercises their administration structured and facilitated, but most said that the mindset of building something new was the most common feeling they experienced. Trevor stated:

What'd they do to make us feel part of the team? I think most of the community in a sense came from the feeling that we're all in this together, that there's a great equalizer in that we were all in a brand new situation together, and I think a lot of the understanding amongst us came from that understanding that we are all facing something brand new all at the same time. A lot of us came from completely different teaching environments in different buildings, and different places. Seeing everyone being very honest and open about what it looked like for them to adjust to that was probably one of the most comforting things (Trevor, personal communication).

Even though there were former building leaders, teachers with decades of experience and those with just a few years, and teachers with recognition and accolades bestowed on them in previous building placements, the feeling of VHS, as reported by teachers, was one of starting on an even playing field. This feeling might not have occurred at other, established buildings, but coming to VHS at the same time, starting everything from scratch, and having a fresh start provided an equal and egalitarian beginning for many.

In an interview, Hugh, a longtime MPS educator, spoke about the importance of community and culture building in relation to opening Victory High School. He mentions the five “one year out” professional development (PD) dates that every secondary school had as particularly helpful:

Well, obviously we had those PD days, and a lot of it was geared towards building community and doing those type events. They had almost like a back to school picnic-type thing over at the (Woods) Golf Course where I guess they had a barbecue and did some things like give out (Victory) t-shirts. I couldn't go, I had football practice, so I missed it. I know they did that (Hugh, personal communication).

VHS administrators knew that some teachers and staff would not be able to attend each social function because of work or family obligations. They staggered the events, and also started to include students, families and community members in other activities they hoped would take root and be annual occasions. Social events were important to the teachers of Victory High School. Administrators might have strategized the intent behind these social occasions to be fun, but also engage and connect staff members, because they were all new to VHS. Community involvement from parents, students, neighbors, and other stakeholders started to anchor Victory in the minds and hearts of the community. Teachers were excited to start traditions, make a new culture, and be a part of something never seen before in Halpin, MO. Hugh noted:

One thing that we did to sort of tie us to the community was they did the Call to (Victory). A yearly thing now, but that was something that was pretty big, tying it in, getting people connected to (Victory). Honestly, I think it's just like kids, how do you get connected to the school? You sponsor groups, you coach. You know what I'm saying?

You join things, I'm one of the two Stuco sponsors, I coach football. Those things keep you busy year-round and you feel more vested interest in the school because you're connecting with kids differently than you would just in a classroom. Obviously, the opportunity to create a culture or start traditions, things that have never been done before that we would get to be a part of with starting clubs and sports and just all that kind of cool stuff (Hugh, personal communication).

The excitement generated from the PD days was still palpable in the halls of Victory High School almost two years later. Many teachers remembered how meeting

their colleagues a year before school started was particularly helpful, and these events solidified the connection between teachers, as well as their burgeoning loyalty to VHS.

For example, Adam, a Math teacher, stated:

Administrators? Not only did we do the PD stuff but we had a couple happy hour type occasions either at Dr. (Rudy)'s house or happy hours even before we started, to break the ice and get people talking and knowing each other and things like that. That was helpful (Adam, personal communication).

MPS leaders and the principal and leaders at Victory High School created an agenda for change using culture and community building to guide their efforts during Secondary School Reorganization, but not everyone was on board with creating a culture of collaboration from the very beginning. True relationships with lasting effects on improving student achievement cannot be magically created, but are cultivated through training and time. Thomas shared:

I think that some of the issues I ran into last year is everyone was kind of working separately. I'd get the comments at some points that we were just still teaching like we were at (Huff), or (East), or (Roseman), or (Elizabeth Bergman), because we had never really a defined clue of what our culture was (Thomas, personal communication).

Even though VHS teachers worked on culture and community during the one year out meetings, there is always more work to do to fully create, establish and maintain a successful and foundational culture and community.

Teachers' interview and focus group perceptions regarding Secondary School Reorganization in the Midwest District frequently mentioned the meetings before school began (one year out meetings) was one of the single best things MPS did to set the culture and community of the new building. Since Victory High School was not fully

constructed a year before it opened, VHS teachers met at the MPS district Neal Board Office to have their meetings. They gathered in the large board meeting room at Neal to begin their plan for a successful VHS launch in 2013. Adam (Math) and Willem (Gifted) shared:

We had a lot of professional development that entire year before. I think every district PD Day was with our faculty the next year which was pretty cool. The thing that stands out about those is not necessarily what we did. It was the time with the faculty (Adam, personal communication).

We had about a year of preparation where we focused intensely on team building and culture building (Willem, personal communication).

The humanization of transitional change is also be noted, according to Bridges (2009). Instead of a distribution memos and emails informing stakeholders of change, a more personal method is suggested, as “memos are actually better ways of protecting the sender, however, than they are of informing the receiver” (Bridges, 2009, p. 19). Leaders would benefit from considering “talk about transition and what it does to people” (Bridges, 2009, p. 16). Administrators at Victory High School invested time in the transition through community and culture building, facilitated by meetings that began a year before Victory opened its doors to students. Hugh mentioned that:

I mean, we had some meetings. I mean obviously we had, I guess they were PD days that were geared towards where your new placement would be. We had three, maybe four, I guess we met, because we didn't have a building, at the board office over at (Neal). We kind of met as a staff and hashed out a lot of things. We came up with a mission statement. We signed up for clubs, or organizations, or things like that. We tried to build community. I think that in that sense, that was one of the things we did (Hugh, personal communication).

Teachers specifically cited one year out meetings when they mentioned creating culture and community, but many delved into the nuances of what happened during those

meetings, and how that time together made them feel. Shelly, a World Language teacher, stated:

I liked the beginning ones that we had right when you first got your letter of where you were going. I was in that first group that very first year and we went to (Neal). We worked on our motto and I remember the first time we had we were going to be the Warriors. This is what we want to be our values that kind of thing in being a part of coming up with that. That was very helpful (Shelly, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

Opening a third comprehensive high school was stressful and time-bound, but VHS teachers mentioned they were given grace and time to reflect over what would be best for the school. Decisions were not rushed, nor was there the expectation that all problems had to be solved a full year before the doors opened. Marie, a Math teacher, said:

They gave us lots of time to think. We didn't have to make a decision but they... gave us information to ponder. And then, how did we prepare ... Oh, we had meetings the entire year prior, you know, once we had made our decision, we had meetings prior for a year with (Victory) to help us get to know each other and to figure some major things out like our vision and you know, clubs and just kind of where we were headed. The direction we were headed (Marie, personal communication).

Victory High School teachers' perceptions regarding secondary change were positively influenced by one year out meetings, which created an agenda for change to guide their efforts during Secondary School Reorganization.

### **Searching for Colleagues and Opportunity**

Interviewees and focus group participants also cited colleagues and opportunity as reasons they decided to ask for a transfer to Victory High School. The principal, Dr. Rudy, selected educators she thought were up to the challenge of technological

advancement: those who would be innovative and promote positive culture building. The opportunity for teachers to take on more responsibility, be it sponsoring clubs, coaching sports, or joining leadership teams, was exciting and motivational for teachers at Victory High School. Thomas shared:

The building was probably less a consideration, just because of the size of high school, I know that I'd be interacting with my colleagues at the department level more, but certainly I needed to make sure I was working with people that ... I don't know how to phrase this out loud, but the freedom to kind of work how I need to work, and not force me to do anything one particular way (Thomas, personal communication).

A recurring theme, and one that will be explored more fully in the section on Emotions and Personal Life, is the feeling of loss that teachers who joined the Victory High staff experienced for their old school. They were not encouraged to forget the past and this loss, but mentioned that the draw of talented colleagues and the opportunities they would have professionally helped them mourn the loss, if any, of their former building. Adam said:

I mean, I do not know if I was going to be in the same spot where I wanted to move. I just felt like I could not pass it up. This year is going to be a lot of ground work for starting new high school traditions and all that kind of stuff. I was excited about that activity (Adam, personal communication).

Adam had the opportunity to move from a teaching position to that of a media specialist instructor, in charge of managing teacher and student iPads, as well as contributing to technological instruction for teachers. With his move to VHS, this opportunity in the 2014-2015 school year was much more open to him than if he had stayed at his previous school, Roseman High. VHS was going 1:1 with technology, which

meant every student had their own iPad as a personal learning device. Cynthia, a Science teacher, shared:

As far as what our administrators did, we had the meetings. They organized some social events. They gave tours of the school and I thought that was a really ... they built on that excitement. When (Victory) opened, we'd been riding a wave for five months and I think they created that wave really, really well. That excitement, that energy (Cynthia, personal communication).

If teachers can take some of their previous school or experience with them, they are more likely to celebrate the changes of their new familiarity, as the resistance to endings is pacified when people are able to bring a little bit of their former work-selves with them (Bridges, 2009, p. 35). The Victory High School teachers focused on the energy and excitement of opening a new building and “riding the wave” of vigor to the beginning of the school year.

This break with the past, and the opportunity to work with pioneering colleagues and positive leaders, did seem like both a positive and a negative to certain teachers who weren't used to sharing leadership in their former schools. Some teachers did not realize the amount of opportunity and leadership thrust upon them, and did not feel prepared to take it on, like Margaret:

I've never been the leader. I'm the baby. I'm the fun girl. We do the fun stuff. I plan the party. I plan the volleyball versus ninth grade. I'm not used to being the experienced educator role. I guess I would say that would be my second biggest struggle, is transitioning to people perceiving me as an educator differently than I was used to being perceived. It has been a shift. It's been a difficult shift (Margaret, personal communication).

While Margaret was viewed as an esteemed teacher and cooperative colleague by others, she did not view herself as ready for any leadership role. She transferred to VHS



and was now classified as a veteran teacher; in her previous building, however, even with nearly a decade of teaching behind her, she was categorized as a novice. Her previous school had been staffed with teachers who had been in the classroom for twenty or thirty years.

Many teachers interviewed cited colleagues as a major source of inspiration for their choices in regards to Secondary School Reorganization and their perceptions of it, as Trevor shares:

It was interesting with the World Language department, a lot of people had planned on being at (Victory). In my case, that was definitely helpful, since my mentor was moving. She had been a huge help to the end that my formation as a teacher was very much helpful. Sorry, let me rephrase that. Her role in my teaching was very much present, so that was very helpful to have another year collaborating with her very closely (Trevor, personal communication).

Most teachers were excited to go with their colleagues to their building of choice, mainly Victory High School. Joseph, a ninth grade Math teacher, mentioned that he did not want to remain at his building and intentionally requested VHS because of his former administrators and peers. He cited pressure from his junior high principal about staying at the junior high school (which changed into a middle school), and revealed that he did not appreciate the pressure she put on him to stay:

I didn't want to work with the principal with whom I was working. I wanted to go somewhere where I could be reasonably sure that people were going to be interested in trying new things... (Joseph, personal communication).

One interviewee, Margaret, mentioned a "Victory Pact" with her teacher girlfriends, and talked about how devastated she was when three of her friends broke their pact and either went elsewhere or retired early. Margaret shared:

The very first thing that I took into consideration when I heard about the transition was, I want to work where my friends work. It sounds really juvenile, but so much of the hard part of our job involves having a strong support network. If you have a support network who has been with you through professional difficulty and professional triumph, as well as personal difficulty, first year of marriage, being pregnant, having kids, family members dying ... When you have a network that are willing to support you so deeply, that was my very first concern.

It was very funny. I have a strong, strong group of girlfriends from my old school and we joked about our pact. We joked about wanting to go someplace where we would be valued for what we bring to the table. We did a lot for our old school. We were leaders in a variety of ways. Academically, socially, student activities. We wanted to go together as a group and we joked about our (Victory) pact. Only two of us are here from the (Victory) pact by the way. We had three pact members drop out, again for a variety of reasons. It was one of those things where, we all agreed that we wanted to be able to keep with our network of people. Things occurred that changed over the course of time and it was ... I went to (Roseman), I went to (Bergman), that's where I want to be. I already know that there's a position for me there so I'm going to get out of this building a year early before the transition occurs, because I don't want to be caught up in the emotion of that last year of transition (Margaret, personal communication).

Another teacher, Tony, discussed the idea of having younger colleagues as a bonus for transferring to Victory. He thought teachers who were all new to one place would not be as entrenched in the old ways of doing things and would keep an open mind.

I feel like it's an advantage to us being a younger staff because we're more willing to change. It's not like you've got a person that's been here for 25 years like you have at a lot of the other buildings. It's like I'm not going to change what I'm doing is working. We're innovative I feel like (Tony, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

The ending of a previous structure, culture, or way of doing things, like having only two comprehensive high schools, was a mourning period for those who worked under the old system. Because of collegial promise and open opportunities, those losses and that mourning period seemed to have abated some regret and sorrow.

## **Perception of Student Benefits**

Students also felt the opening of VHS was an opportunity – a third comprehensive high school would now allow ninth through twelfth graders to be in the same building; freshmen would have the opportunity to play sports, engage in classes, and immerse themselves in true high school activities. They would also be in the building longer – for four years instead of three. The hope was that this would build more pride, loyalty and affiliation with Victory, which would benefit students and the schools, through opportunity, as shared by Jean:

I think overall the idea of keeping kids in schools longer was a good idea. Just my experience with my own children being in elementary for so long, it made me realize how quick that transition, two years, two years, and then three years in high school was. Hopefully this gives kids more of a sense of this is their home, that school pride and all that, which I think helps the kids be more successful (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

Elective teachers were especially entrenched in the idea that the opportunity for students in a comprehensive four year high school would surpass any prospect they had in the past for advancement, learning and improvement in their field. Miles is the band teacher, and he was passionate about the idea of student opportunity:

A huge positive ... in recent years we had a scenario where for years and years we had students who would go all the way up to their ninth grade year playing their instrument or singing and then as soon as they hit their ninth grade year and got that Fine Arts credit, it was very easy for them when they were transitioning to a new building to just ditch it. Because they didn't have that connection with that teacher. And then, they would do other things. Our retention would just fall through, I think we would lose like forty percent of the students (Miles, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

The principal and leaders at Victory High School created an agenda for change using colleagues and opportunity to guide their efforts during Secondary School

Reorganization. Teachers cited they garnered strength for the transition from colleagues and the opportunity to take on more leadership roles.

### **Excitement of Transitioning to a New Building**

Many teachers also cited the “shiny newness” of Victory High School. They revealed it was exciting to be in a fresh, clean building with new things. Many of them also referred to the fact that with a new building came the new 1:1 technology initiative, where every student has an iPad, which was exciting for them. Some teachers mentioned the exhilaration came from the jewel that had become the building and grounds of Victory High School: everyone in Halpin was talking about the building and how nice it looked, even from the outside when people just drove by, as shared by Joseph:

...to be perfectly honest, I liked the idea that this is a beautiful place, and a lot of the buildings at (MPS) are not, and I think we underplay that, hence beautiful places are much nicer to be (Joseph, personal communication).

When examining the SES factor in Victory High School, many of the new Warrior students did not come from homes that were particularly new or fancy. Their family’s income generally did not allow for many perks or a high rate of spending. Having a new school was important to the Halpin and VHS community, to show the “poorest kids” that they could have nice things. VHS teachers’ perception of the excitement of transition included a focus on what this anticipation and enthusiasm meant for their students. Shelly mentioned:

After the tours, kids were videotaping their tours and taking pictures. They came back so excited. Whereas before, it was like, "Oh, I have to go to the other school." They didn't really know what it was going to be like. I think getting the kids involved in getting them prepped, and having them have a say was key in

getting them excited and wanting to be a (Warrior) (Shelly, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

New teachers to Victory shared this excitement in having new things to teach with and a brand new, clean environment in which to work. Many districts, Midwest included, faced severe budget cuts since the American financial depression of 2008; MPS opened Victory after a successful tax levy (Midwest Public Schools, 2012). Schools engage in conversations and thinking around student success in relation to Bandura's "self-efficacy" model (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 160), but to the extent to which teacher and employee self-efficacy is present can make or break any change. Self-efficacy involves being able to believe in yourself, that you can accomplish your dreams and realize what you want in a lifetime of success (Goodman et al., 2006). It is the confidence needed to complete tasks and move toward goals. The ingrained self-efficacy of teachers, as well as students, was a bonus for the opening of Victory High School, as shared by Hugh:

Obviously, another piece of it was, almost like a selfish reason of getting to open up a brand-new building. There's not a lot of people in their career that can say that they opened a high school or a new middle school or any type of building, so I think that was part of it (Hugh, personal communication).

Many teachers mentioned how exciting it was to be a part of something new, almost revolutionary, in Halpin. The opening of Victory High School and the inaugural year of Elizabeth Bergman High School, which some Halpinites still describe as the "new high school" were separated by forty years, which Emma, a counselor, spoke about:

But I mean, then I got really excited about being able to be a part of something that was going to be so magnificent, you know. And I knew it was the right thing to do, but then again, was it the right - I mean, you know, you were doing fine where you were at and everything so - I mean, I knew it was very exciting but at the same time... (Emma, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

This eagerness and enthusiasm enabled teachers to travel through the neutral zone of uncertainty and had something exciting and remarkable to look forward to in August of 2013, when VHS opened, as Caroline shared:

I was really excited. I'd known for a long time that this was coming and obviously I was part of this district when we first planned to open two years before we actually did. So I felt like I was really, really ready to get it started, and I was part of the group that kind of was in it from the beginning, so planning a lot of our collaboration days the year before the transition, so I really felt positive and I really felt ready and excited. Obviously, I was a little bit nervous because I was starting in a new position in a new building with new people and as department chair. I didn't really know what I was getting myself into, because that is really different than it was at the junior high level. But overall, I think there was just a lot of anticipation (Caroline, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

Teachers at Victory High School credited the excitement and expectation of opening a new building as one of the many positive aspects of transitioning to a new high school during Secondary School Reorganization in Midwest Public Schools.

### **Following the Leader**

Teachers at VHS reported that one of the main factors of starting the 2013-2014 school year at Victory was to be under the guidance, tutelage and leadership of Dr. Jennifer Rudy. Successful leaders focus on a sustainable mission and vision, inspire others, and reward them for a job well done (Northouse, 2010). Effective leaders share an inspired vision while listening to others and letting others share, in some part, in the leadership, while encouraging active stakeholder participation (Northouse, 2010). Enlightened leaders empower employees and encourage active participation in the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Dr. Jennifer Rudy was principal of Huff Junior High School for many years and had loyal employees who followed her to Victory High School. Teachers who were interviewed and participated in focus groups were quick to mention Dr. Rudy as one of the main reasons they chose to go to Victory. The leadership of Dr. Rudy came into play considerably to foster the idea that there will be mistakes and bumps along the road but the teachers, staff and administration would work through them together. Many individuals mentioned “fix it” meetings where any and all ideas for changing something that was not functioning well – a program, design or process – would be taken into consideration. There was no wrong answer and all thoughts and input were valued. Jean mentioned this in Focus Group 3:

Yeah, and I would second that...coming here, it was super helpful that I felt like Dr. (Rudy) got it, that we were overwhelmed. She would say constantly, you know what, it's okay. How many new things are you learning this year? It's okay (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

Dr. Rudy's sensitivity to teachers feeling overwhelmed was a main source of comfort during the first year of VHS. Dr. Rudy reminded teachers that all of this was new to everyone, and they were all constructing new customs and a new culture together. Issues like Warrior Time (a period in the school day devoted to RtI – Response to Intervention), which could have caused consternation and negative feelings, were dealt with in an open, equal and democratic manner, as discussed by Mark and Jean in Focus Group 3:

We're building new traditions. She constantly said that (Mark, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

Yeah, building new traditions...if somebody would come with a problem, like Warrior Time, I had a horrible time with Warrior Time in the beginning. Yeah, that people would propose solutions. It would be like, great, what else, let's try this. That whole mentality of not, "well, this is the right way to do Warrior Time." There was never that. I never got that feeling (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

Yes. Dr. (Rudy) might think this is the most ridiculous idea but she'll always say, "That's a great idea, how are we going to make that work?" And then people sometimes have to answer for themselves that they've come up with a ridiculous idea that's not going to work but she hears them all. She really does. And that I think helps everybody feel like you're valued and that you're smart and that you're building something (Logan, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

As Bolman and Deal (2008) remind us, "Progressive organizations give power to employees as well as invest in their development...It also involves encouraging autonomy and participation, redesigning work, fostering teams, promoting egalitarianism, and infusing work with meaning" (p. 149). Students and teachers are invested in schools when leaders share power. Dr. Rudy included teachers in the planning, culture building, and vision of VHS. Looking at the foundation of reward and referent power through the lenses of transformational leadership and the political frame, Bolman and Deal (2008) remind us to consider a concentration on agenda setting (p. 214). Kanter (1983/2008) says "the first step in effective political leadership is setting an agenda" (p. 214). This agenda for change balances two parts: long-term benefits, and vision setting within the parameters of conflict from contained and outside forces.

Teachers mentioned this shared leadership and agenda setting from Dr. Rudy as a constant theme in the interviews and focus groups. There is no way a sole leader could single-handedly take on opening a brand new high school. Leaders often get in the way of themselves and neglect to use their most powerful resource: their people. Teachers



perceived that Dr. Rudy used shared leadership to build the capacity of learning at Victory High School, as Willem discussed:

The administration team really worked hard to help create a culture of shared leadership. Let us know right away that we would be a part of the decision making process. Not only was it part of the expected culture but that we could take leadership roles if we were interested as well (Willem, personal communication).

Department Chairs mentioned they felt invested in the creation of VHS through the leadership of Dr. Rudy. The empowerment she shared enabled them to create community within their own section of teachers to help with the foundational aspects of creating a culture of relationship building and collaboration. This was especially pertinent to Cynthia's reflection of Secondary Reorganization:

Being a Science Department Chair put me in a little different position, I think, than if I were just hired on as a teacher. I was a part of a lot of the planning and the leadership and the meetings that we would have and the district-wide meetings where we pulled people together. I was a part of that. I did my best as a Science Department Chair to really keep people informed about stuff. For our Science staff that we had hired at the time, I had several get-togethers just to get people together. I think we had more get-togethers the year before we opened than we do now that we're already here. It's just different. We knew that was something that needed to be done (Cynthia, personal communication).

The praise continued for Dr. Rudy and her leadership team, even after fifteen months of VHS being up and running. Victory teachers do not believe that Dr. Rudy's leadership was just a flash in the pan; she has established herself as a progressive and understanding leader, and chose assistant principals who carry on her message of shared leadership throughout the school. Lorraine, the Social Studies department chair, focused on this:

I think Dr. (Rudy)'s doing a great job. She's doing ... and our APs are doing good. I think everybody's doing the best that they can do. I mean I feel like they have a good team here (Lorraine, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

The band teacher, Miles, mentioned how some administrators don't usually have a lot of knowledge of Fine Arts, but he has felt very supported by the VHS administration, whether they have a musical or artistic performance background or not:

I don't think ... A lot of them don't have experience in it (Fine Arts). I felt very supported. I have very supported here with ... Whenever I go to them and say, "here's what's going on," or if they come up and they make the decision, and it's like it's not the right decision, I'll make an appointment with them. I'll go in and I'll just explain here is what's going on. They've always listened to me about that (Miles, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

The evidence reveals that shared leadership, along with a feeling of empowerment and self-efficacy, has established VHS as a place teachers want to be. VHS teachers involved in this study felt their colleagues were handpicked for their resiliency, community building, and intentional professional learning community skills, which Margaret shared:

In a building that we're chosen to be there and wanted to be there. Not just because they got stuck there or left there or there was space for them there. Not just new because of the building, a new way of doing things. It doesn't have to be high school like (Halpin) high schools before. We can do it a different way (Margaret, personal communication).

MPS leaders, and, more specifically, the principal and leaders at Victory High School, created an agenda for change using shared leadership to guide their efforts during Secondary School Reorganization.

## **Committees, Surveys, Community Voice, and “The Draft”**

The High School Transition Committee began work on the possibility of opening a third comprehensive high school in 2008. From this came the Secondary School Reorganization Committee which was served by teachers, administrators, students and parents (Midwest Public Schools, 2012). Teachers had mixed emotions about the level of transference from their committee work to the reality of the actual transition, the amount of input they had on transition surveys, and the process of moving teachers from various schools to Victory High School.

The Secondary School Reorganization Committee generated a lengthy report detailing their recommendations for middle schools and the new high school. The committee researched extracurricular activities, block scheduling, the Middle School Model, adolescent brain research, curriculum, advisory, electives, and the physical transition needed, (moving people and supplies (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011).

Teachers, community members, parents and students were on these committees, and most committees were up and running for five years before the junior highs became middle schools, and before Victory High School opened its doors. It should be noted that Midwest Public Schools went through an initial transition in 1997 when three new middle schools were created to help the overcrowding at the three existing junior highs (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). The middle schools served students in grades six and seven, then junior highs had students in eighth and ninth grades. Before 1997, junior highs served students in seventh, eighth and ninth grades,

and sixth graders were at elementary schools (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011).

Teachers reported that their voice was heard, for the most part, when they were engaged in committees, and through their survey responses. Having a say in the process was important to them, as shared by Lorraine:

I thought some of the positives, I was involved in a lot of the transition planning, so being on different committees, and I was actually on the middle school planning committee and ended up in high school. But I felt like, just based on what I went through the first time we did it with middle school and then the second time with adding a new high school, I thought it was much better organized this time. And I felt the fact that we were able to take a survey and people really cared about what we wanted and tried to make the best choices for us, you know, with what we wanted in mind, I really appreciated that. And I didn't feel like we had that last time (Lorraine, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

Even five years before VHS opened, and the junior highs became middle schools, Most teachers and staff felt district officials valued the investment of their time and ideas in regards to Secondary School Reorganization. The voice of teachers was heard, according to Emma in Focus Group 1, and Logan, in Focus Group 3:

Yeah, I felt like they were asking a lot of questions from the staff, that they wanted to hear their input (Emma, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

I think the purposeful building of tradition was effective, and I think that the purposeful community decisions about what the identity and atmosphere and environment of this school should be like, I felt involved a ton of people who needed to be involved, so I felt like that was very positive. The mindfulness of it meant a lot to me. They were embarking on something new, we needed to make things right as we're doing it (Logan, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

Teachers, parents, students and Halpinite stakeholders were asked to serve on transition committees, and to make decisions or recommendations about what they

thought was crucial to be incorporated into the new high school model, according to

Mark:

I felt like the community was really involved, or at least they had a sense. The (Halpin) community, the city community felt like they had an influence over a lot of this, especially the boundaries, and I feel like news coverage was just enough, not too much, not too little, to keep people informed and feel like they had an influence over what was going on with their schools, so I feel like that was a positive (Mark, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

There were also a lot of meetings about the new school boundaries, and the entire school district went through a major redistricting, headed by two former school board members (Midwest Public Schools, 2012). VHS teachers shared that the news coverage on this process was helpful to get the community to embrace and participate in the establishment of a third comprehensive high school. Jean was a part of these committees:

I think creating all the committees and giving teachers a lot of buy-in, the planning stage seemed to be a huge positive. I know that not everyone would say that the follow through of the plans, but they had the right idea in releasing that. I was planning to stay at (Joneston), and they really looked at "What is the new (Joneston) going to be?" Not just "We'll just integrate in the eighth graders," but the whole building got a chance to look at our values and look at the things that had been in place beside what we wanted to keep, and so I think the in-building committees as well as those big district committees, they seemed to cover everything, that was a good idea. The timeline, too. Starting so far in advance, I don't think it was, unless you were new here it wasn't like "Here you go." It seemed longer than we've ever done anything before (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

Change in schools profoundly depends on the personal feelings of the staff rather than relying on what is most important to improve student achievement. Teachers and staff involved in transition must acclimate to change for the betterment of the school or district, especially those students affected by the change (Midwest Public Schools, 2012).

After this groundwork was complete, MPS' Human Resource department developed a plan to determine which teachers would go where (Midwest Public Schools, 2012).

Nearly two years before the opening of Victory High School, teachers in secondary schools were given a survey. It asked them what they wanted to teach and where they wanted to teach. The survey also inquired as to which choice was more important to them: where or what (Midwest Public Schools, 2012). From that came an enormous spreadsheet that the Midwest Public Schools Human Resource department compiled and shared with all secondary principals. Current middle school principals were reminded that to ensure all six new middle schools were properly staffed, they might have to share some key teachers with the former junior highs. Principals were asked to identify key players in their buildings who then became sacrosanct – not available to be offered a position elsewhere. They also conducted conversations (not interviews) with anyone interested in moving schools during the Secondary School Reorganization (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Thomas spoke about these conversations:

Okay. I think at (Huff), like I said, it was kind of an individual choice. So, it was ... just because I mean ... you know what I'm talking about when I say like the family at (Huff). It was tough to leave. I think the Math department was a very tight department. It had its own little kind of quirks, but we'd been together a pretty long time at that point. I think like six years, so it was tough to leave them, but as far as them influencing my decision, really not much at all (Thomas, personal communication).

An infrastructure evolution must be fully incorporated into the hearts and minds of the people involved in the change, because “changes of any sort – even though they may be justified in economic or technological terms – finally succeed or fail on the basis

of whether the people affected do things differently” (Bridges, 2009, pp. 5-6). Few systems start with the end in mind. “Transition is different. The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome but the ending that you’ll have to make to leave the old situation behind” (Bridges, 2009, p. 7). Leaders in school transition must understand the psychological and mental implications of change and plan accordingly. Emma brought up the issue of allegiance:

I don't know where this fits in, but I think two different things. I think one thing is the struggle with the loyalty issue. Who should we stay with, who should we go? We don't want to offend anybody if we go, we don't want them to think that we don't like them and all that. Where is my loyalty to my team and the school that I'm at? The other thing I thought was interesting at times was that it felt that there was an encouragement to kind of maybe wash out the ones that didn't need to be there anymore. It's kind of like you all can retire if you want to. You might want to consider that retirement. It's like we're starting all anew, so let's start with all new staff and the ones that we think are productive. I kind of expect we'll get that message sometime... because we're a new school and everything. It's maybe an opportunity to, what do you call that don't throw out the baby with the bath water thing (Emma, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

These emotional repercussions of change manifested themselves in the variance of opinions on whether “The Draft” was successful in Midwest Public Schools. Those who received their first choice quickly, like key players (department chairs, media center specialists, the band teacher) were more positive than those who had to wait longer to be notified, or who heard from friends that their wishes had not been respected, which impacted Emma’s view of Secondary Reorganization:

I feel like they tried to promote a community, too. You know, to do celebrations and to try to get everybody involved. Because they knew it was going to be a hard transition pulling in a lot of different people. And I feel like they knew some were not going to be happy with where they were placed and so they did try to, at least here, try to build that community. Because it was a new high school, too (Emma, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

Interviewees and focus group members mentioned that while they received their first choice in buildings, colleagues they knew did not. Some teachers were moved from established middle schools to former junior highs, even when their preference was to stay put. Others were moved because of their expertise but then reshuffled when enrollment fluctuated in the six middle schools (personal communication, February 10, 2012). This fluctuation came from physical boundary decisions made by the MPS School Board. Some teachers stayed at their previous school because their principal valued them and needed their help to support the foundation of the school. Leaders were not necessarily at liberty to share the reasons different teachers were to stay or go, however, which led to hard feelings among some MPS teachers (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Caroline, the Language Arts department chair, mentioned this topic in Focus Group 2:

I think there were issues with enrollment in certain buildings and so I know people that got shuffled around a lot at the last minute which caused some obvious anxiety, and I think some hard feelings on the part of those individuals. So, even if they like where they ended up, it's kind of like they might have felt they got the short end of the stick, at least last year. And maybe they feel better this year, I don't know, but I know that was an issue. I also know that the boundary didn't end up being as equal as they originally were supposed to be, and that's something that we talk about a lot up here at the high school (Caroline, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

Issues with enrollment concentrated on boundaries the MPS School Board set up to try and regulate the student roster numbers at each school. These numbers fluctuated immensely before the middle schools opened, causing teachers to be shifted from building to building. Huff Middle School lost two teachers the day before school started



in 2013 because expected enrollment numbers dramatically increased in a school on the south part of town (personal communication, August 16, 2013). Jean shared:

Then the last thing that for me that was a big negative was the way that the people, and this might have been individual to buildings, but in our building there were a lot of people leaving to go to the buildings that were previously junior highs. I know that this happened with other people. There wasn't a clear positive message. It could have been really presented. Do you know why? Experienced teachers to start these buildings. I think it needed to be the current principals who had that conversation, because they already had a relationship with those people. I don't think there was a uniform message that went out to everybody.

People just assumed they weren't wanted in their building, and they were the ones who were being kicked out. There were quite a few hard feelings, and I think the established middle schools, I think it worked out okay in the end, but it just could have, that year where we all knew where we were going could have been a lot better if people had been told, we need you to be a leader in this new building. Which I think was the thought (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

There were videos that came out of the Neal Board Office to apprise employees of the sorting process involved in staffing all the buildings. Some thought these were helpful, some did not, and still others received differing information from their 2012-2013 building principals. The message principals told teachers who were asked to move was not clear or consistent throughout the district. Some principals were concerned about telling staff too much. The district's administration asked principals and school leaders to share very little so that the message was not diluted or confusing, but sometimes that had the opposite effect (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Joseph disagreed with this tactic:

I think they could have been more transparent about a lot of what they did. We were getting these half confused reports from our principal, and then every once in a while we'd get a video shot with a camera from like 1987. They'd send us that and it would be a talking head kind of thing, and it was clear that everybody was telling us something was being protective about their information, and they

were choosing their words really carefully so that they weren't committing themselves to anything. I think it would have been a lot more helpful if they would be direct, and say we haven't decided on this, this is probably what's going to happen, but we're not sure yet. Instead of trying to make us feel good the whole time, which I think that's kind of a robot, so I'm just concerned about the way I feel, I know some people would feel a lot more (Joseph, personal communication).

Lorraine, a teacher in Focus Group One, was the actress in the district videos. Her perception differs dramatically from Joseph, who was not involved in a transition committee nor in the district's communication regarding Secondary School Reorganization. She shared:

I also thought they did a good job at the district level of being transparent. Saying, "This is what's happening. We're going to tell you what's happening any time we have an update, we're going to let you know that." I thought that, anxious as people were that was one thing that kind of helped, for the most part, I mean, other times it was like, "Oh my God, I'm going to have to make that choice." But at least we knew what was going on and we weren't kept in the dark until the end and then they said, "OK, here you go." And just the fact that we had some say in where we went, for the most part. I think it was, like, 90% of people, it might have been, like, 83%, but a pretty high percentage of people got their first or second choice. And just...people felt empowered that way, so it was just done to us, we were part of the process (Lorraine, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

During the Secondary School Reorganization of Midwest Public Schools, principals were engaged in a sorting of personnel many referred to as "The Draft" or "sorority rush". Throughout these closed door meetings, the ten current and future secondary principals of Midwest Public Schools divvied and divided all secondary certified personnel into new schools, based on surveys that asked for teacher preference, but also by the teachers' certification (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Many educators at HJHS, and the other two junior highs, only had nine-twelve teacher

certification. When the three junior highs changed into middle schools, they would no longer be certified to teach there. Because Dr. Rudy knew and had hired almost 100% of the teachers at Huff Junior High School (HJHS), she wanted many of them to move with her to Victory, and most of them wanted to move with her. Teachers received letters indicating where they would go in the 2013-2014 school year in May of 2012, which Margaret reflected upon:

I remember the day we got our letters and it was sorority rush all over again. It was just who's going to be here, who's going to be where, what did they get. Oh, my God, is that their first choice? Is that what they wanted? How do I provide support for you? You're going to want to know where I am, I'm really excited about where I am, but drawing it out that long only presented some more opportunities for that animosity to fester.

I think doing that right before the end of the school year was genius. I think even then during, if it had been earlier in the school year, I think it would have been more bad, worse I guess is the word...

They were valid reasons, but it was absolutely part of the conversation. What's your first preference, here's my first preference. There was a period of time where I was second guessing my choice because so many people had decided to go other places. I'm just thinking, this was one of the most important factors for me to start with, and now I'm going someplace where I know no one. Then a dear friend got a position here as a department chair. Then it was like, okay, well there is someone I feel there that would have my back in a personal or professional crisis. That there would be someone there on day one that I feel like I can go to and they would be there for me... That's ... I cannot overstate how important my colleague's decisions were. That is the most exciting part. I could talk like that for hours (Margaret, personal communication).

Victory High School opened with only ninth, tenth and eleventh grade students.

Midwest Public Schools did not want to move students for their senior year, based on fairness to them and the possible outcry of parental and community anger if they did so.

Some high school teachers from RHS and EBHS came to Victory after the

reorganization, but it was mainly former junior high teachers who now teach there, including Cynthia:

When those surveys came out, those conversations happened with colleagues of who's going where. Where do you want to go? I definitely did my share of trying to convince people to say, "Hey, why don't you come over this side or that side?" As far as the preparation, we knew it was coming. There were surveys. We got to meet with our new school the year before. That's it. I don't know, that's all I think of.

It was funny how people were very hush-hush though. No one really wanted to talk about it. I don't know why. I don't know why that climate was there but it absolutely was. My colleagues that I worked with so closely wouldn't readily discuss this. It was almost like off-limit conversations. It was a very interesting climate that was created because of the unknown. I think that's maybe some of it. Maybe because the information was provided so early, and then people just wondered how they going to do this? What's it going to be like? There were so many questions that people didn't know and there was just so much ... fear because of that, I guess. Maybe it's ninth grade teachers where that is the highest concentration because we were having to make a change regardless if we were going to stay in ninth grade.

I think there is something different that maybe the ninth grade teachers ... It'll be interesting for you to see in your interview questions. Something different that ninth grade teachers felt, knowing that they had to go somewhere versus somebody choosing to go to another building (Cynthia, personal communication).

One teacher, Angie, in Focus Group 1, said the survey window and questions were a stressor for her. She said she went back and changed her answers no less than 10 times before she settled on Victory High School as her first choice, where she was placed:

I think that was part of my anxiety, was I making the right decision. There was a survey that we had to fill out and it asked, a little questionnaire and it asked where you wanted to be and you could complete it as many times as you wanted up to a certain date. And I remember other learning specialists were making fun of me because I completed it, like, 10 times.

The first word I can come up with is anxiety. Very anxious. I am a type of person that I like to know where I'm going, what I'll be teaching, that kind of thing and for the longest I didn't know what school I would be in, what I would be

teaching. So just a lot of anxiety is how I felt (Angie, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

As well as anxiety about making the right building and grade level choice, teachers also reported concern about moving from a junior high to a high school. They wondered if they would be good enough, if they would be able to challenge students academically and significantly prepare them for college. Shelly mentions this tension:

I was stressed and excited at the same time. Stressed because ... I think everybody here must have went from like a middle school, junior high mentality to, they're older, I have new things I've never taught before, I need to make it more challenging, more college ready, so it was a stressful time and we didn't really know what we were teaching until ...For me it was about a month before. And I feel like when I knew two years before I should have been able to prep for that, but I couldn't, because I didn't know how or what to prep for! But it was exciting, because it was new, we could start new traditions, we could go with some people we knew yet meet new people. It was a time of starting all over again which was fun and exciting (Shelly, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

Although there were many facets in the MPS' Secondary School Reorganization regarding students, this study focuses on adult transitions, especially those made by teachers at Victory High School. The workforce transition caused much consternation for those teachers who were anxious about their placement, mainly because people think about their own necessity for safety above all else in what they perceive to be a crisis situation (Goodman et al., 2006). Teachers who were secure in their teaching and future with the district, through tenure or professional efficacy, were not so concerned about their 2013-2014 assignment, as they had transferable skills, which are skills that can convert from one job to another, or specific abilities associated to a task or proficiency (Goodman et al., 2006).

The MPS district waited until May, 2012, to officially send out placement letters. The original surveys were posted in the first semester of the 2011-2012 school year, and “The Draft” began February 10, 2012 (personal communication, February 10, 2012). This meant that even though principals knew who was on their list for assigned personnel, teachers didn’t know until May of 2012, almost at the end of the school year, which Thomas remembers:

I wish we would have been ... we would have gotten the decision sooner. I know we got them probably as soon as we could get them, but if I remember correctly, it was really towards the end of the year. I don't know what the decision making structure was, but I know there was a good month or two we were just kind of hanging out, waiting for a decision to be made. Yeah, but, again, I'm not really bothered by that. It was just like, "Okay, not this weekend" (Thomas, personal communication).

Some teachers wanted to know placement for the 2013-2014 school year for their own personal satisfaction, while others conveyed the anxiety they felt from waiting. It was like being in a competition and trying to figure out who had “won”. Teachers cited this lack of transparency as a source of stress, including Hugh:

At the end of the day, you made your own decision, like, this is kind of what I'm feeling now. I guess part of me wanted to know just because you wanted to know who else was going out of pure curiosity and it almost became a competition thing, like, how many Social Studies spots are available? If there's three of us here, then, how many are going to ... You know, almost like being picked last for kick-ball, that type deal (Hugh, personal communication).

Other teachers felt the intense scrutiny that came from “The Draft” letters of placement made them feel uncomfortable, especially when they were asked about their preferences from administrators, as mentioned by Joseph:

A number of awkward questions from my current principal, I think she kind of felt, she had this conception of family, you know how some people really lock

onto that idea of family in terms of a building, and she was saying, "I want to know where my family goes," right? But it was sort of like asking press for the information that's supposed to be private. That was a little uncomfortable. That's one thing I think that there is a distinction between the policies that (Halpin) had, in terms of how those things should be discussed and what, at least my principal, was doing at the time (Joseph, personal communication).

The message from these comments seems to be a lack of transparency by the district, and a feeling of mistrust between teachers and administrators. Information from this topic shows that MPS could have invested more in positive teacher perception of Secondary School Reorganization by delivering the news of where teachers were going to be working in the 2013-2014 school year in a timelier manner.

### **Inequity Among Schools**

The issue of inequity came through in many interviews and focus group discussions. Teacher perception of Secondary School Reorganization links to issues of observed inequity between schools. Issues of boundary lines, socio-economic status (SES), job responsibilities between schools, class sizes, course/curriculum conflict and other issues cast a dark shadow over some teachers' perceptions of their Secondary School Reorganization experience in Midwest Public Schools. The more a change affects someone's life, the more coping resources it requires and the more time assimilation will take (Schlossberg et al., 1995). In other words, how do we support teachers in this adjustment and still do what is best for students? This study investigated what teachers' perceptions were because of the Secondary School Reorganization and what more the district can do to support them in the coming years.

**Class size of 18.** While secondary administrators were negotiating during “The Draft”, MPS board office personnel were wary about a dwindling MPS budget and creating classes that were not maximized to fit FTE (full time equivalent) financial constraints. This led to a 2014-2015 edict from the now retired Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools: all classes will “make” at a minimum of 18 enrolled students (personal communication, March 12, 2013). For smaller schools, or new schools like Victory, this was a challenge, especially in elective classes like Fine Arts, Practical Arts, and World Languages, or typically low enrollment courses like AP and Honors.

There was also a partnership in Midwest Public Schools with EOS (Equal Opportunity Schools), a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to increase minority and underserved students in AP and Honors classes. This partnership agreement’s timing began when Victory High School opened. Many teachers had difficulty reconciling the push to increase AP enrollment and course offerings while also obeying the class size of 18 threshold, like Miles:

The AP thing is a double-edged sword too. I know that there's a lot of push to put kids in AP. I see the merits. My frustration is when they have a blanket enrollment number in order to have a class. I'm sorry, but like the next hour I have to teach a class that is regular and AP in the same classroom. Essentially, I went to him (the Fine Arts coordinator). I said, "This is extremely difficult to do. I don't know how I'm going to do this and I'm going to do my best, but really someone is going to suffer.

What's going to happen is both of the classes, their achievement is going to go down. I'm scared of these AP kids taking the AP period exam without me being able to give them my 100% of my efforts in that class to give them prep for this. Having a blanket, this is the magic number for every single classroom is ...it's very difficult especially regarding to AP ... Trying to deal with the push to get kids ready for the AP test. If they're seriously worried about that, then they should be saying, "Okay. Then you can have a class of six or a class of seven if AP is what is important to us." If that's not important, then okay the magic



number of 18 or whatever the magic number, it goes up and up, and up, but whatever that class number is then that's fine. But it is a double standard (Miles, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

Victory has a high percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) students, and students in under this poverty line do not traditionally take AP or Honors (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014). These students are also made up of a high minority student population (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014). EOS encourages minority and FRL students to participate in AP and Honors courses, but it takes a while to get interest and excitement up to a level where it is the expected culture that students will participate in a high rigor course, as mentioned by Caroline and Tony, in Focus Group 2:

Well, and ultimately there's that...AP how sacred it is and you don't want to jeopardize the integrity of that class. Whether it's because it's mixed or whether it's because you put students in the class who aren't really motivated to take AP but were talked into it by a counselor. Or are on this list and so they need to take it. Ultimately I know that I have teachers in my department and I do, am concerned that AP at (Victory) or AP in (Midwest) Public Schools is going to be different than AP in other places. Ultimately you have to take the test regardless, but as a result of this program, we may not have as many students scoring fours and fives, because we have to have certain kids in that class. The class has to look like our hallways look (Caroline, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

I see the exact same thing. Maybe because I'm not a core - we have kids that should not be in AP. We have kids that are 7% in AP because the district or the building is pushing those stretch classes. What can you do to push yourself? What can you do to push yourself? Well, it's like, just because you put yourself in an AP class, doesn't mean you're qualified...it's like when you put some of these kids in AP who are not AP students, to me I think the counselor should make a decision. "You are an AP student, you should take AP." They need to narrow their criteria because you're right, they are going to get watered down (Tony, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

Teachers who discussed AP and the class size of 18 also mentioned the inequity between Bergman, Roseman, and Victory. Students at Bergman and Roseman are typically more affluent than those who attend Victory; those other students and schools have also had time to establish credible and durable foundations of AP and Honors courses, as Miles discussed:

So, that's huge. And helping with retention, it's going to help a lot with ... The way I said it was going to can help with retention, the side that's counteracting that right now, which is the negative, I think that you've experienced this this year as well, is the inequities between the schools, I'm talking music right now, between the other clusters. They have higher enrollment which allows them to have like instrument classes for their sixth and seventh graders where our schools with smaller enrollment like (Huff) I think you have the smallest enrollment. They don't have the enrollment and music programs to have all trumpets in one class, that's it (Miles, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

The issue of class size being a minimum of 18 caused stress in teachers' lives. Classes they were excited to teach did not materialize because not enough students were enrolled.

**Curriculum and peer conflict.** While EBHS and RHS were jealous of the newness and technological advancement of Victory, VHS teachers reported they didn't want to be a "lower caste" at RHS or EBHS. This was mainly because most Victory teachers were former junior high/freshman teachers. Because Roseman and Bergman were adding ninth graders to established ten through twelve buildings, teachers who were going to be moving anyway, as they were certified nine through twelve, did not feel they would be welcome in the two established buildings.

There were also issues in a particular curricular department that reportedly caused outright hostility to those who taught freshman. Some AP and Honors teachers were also perceived as having a patronizing and condescending attitude toward those teachers who

did not teach AP, Honors or upper level courses. Since Victory High School opened its doors to ninth, tenth and eleventh graders, freshman teachers, like Margaret, cited more comfort with starting out in a new building with no hierarchy of grades or teachers' subjects.

The other part of that is I just worried about going to a high school in general and feeling like an outsider. At several meetings, again departmental meetings, people had talked down to the ninth grade teachers. Well you work with ninth graders, you've never done that, you've never taught AP, you've never even been in a building with AP. They didn't mean it as significantly as some people took it, but if you talk to other ninth grade educators in our district, they will say that that was one of the concerns they had. Going to an established high school was a culture of you're new and you're ninth grade, and that you would never be able to get out of that preconceived box. That was absolutely frightening because I know I'm more than that. I'm not trying to deny my experience. I know I can bring more to the table than just being a ninth grade teacher of a particular subject.

That, coupled with departmental dynamics. I feel like the district department that I'm in has a lot of conflict at the high school level, specifically the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade level. The other end of that, our ninth grade team worked very strongly together. I feel like our ninth grade team, really, as a district has done some amazing things for our students, and has stepped out of the box and done some really neat things (Margaret, personal communication).

As well as course conflict, regarding the hierarchy of who taught what at the high school level, the issue of curriculum conflict also materialized through the interviews and focus groups. One of the themes that emerged was even though the high schools were supposed to be equal in what they taught, that had not yet happened at Victory High School. Tony mentioned this in Focus Group 2:

With the middle school Tech Ed. teachers everybody at the same building teaches the same thing. There's eighth grade is robotics. You've got ... all the schools are teaching eighth grade robotics. We get together seven times a year. That's what they discuss. All their curriculums. At the high school level none of us teach the same thing. I teach car care. Nobody else does. T. doesn't even have a shop. That teacher is brand new - he is not certified in Tech Ed. He's a PE teacher so he has no idea what he is doing. He's already done with our curriculum. Then again -

OK, so I taught home improvement last year well because we added a woods class I can't teach it this year so another teacher is teaching it this year. We are teaching completely separate things. My approach to it as I work in the field of carpentry as a professional. He does not. The needs are just totally different.

What he sees as being important and what I see as being important are two vast different things which then leads back to essentially we have no curriculum that we have to follow. We make up the curriculum as we go. That gets very confusing. (Bergman) teaches just theater tech. He's got four classes of theater tech. I've got one. It's not equitable, you know? (Tony, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

As previously stated, those former junior high teachers who were certified to teach grades 9-12 had a decision to make: get certified to teach 5-9 or go to a high school (the certifications in Missouri are either elementary (K-6), middle school (5-9) or high school (9-12) (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Teachers who were certified in the late 1990s have grades 7-12 certification, but since Victory teachers are, on average, fairly young teachers, their certification is 9-12 only (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Freshman teachers were caught in the middle during Secondary School Reorganization: they had to choose to stay in their building and get re-certified by taking a \$100 Praxis exam (the expense was theirs) or move to one of the two established high schools or the new Victory High School (personal communication, February 10, 2012). This is something Margaret considered:

My second concern was, I wanted to work with ninth graders still. I really enjoy it. Working with the older kids at my previous school and as a result, I was not interested in staying where I was. I felt that the climate would change in a way that it would no longer meet my professional needs (Margaret, personal communication).

Freshman teachers were caught in the middle during Secondary School Reorganization: they had to choose to stay in their building and get re-certified, or move

to one of the two established high schools or the new Victory High School. The perceived inequity they thought they would encounter at either Roseman or Elizabeth Bergman High Schools was a deterrent to those who transferred to Victory. Teachers interviewed thought finding their space in a pre-existing school would be a challenge; they would be a lower social class of teacher in either Roseman or Bergman High Schools, as Margaret shared:

The idea that it was going to be new and different. I'm an alumnus of (Halpin) Public Schools, I am prideful about my alumnus status, but I had student taught at (Roseman) High School. I felt like a student there. That's no one's fault. I had never left. I graduated, I came back a year and a half later to do pre-service work. I did pre-service work there for two and a half years, student taught there. That was not the place that I needed to get my first job (Margaret, personal communication).

VHS teachers recognized the need for separation and autonomy from previous colleagues and established high schools, and saw that while their contemporaries in the two other high schools might be supportive, they would never have the class or standing of those who had been at EBHS or RHS for many years, which worried Cynthia:

I knew from the get-go that I did not want to fit into an existing school. Primarily, because ninth graders, I know, ninth grade teachers weren't going to be ... they would find a spot for them. It probably was not going to be the most ideal situation. Basically, we'd be coming in low people on the totem pole. That's one consideration. The other consideration was just the excitement of starting a new program was something that was real interesting for me to take on as a challenge.

Then, finally the last thing was I'd already decided I was going to (Victory). When I applied for the Science Department Chair position that was just another place that I could professionally grow. The biggest reasons for sure was, I didn't want to fit into an existing program (Cynthia, personal communication).

Many VHS teachers made the decision to transfer to Victory to be a part of something new, exciting and revolutionary; a decision to transfer to VHS was also a

decision to not participate in the established environments of the two other schools, as David shared:

The biggest one that attracted me at first was the new high school. I think not so much from a physical building, but I thought of trying to integrate into either (Elizabeth Bergman) or (Roseman) and being concerned about whether you would be considered a full faculty member. Would you come in with all the rights and privileges and such as the people that had been there for years before you? That was a big part of it. Plus, it was also you know thought of trying to build a faculty, a community from scratch was intriguing (David, personal communication).

**Resources.** An inequity teachers cited during interviews and focus groups was the fact that only core department chairs (Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and English/Language Arts) were selected and named a year before VHS opened. The Athletic Director and Fine Arts coordinator were also named and hired a year before VHS began. Non-core department chairs (Practical Arts and World Languages) were not selected or named until a month before the opening of Victory High School. This created inequity within the departments of Victory, since they did not have as much time to prepare curriculum, instruction or assessment. Some World Language teachers were not hired until days before the doors of Victory opened. The Industrial Technology teacher, Tony, mentioned that VHS was also without a Performing Arts Center director. All the prop planning for the school musicals and plays fell on him. He and the theatre director worked until the wee hours of the morning every day for a month before each production because he did not have the support he needed. Tony cited this inequity that still exists between VHS, EBHS and RHS. A Performing Arts Center coordinator had still not been

hired in the 2014-2015 school year, nor was he certain there was money in the VHS budget for their salary (Tony, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

There was also a question of whether Victory has the same instructional and curricular budgets that RHS and EBHS had. This lack of resources was a source of stress for VHS teachers during and after the Secondary School Reorganization of Midwest Public Schools, as Shelly mentioned:

Because that was the focus I think, was on Core. And that was what, when I kept asking (Jennifer) about that was like, well we haven't been given approval yet. It was all the Core. So she couldn't name one, so we couldn't hold interviews. And they were holding interviews like, three weeks or something before school started? It was the very end of July were interviews for that. And so, some people were on vacation, and we didn't know about the interviews until four days before it happened.

So, I just, that was very frustrating to not have somebody to go to, we didn't know who our colleagues were, who to ask for, how are we going to do this, how ... We have a language lab but we didn't know information about that, we don't have a resource room but we didn't know any information about that. A frustrating thing for us being an elective was that I felt like everybody had a department chair except for electives for a long time. Like almost a year. So (Caroline) could have started with her teachers and stuff, and they could start building early. And I felt like they all knew what they were going to teach way before we did and it was like, "When are we even going to get a department chair?" (Shelly, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

Many elective teachers felt slighted when they realized the concentration and emphasis of VHS was on the core curriculum and not on elective areas. World Language, Practical Arts, and Fine Arts teachers interviewed cited this as a negative consideration for opening a new school in the MPS district. Not only did their budgets not match their contemporaries' funding in the two other high schools, but institutional issues, like interviewing department chairs, learning about curricular technology, and hiring support staff were neglected by MPS administrators, which concerned Miles and Emma:

Even in budgets, I'm looking from up here. I'm not going to complain. I have a great budget to do what I need to do. It's never going to be enough, but when I compare what I have compared to the other two programs that I'm compared to in this district and I'm charged with providing the same experience as those other two schools, yeah, they don't provide me with the same monetary amounts to provide those. Then it's to me, I'm starting to feel like I'm hung out to dry, but it's hard for me to complain because I look at other situations in other departments regarding their budgets and I know that I'm not one that should complain. It's very, very hard to approach that, but to me it's the equitability. It is probably what still needs to be addressed in order to make this reorganization work (Miles, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

I think it's been successful. I think it's really coming together. I do feel like the teachers, just from my point of view, have a lot of responsibilities put on them from year one right off the bat. Maybe even more so at (Victory) because it's a new school, so the expectations were pretty high. I was like oh my gosh I don't know how you all do it here with all this stuff. There's just more and more, because I think we're being held at a different standard in some way because people were looking at this transition and everything. I feel like even this year the community has been built more. I think we're getting to know each other more and I think we're going to run into a different set of things because now that this has kind of gone away we're going to deal with more issues. But I'm feeling like I really get to know the teachers and I feel like we have support when needed. I definitely feel like it's there (Emma, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

Secondary School Reorganization/meetings/high school transition committee was also cited as a stressor for some, especially when it came to the topic of resources. Jean, a member of the third focus group, said that she was excited to be on a transition committee. The former superintendent of MPS opened these committees with a “pie in the sky” philosophy regarding funds – “ask for whatever you want and we will see what we can do”. In reality, there was a very set and strict budget. Jean said the committee should have known about MPS’ limited resources up front, and not even considered any pie in the sky ideas.

This is money. We don't have money for X number of teachers, so let's find the best way to do it within the actual budget that we have. I think those of us that



were on those committees that felt like we were creating something that we didn't really believe in ... What's the actual numbers and the time and all of that kind of stuff. I think also the committees were so separate that they were each creating their own ideal world. Then when you tried to mesh them it was impossible; it wasn't going to happen (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

Some teachers involved in this research were department chairs at Victory High School. They mentioned the stress of being in their “old” buildings for a full year before the transition to VHS. While the one year out meetings were taking place, they were on leadership teams at both schools. Department chairs who were doing that job at both their old and new schools reported stress at dealing with each job at the same time, like they had a leg in two boats, each of them going a separate way, as David shared:

Some of the things I think that would have been helpful is to release the people of our current responsibility. I know from a department chair standpoint, a lot of us were currently department chairs or currently engaged in our school. Then it became, for a year, we were doing double. I was still involved with doing all the decisions at my previous school in addition to my future school, which is problematic because there were a lot of decisions, like when I was at (East), there were decisions I was making .... There were decisions that we were in charge of making that pertained to (East) Middle School.

It was really, I remember, it was frustrating for all of us because almost every single one of us in the room were making decisions about (East) Middle, and none of us were going to be at (East) Middle. It was frustrating why we couldn't start picking those people and putting that leadership in place for the old buildings just like they did for (Victory).

I think two of the things I already mentioned were, One: for anybody was signed in from a leadership standpoint, to release them from their duties to their old building. Just like they announced principals, some of the department chairs and that kind of stuff, it would have been nice if they did that same kind of thing for the, I guess, (Roseman) and (Elizabeth Bergman) High School and the six middle schools, if they would have announced those and put those leadership teams in place at the time. (David, personal communication).

While Victory High Teachers were excited about the opportunity to inaugurate a new high school, the anxiety and stress of being held accountable and responsible for their previous schools was taxing and unappreciated.

**Teacher perception regarding super sub groups.** Victory High School is in the northeast side of Halpin, MO. The north east side of Halpin is less affluent than the south side of Halpin (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Victory High School is a shiny, new building with iPads; some teachers believe the Halpin community think that is too generous for the less affluent side of town (personal communication, February 10, 2012). There are also feelings of jealousy from RHS and EBHS. The resentment comes from the north side kids having a glamorous building and individual technology. RHS is 88 years old (with some recent renovations) and EBHS is 41 years old (Midwest Public Schools Intermediate Steering Committee, 2011). Teachers cited this Halpin community conflict as something they are very aware of when asked about their perception regarding Secondary School Reorganization in the Midwest District.

When a school district restructures, it must concentrate on maintaining or creating equity in the student population's socio-economic status, minority enrollment (African American and Hispanic), English Language Learners and Special Education pupils, which comprise the five members of the "super sub-group"(Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014). Midwest Public Schools revamped secondary enrollment lines, and dramatically changed the super sub-group numbers associated with each high school and middle school. The committee did not find a way to

make these numbers, especially SES, equitable through the high schools and middle schools (personal communication August 13, 2013).

Parents, students, stakeholders and Halpin citizens were divided on where to build VHS, and the selected site changed a number of times (Hull, 2012). The boundary committee then sought propositions which included demographic equity in boundary decisions (Martin, 2011). All boundary solutions included the problem of northeast schools in Halpin having higher free and reduced lunch numbers than other MPS schools (Martin, 2011). This was because the concentration of lower socio-economic status was geographically closer to the site of Victory High School (Martin, 2011). Mark told us this story to express his dissatisfaction with the SES inequity at Victory:

I painted a lot too and did construction (last summer) and one of the guys that I work with who I'm really good friends with now. We hang out. He is a father of a senior year African American low socio-economic status and he explained and shared with me some of the perception that the community - as far as boundary shifting has been very negative and I don't think that that is limited to the community that he's in. I think that that perception from comments that I have heard that are offensive about our student population I think that that's a community impression. And that's anecdotal, just the one guy and my experiences but that is frustrating for me and I don't know transparency about why the border shifted the boundaries I mean what they could have done differently to fix that but it's really a negative and it's a stigma (Mark, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

Logan agreed:

And it's been like that for a long time that the north side of town is the bad side of town and I think stepped into that. I think (Huff) has dealt with that for years and years regardless of that (Huff) is a really nice place to be (Logan, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

Teachers and families were promised equity at Victory High School, but Focus Group Two teachers' perception is that that promise was broken. Caroline, in Focus

Group Two, said Midwest Public Schools did not deliver on that promise, and VHS has the highest SES numbers at 61% (personal communication, August 11, 2014) of all three comprehensive high schools. Teachers in Focus Group Two said they were aware of students' perceptions of this disparity, and even went so far as to infer that the students thought MPS put all the poor kids and the minority kids together in Victory school to get rid of them (Angie, Focus Group 1, personal communication). Angie, a Special Education teacher, shared:

I think the advice or something that I would have changed is that it was already before (Victory) was even built ... well, after it was built. I guess, there was already a ... like it already had a perceived reputation and I think that it should have been important for leaders to maybe to address that with the community. I mean I remember talking to kids from middle school that were like, "Oh, we don't want to go to (Victory). It has all the gangs out there..."

It's the ghetto school. Before it was even ... before we even had students, it already had this ... this perception. I remember last year in one of our English classes, we were talking about the perceptions of the different high schools and I remember the kids ... the kids were saying, they were like, "Everyone thinks that we're the ghetto school and the (Bergman) kids don't think we deserve these iPads." It was all these different things that they had already heard... (Angie, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

Having a high rate of low SES students usually means those students don't come to school having taken private music lessons, or don't have access to funds to attend sports camps or extracurricular activities in the summer which can boost their learning and skill. Miles, the VHS band teacher, talked about this:

In my world, I think it's the reorganizations, doing some work everywhere, but I think primarily in my world it's at the middle schools. I think the equitability issue to me is huge. When students at other schools in other clusters are at an advantage just because of where they live and really their socioeconomic background, just from the families they come from, there needs to be more resources put in place, and there needs to be more policies put in place in order to help that become more equitable (Miles, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

Teachers, like David, who formerly taught at more affluent schools also noticed a difference:

Then, some of the issues, too is just the structure of our school, the student body of our school, I guess. Coming from (East) Junior, the population's significantly different than (Victory) High School. That's not so much unexpected. I sort of knew what I was getting into and I knew ... but it's just a lot different (David, personal communication).

Other teachers, like Willem, cited the draw of low SES in their quest to join

Victory High School:

I would say that that was a huge factor. I came from a high poverty area. I grew up in River High School in North St Louis. Understood the unique challenges that over 50% poverty kids were going to bring. Just to have a passion for those 'at risk' students. I feel very at home with them (Willem, personal communication).

**Supplies and moving.** Teachers who participated in interviews and focus groups who were department chairs mentioned the topic of inequity regarding moving and ordering supplies when asked about their Secondary School Reorganization perceptions. The former superintendent of Midwest Public Schools promised many groups that the district would move the big boxes of supplies (especially from Physics classrooms, with a large amount of materials, that were going to be housed in the high schools after the reorganization). Jean shared:

I was on the Superintendent's Advisory committee at that point, and you know Dr. (Davis), he talks and talks. He said "We're going to come in and pack up, and we're going to move things... (We)...would be sitting there at the time going "Oh, dear God." People got very mixed messages about how the logistics were all going to fall out (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

This was not the case and the load of moving these supplies, literally and figuratively, fell upon the same person: the Science department chair of Huff Junior High

School, who also happened to be the incoming Science department chair of Victory High School. Department chairs and teachers in the two established high schools did not share the brunt of this hardship. They did not have to deal with a huge incoming flow of supplies since they were already operating with a full tenth through twelfth grade Science labs. Their supplies for Physics were brought over by the current junior high teachers. The VHS Department Chair had to start from scratch, as well as figure out how to move all the Physics supplies from Huff to Victory.

The band teacher, Miles, related a story of how he was responsible for ordering all the instruments and all the marching band uniforms, two big-ticket items that cost many thousands of dollars. Not knowing how many students were going to be involved in band left him confused about how much, and what, to order. The issue of supplies became less important for other department chairs because of the 1:1 technology initiative. They did not have to buy textbooks or manipulatives for classrooms since so many of those were offered online. Cynthia, the Science department chair of both Huff and Victory, cited moving and supplies as a stressor during the Secondary School Reorganization of Victory High School:

It's hard to prepare for this. It's very difficult to prepare because professionally it's like no other ... transition I've ever gone through because there is no existing culture. There were no supplies in the school...I think in preparation for the Science Department, me coming in as the Science Department Chair from a junior high into a high school building where we have a whole lot more courses than we did in junior high, our district coordinator purchased supplies. We were given no time to really, really look at what those supplies were. I was lucky to get one day to get teachers to come over here and put supplies away. The equipment issues alone, they needed a team of people to really do some extensive planning to not only purchase and put away and inventory all of the things that are in this building.

...we have probably 400 beakers cramped in a classroom right now, and it's because it was ordered. We didn't have the space. We didn't have the manpower. We were just shoving them places, because we were given one day to shove everything everywhere. In our physics department, we at least were taking the things from (Huff).

And we, on our own time moved all of that ourselves. That was very frustrating that all of that was put on us. Now, could the district services people have done it? Yes. As long as it was in this size box and went to a place, and then who knows where it ended up. So, I think the whole equipment issue was so poorly, poorly managed. I'm still dealing with it (Cynthia, personal communication).

Cynthia talked about the process of ordering supplies and what she expects to happen in the next few years:

Now, I do understand it's gonna take me five years to get all the equipment I need. I understand that. So, the first year, I'm still gonna talk about equipment, because that's a hot button for me.

So the first year, we purchased. I did not purchase, but was purchased ahead of time, the equipment. We were given no time, no labor, or anything, and really no expertise. I was put into a building where our chemicals, we had to basically start from scratch in organizing all those chemicals. Our cabinets weren't OSHA approved, so all our chemicals were in one room until I could get that done. I got some great people within our building two months after we opened who finally said, "We need to get this in a place that's safe." So, having someone with that expertise to come in and set that up in a safe, right way, that's safety is how I see it. There was some of that. If we're still going at year one, now we're at year two. We've got new classes, but no budget to then purchase supplies for those classes. I was not prepared for any of the equipment issue at all.

That year we opened, that summer, we were here every day. We were here every day. It wasn't because we were getting paid to do that, but we were here every day, because we knew we had to in order for our teachers to walk in and have anything where it's supposed to be...you don't walk in with a textbook and rock and roll from there. There's just more to it (Cynthia, personal communication).

This period between endings and beginnings is an opportune time for an organizational renaissance (Bridges, 2009, p. 9). Hazards in the neutral zone include an increase in anxiety, decreased motivation, and absenteeism. Employees can feel

overwhelmed with change while still trying to do the work for which they were hired, and mired in gossip about the many nuances of uncertainty that come from any transition (Bridges, 2009, p. 41). “Neutral zone management (is) the only way to ensure that the organization comes through the change intact and that the necessary changes actually work the way that they are supposed to” (Bridges, 2009, p. 42). Bridges asserts that managing this transitional period saves time because the change is moving through and forward (Bridges, 2009, p. 42).

The inequity between VHS and the other two high schools, coupled with the inequity between Science and other equipment-rich curricular strands, caused stress, anxiety and resentment for the Victory teachers who had to (and still have to) deal with it as part of their job description.

### **Technology and the Need for Professional Development**

When Victory High School opened in August, 2013, the school was technologically 1:1. That meant that every student was given an iPad, and textbooks were not purchased for the new building. The student to personal device ratio was one to one. Every teacher was given an iPad as well as an Apple MacBook (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Midwest Public Schools had already been experimenting with iPads, and most classrooms had SMARTBoards, but this was the first time each student had a personal learning device entirely their own. The other two high schools’ Honors and AP students were also given iPads, but not every student in the other schools had one unless they were enrolled in an advanced class.



Teachers from interviews and focus groups reported stress in relation to iPads. Many of them had only had their teacher iPads for a few years before their students received theirs, and most educators came from classrooms that did not have a full set. This meant they were not used to all the applications and programs their students were using, and certainly were not accustomed to teaching a classroom full of students with devices.

In the interview and focus group process, many teachers related they did not have enough professional development in relation to technology. They said there were too many items on the PD list: iPads, MacBook laptops, SMARTBoards, wireless connections, Google Drive, class websites, AVID, AP and ACT prep were among the different topics of stress for teachers at Victory High School (personal communication, February 10, 2012). AVID stands for “Advancement Via Individual Determination” and is a program in Midwest Public Schools. AVID is worldwide, but MPS adopted the program in 2013, two months before Victory High School opened (personal communication, January 15, 2013). Shelly shared her frustrations:

I'm like, you know, like meetings. [laughter] Oh! Like meetings. Yeah, but I feel like last year everything was new. We had iPads. We had iPads and that's the big thing I could think of, but we were teaching new things at the same time. Honestly, I just felt like I was doing good to show up every day and try to use the iPad, try to use the laptop, and an Apple, and SMARTBoards, and wireless, and that was to bring our own device here. It was just like, "Oh!" I was doing good to do Google Drive or website.

Then this year I think it still continues. There's still a lot of new. They're really pushing AVID and they're really pushing more technology, show that you're doing these awesome things. We're trying to get more AP. We're trying to do ACT prep. There is so many things as a second yearer that are brand new with all these new people and with new people that don't know what we learned last year, I just feel like continued professional development ...forgot the word.

I still need to learn more about AVID. I still need to learn how to better use iPads. I still need to learn how to do better about our little website thing. I just think that we're being asked to do a lot of things and to show that we're really good at them. I feel like I'm just smiling and I'm doing the best I can, but I also need to be trained and collaborate with everybody else, but it's very difficult to collaborate when we're so technology focused and nobody else in the district is (Shelly, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

Shelly, along with other teachers, believed that there was a vast amount of new things to learn at Victory High School. Other teachers cited overwhelming emotions when it came to “one more new thing”, which was brought on by so much newness and the technological expectations put upon teachers. Cynthia agreed, stating that:

So in regard to technology...there was a committee that was put together that made decisions. I was a part of that committee... I think there was a small group of people who said, 'this is the way it's going to be,' but then there were no foundation for the logistics of it. So again, we have this vision, but we don't know how we can support to get to that vision... We're still dealing with that now, is that we say, 'yeah, we can do this,' but we don't have what we need, and it's October 21st when we should have what we need, but we don't. So once again, they want us to use the technology, but they have not provided some of the structures in place to accomplish it.

And then also, funding for some of it. We, in Science, fund our apps. We value that, and we say, 'well, it's gonna come from our Science department budget.' That's great and that's fine, but year one, our Science department budget couldn't buy an entire school's worth of these things. Again, it comes down to technology equipment issues (Cynthia, personal communication).

Some teachers were used to the paperless aspect of 1:1 and appreciated the ease with which they were able to adapt to the new availability and uses of technology, like Willem:

I'm very fortunate in that, I've had a paperless classroom since 2005. I was very immersed in applicational technology in the classroom but I feel like that was a huge factor for many of our staff. I feel like they felt kind of overwhelmed by the multitude of options and choices. There were plenty of training opportunities for this and that app. but I think teaching systemically how to apply one-to-one would have been a very good addition (Willem, personal communication).

Teachers interviewed also cited lack of professional development in areas like block scheduling (80-90 minute classes instead of the 50 minute classes to which most teachers and students were accustomed) and teaching ninth graders in a nine through twelve grade building instead of ninth graders in an eighth and ninth grade building.

Trevor talked about his reflection regarding time:

I think in my case, I've been reflecting on this a little bit, one of the struggles came from the transition from daily classes to block scheduling. In one way it was very nice to travel with my students and teach them for multiple years, although on a curricular level, I went from teaching a half pace class to full pace in every other day format. Not only was I going from a class that was a year of curriculum taught over two years, but from an everyday class to block scheduling, which means every other day (Trevor, personal communication).

Most of the teachers who opened Victory High School were former teachers of freshman, for a variety of reasons. Many of them were employed at Huff Junior High, where the new principal of Victory High School, Dr. Jennifer Rudy, spent many years of her career. Dr. Rudy left Huff Junior High School (HJHS) to open Victory High School, and her assistant principal became the principal of Huff. These teachers were familiar with a 50 minute class, as well as teaching ninth graders. The developmental difference between ninth graders and high school seniors was noted as a stressor for teachers, as mentioned by Trevor and David:

Biggest personal transition. I think one of the things that I noticed most as I was teaching was the broad sweep of developmental differences between a freshman and a senior in high school. I guess last year would have been juniors were the oldest, but working in a building that covered two years previously, the students seemed more or less similar to each other, and now seeing the difference even in one day between a senior and a freshman, and in some of my classes a senior and a freshman in the same room, there's just a huge difference. Knowing how I can respond and serve students despite all of those different developmental changes in

... What's the word I'm looking for? The dynamics of their maturity (Trevor, personal communication).

I think dealing with older students. I'm coming from a junior high setup and dealing with older students was a bit of a change. Not as bad as I thought, honestly. It was a lot more seamless (David, personal communication).

Bridges mentions that employees' anxiety might diminish when they enter into the beginning stage of shifting culture and the infrastructure in an institution. "Like any organic process, beginnings cannot be made to happen by a word or act" (Bridges, 2009, p. 59); the organization has to be transparent and intentional to make the most of the power of the transition. "Only when you get into people's shoes and feel what they are feeling can you help them to manage their transition" (Bridges, 2009, p. 59).

Administrators and teacher leaders must provide the groundwork for learning and set the stage for developing a strong teacher education program; professional development "provides the nourishment" for change (Bridges, 2009, p. 60). Leaders can explain the point, the portrait, the proposal and their part in the change (Bridges, 2009, p. 60), but they must lay the foundation of learning for those grand plans to find continued success.

Teachers interviewed said lack of professional development was a stressor in the Secondary School Reorganization of Midwest Public Schools, as discussed by Hugh and Logan:

I think one thing they could have done is, that since so many teachers came here from a junior high setting, they could have maybe done I don't know, some PD, something to help teachers transition from that middle school or that junior high setting to, like, what is a high school (Hugh, personal communication).

We quickly found out that they might be big but we kind of need to do some more structure. Especially those of us that taught ninth grade, these kids still need a ton of help and guidance and parameters on what they can do. And I think we all did a

really great job of reflecting and maybe intentionally or not and saying, "These are going to be my expectations from the get-go next year," and I think that - I think everybody kind of did that (Logan, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

The issue of discipline also came up in interviews and focus groups. Teachers came to Victory from many different buildings, with completely different systems of discipline, and needed further education and professional development to create and maintain a succinct response to misbehavior. Getting together behind one system was a challenge. While Victory staff engaged in community and culture building a year before Victory opened, there was not a foundation of a systematic student behavior management system like BIST (Behavior Intervention Support Teaming) and PBS (Positive Behavior Support) at Victory High School, which Hugh and Lorraine mentioned:

The high school teachers that came from a high school and are now here, their perception of what discipline looks like, and how you interact with kids is completely different than at the junior high level. You have PBS, BIST, I mean, you have all these other things happening there and then you're coming here and those are gone. You know, hey, at junior high, the kid was misbehaving, I would have put him in the safe seat, or I would have sent him to a buddy room. Now, in high school, none of those structures are in place with like, BIST per se. Would you send a kid in the hallway, do you refer them? (Hugh, personal communication).

You're looking at dress code and inappropriate behavior, being out in the hallways and then supervision and all that stuff. Then, you're like, "No, they're in high school. They should be able to do it." Then I found myself not doing it and then all of a sudden, it's like, "Why aren't you doing what you're supposed to be doing? They're getting by with too much stuff. I'm like, "Well, what is the rule? Just tell me what the rules are (Lorraine, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

Professional development is key to connect teachers to a consistent and

manageable student behavior system. If teachers perceive the hallways to be safe and off-task or even dangerous behavior to be curtailed, they might be more likely to feel more secure in their working environment.

### **Emotions of Transition and the Effect on Personal Life**

Along with collegial and community building, many participants related the stress involved in choosing a new school and opening a new building and how that stress affected their emotions and personal life. Margaret relayed that she thought she suffered a slight depression a year or so before moving to VHS, because the change was so stressful in her personal life. Her former colleagues had helped her through marriage, child birth and professional milestones, and now they were no longer with her every day to give support. Teachers who had not studied change were sometimes overwhelmed by the resolve needed to head to a new school and take on different challenges. Emotions and personal life affected teacher perception in Midwest Public Schools.

In order to begin something fresh, we must put an end to something most people have cherished (Bridges, 2009). Teachers in Secondary School Reorganization might have been willing to accept the new and try to forget the old, but there was still a forfeiture of their past. “Transition...is psychological; it is a three-phase process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about” (Bridges, 2009, p. 3). Leaders must prioritize the human side of transitions as key to successful changes; “because transition is a process by which people unplug from an old world and plug into a new world, we can say that transition starts with an ending and finishes with a beginning” (Bridges, 2009, p. 5).

Teachers reported stress, anxiety and even depression when they reflected on their experience with Secondary School Reorganization in Midwest Public Schools, as

Margaret shared:

That would have been spring of 2013, spring of 2012. I think through that year. I think I was actually suffering from mild depression about the anxiety of and excitement of new coupled with I'm leaving this, this is what I know, this is where I've been. I didn't realize until the first month here that it affected me so greatly. I immediately, it's like when you have surgery on a part that has been hurting for a long time, even though you got the scars still, it feels you're so much better already.

Also the fact that it was conducted so far in advance. The timeline itself I kind of get lost in that, but I had my therapy with my current principal like a year and a half before I started working here. My life changed a lot in that year and a half. I felt like there were things that were important to me when I had that interview, or that conversation, that had changed over that year and a half. This is still the place I wanted to be and this is still ... The fact that it happens ... is almost comical. We knew three years out that communication started coming. It really gave me plenty of time to mentally deal with all of the difficult decisions that had to be made. The emotional aspect of those decisions. Consider what was most important for me and for my family. Again my family had changed significantly during that period of time. It gave me lots of time to think about that. It was the biggest professional decision I've ever made. I needed that time (Margaret, personal communication).

One of the biggest changes, along with opening a new comprehensive high school, was that the school start times changed district-wide at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. Some teachers wanted to be at a high school but were unaware the district would alter start times to align with the opening of VHS and the six newly conformed middle schools. Bus problems led to this change. MPS created a tiered bus schedule that allowed for more flexibility while also keeping elementary, middle and high school kids on grade-exclusive busses. Middle Schools now began at 7:30 am, elementary schools between 8:00 am and 9:00 am, and high schools at 9:30 am (Midwest

Public Schools, 2012). Instead of starting at 8am, VHS teachers would now have to be at school by 9am and couldn't leave until 4:15pm (personal communication, January 15, 2013). Many teachers cited this as a source of stress for them. This was perceived as a big change, and teachers had to adjust schedules related to their family life because of it.

Child care issues were also brought up as a major stressor for teachers. Because all high schools now began classes at 9:30, they dismissed at 4:05. If a teacher was a coach or a club sponsor, sometimes they would not be home until 8:00 or 9:00 pm. The teachers who had young children at home related the fact they rarely got to see their kids as they returned home from practice after their children had gone to bed. Interviewees and focus group participants felt the district made this decision too late, after all personnel were chosen for VHS and the new middle schools. This was a stressor for teachers, and mentioned specifically by David:

Honestly, the start time was probably the biggest one, nine to four, just because that affects so much of the rest of my life (David, personal communication).

Fullan (1997a) adds to the concept of transition and change by writing that we cannot "assume that the system must get its act together before people can do their jobs" (p. 19). Did MPS do everything it could to protect its employees from the difficulty of transition? Did district leaders consider that "we may assume that the more the transition alters the individual's life, the more coping resources it requires, and the longer it will take for assimilation of adaptation" (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 33)? In other words, how did MPS administrators support teachers in this adjustment and still do what was best for students? Hugh shared:



I guess is just the time difference. With all the research and the years that they fought to get the start time pushed back to 8:55 or 9 o'clock, school doesn't let out until 4:05pm. Practices don't start until 4:30, you're not leaving (Victory) until almost 7 o'clock at night on a busy time. Last year, having a 1-year old, I'm getting home, she's already asleep, so you miss a lot of that family time with just getting home so late from practice or from games. I think part too, is so many kids get out early now for a home sporting event, like the softball team getting out early, and so you miss ... Sometimes, I feel guilty missing so much of school for, like sporting events, or things that I'm doing that I'm leaving early. I kind of feel, sometimes, like my 4th block gets hosed or something because I'm having to leave to do part of my duties, but that would have been an issue had we gotten out at 3 o'clock (Hugh, personal communication).

### **Application to Practice**

The interviewees and focus group members were asked what they thought would be good advice for a school district attempting a Secondary School Reorganization on the scale of the transition Midwest Public Schools took on. The two big themes that came out were: helping teachers make a decision about if they wanted to transfer and where they wanted to transfer to, communication, capitalizing on the hype, flexibility, and a focus on reality.

**Help people make a decision.** Teachers had advice for other educators going through a school restructuring process: get help with interviews, or conversations, with potential building administrators in schools you are interested in. They suggested making a list of the pros and cons of each building, and have conversations with colleagues in an open arena of communication, as discussed by Margaret:

I hadn't interviewed for a job in eleven years. I had never envisioned myself interviewing for another job. I envisioned myself retiring from (Washington) Junior and being totally happy with that for the first 10 years of teaching. It wasn't until they said that we're going to do this that I was like, "Oh, got to come up with a new plan."

That was a very difficult shift for me to try to come up with in my mind. I need to market myself. I need to put a shiny bow on this. How can I explain to another principal why I think I'm good at what I do? I feel like I never had to do that. I think that was a stressful piece for me, and it was stressful for others. I'd say that that part was ... Again, my perceptions were that it was stressful, about having to market. How do you do this? Some people might have needed a little more coaching through that. Hey, you haven't interviewed for a job in 15 years. We can do some workshop kind of stuff almost. Here's how you phrase that. Some people are not comfortable talking to people they don't know, and I will talk to you for hours if I don't know you (Margaret, personal communication).

Angie, a teacher in Focus Group 1, said that she really should have made a pro and con chart for each school, something that could be referenced and reflected upon.

I would say on a ... maybe on a personal level, the advice I would give is definitely making a pros and cons chart about your decision as far as whether you should move or not (Angie, Focus Group 1, personal communication).

Other teachers mentioned a forum with a panel of principals who could share information about each school, almost like a candidate forum, would be helpful. Since principals were encouraged to provide all candidates with a conversation rather than an interview, this plan might not have been supported by the district. Shelly said:

Something that could've helped would be like knowing about a school or if there was some forum that each principal could get up and say, "This is what we believe in. This is our school culture." (Shelly, Focus Group 2, personal communication).

Some teachers interviewed mentioned a district initiative to get a clear picture of the culture and vibe of each building out to the staff to help them make a sound decision about schools. Jean stated:

Yeah. On that same note, I think how you get balance, I didn't really get a sense of me being able to find out. It didn't really occur to me that I should really take a close look at all of the buildings. I don't really know how you do that, but when I finally made my decision to come to (Victory), which was right before the school year started, it was because of people talking about what was going to happen

here. I really got a sense of that, because I know people very well who were coming here. They started talking about the philosophy and the mission of this building. That was what sold me that this is a better fit for me.

I don't know what the best method is for that, but I think that you need to push that a little bit more to get people out and really look at the different personalities and goals of buildings, to say, where do I feel like I would fit, and is it safe for me to take a risk? I think people were very fearful of getting someplace and then not liking it and being stuck there (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

**Communication.** Communication and transparency were other clear areas teachers recommended refining. The communication between principals and teachers, as well as the messages that came from the Neal Board Office, needed to be improved to send a crystal clear statement about transition information. Joseph and Logan focused on this specifically:

Yeah. I would reemphasize, or reiterate, that transparency issue. I think that's, I know this isn't really quite the forum, but it's an endemic thing. We do so much protecting of information, that it complicates processes unnecessarily, and I think that was really evident during the transition, both from public reaction and from teacher grumbling (Joseph, personal communication).

I think a lot of time, because you will give people chances to buy into what they're doing and communicate as much as you possibility can (Logan, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

**Flexibility.** Teachers mentioned flexibility while discussing the leadership at VHS, but also recommended other districts take advantage of a clean slate and embrace the problems that are sure to come. Jean's recommendation regarding flexibility was:

My advice would be to expect things not to work and plan to be flexible. Have a flexibility plan. Expect things to fail or mess up or something bad to happen and just have a reaction plan so that this is how we deal with things when they don't work it is (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

Victory High School teachers reflected over the difference between their first and second years, and realized that a lot of the flexibility they had to exhibit, and have patience with, had paid off in fixing problems and creating continuity of instruction and culture the next year. Mark mentioned:

(We) were talking and we were saying, "It feels as though there's not a lot of communication all the time." And I was like, "We don't need it. Cause things are going OK. We're not having to fix things constantly. And it's just smooth" (Mark, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

If institutions are flexible and able to be open to constant change and upheaval, to further the cause or continue the transition to student success, then VHS teachers believe circumstances do improve and things will get better. Logan and Jean shared how this aided their transition:

I was just going to say, keep confidence that it does get better (Logan, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

It does, yeah. That's what people need to know. And the first year will be chaotic. I mean, it can't I don't think be anything but. When you have a whole new faculty coming together in all of the buildings. Even buildings that didn't change much (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

If you presume it's going to go over without a hitch, then you're insane (Logan, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

**Transparency and realistic expectations.** For those teachers who were involved in the planning, there was still a fair bit of resentment towards the district for leading them down a road of "the possibilities are endless", when, in fact, there were clear budgetary restrictions that dictated FTE, moving expenses, and professional development budgets. Jean reminded leaders about focusing on reality:

And that leads me to have committees do all that but give them the real parameters - pie in the sky is only good for about five minutes. People feel like their voice was just a token voice like we set up this committee just so you could feel like you were heard but we weren't planning to do it that way anyway and I know some people felt that way I tended to be optimistic and say, "They didn't apply the realities first." But you got to get people that stuff you got to say we got a budget for this many faculty with the best possible way to configure it we have money for this kind of moving people like those logistics because I think there was all the way to the extreme in moving from, "You're going to have to pack and move everything yourself," to, "We will come in and pack your classroom and deliver it to you with a bow" (Jean, Focus Group 3, personal communication).

School districts involved in a major reorganization would do well to keep reality at the center of their focus and consideration. Teachers at Victory High School remembered the promises that were not kept about budgets, moving assistance, and the number of teachers that could be hired. When those assurances did not materialize, or were contradicted, they reacted with recalcitrance and bitterness. When promises are not kept it makes stakeholders question what other pledges of support will go by the wayside and be forgotten.

## **Chapter 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine teacher perceptions regarding Secondary School Reorganization and transition in Midwest Public Schools. This Secondary School Reorganization and restructuring is specifically important to MPS' change from a middle/junior high school model to a true middle school system and full-grade comprehensive high schools. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) remind us that people will experience different elements of transition in regards to how much it affects their lives (p. 18). Midwest Public Schools anticipated problems and created solutions to support teachers in the 2013-2014 transition. Teachers were guided by district staff in the ways they could honor their old schools and systems but also be equally supported in the new ones. Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman's Transition Theory (1995) teaches us that it isn't the actual transition that creates emotions, but the rate and expectation level behind it. This transition was expected. MPS administrators thought of many ways transitions affected the adults who work in the school buildings.

The emphasis Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) places on life events and change in adult work lives is what makes it pertinent to be the Conceptual Framework guiding this study. Transition Theory reminds us to anticipate the process adults go through in a reorganization: approaching changes, taking stock of coping resources, like self, situation, support, strategies, and also strengthening resources (Schlossberg et al., 1995). This transition framework allows researchers to anticipate expected and unexpected events (Schlossberg et al., 1995). While MPS tried to account for every

conceivable result of change, Neal Board Office administrators could not conceivably anticipate every possibility of transition. Institutions struggle to acknowledge that “transitions often involve significant life events that require coping with what is perceived to be a crisis situation” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 23).

Perception affects working adults going through a transition. In Schlossberg’s (1995) developmental framework, these transitions are seen as taking place in phases, with each phase having a relationship with the former and following one, which creates mindset variation and positive modification. This framework also considers the impact of a transition on an individual. “For an individual undergoing a transition, it is not the event or non-event that is most important but its impact, that is, the degree to which the transition alters one’s daily life” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 37). This is crucial to understand when implementing Transition Theory.

The study of the MPS transition was viewed through a context defined by Schlossberg’s Transition Framework (1995). This is the most appropriate framework from which to study this reorganization because of its focus on adult transitions, especially those adults who are transitioning into new work arenas. Other factors to take into account, and amalgamate with this transition framework, include organizational culture, research on change and transitions, specifically exploration on adult work transitions, school reform, school reorganization, student transition, system change theory, and organizational policy analysis.

School leaders are best served starting transitions by paying attention to the ending of whatever is going to be replaced by something new (Bridges, 2009). Bridges

suggests that letting go of the past is just as important as understanding what happens next. It is uncomfortable to be in limbo between the end and the beginning but it is necessary to go through this process to come out the other side with a new sense of distinct character (Bridges, 2009). There is a time between transitional endings and beginnings, which can be confusing. The neutral zone is the period between endings and beginnings; if leaders don't acknowledge the importance of the neutral zone, the tendency is to rush past or totally ignore it (Bridges, 2009). People don't often truly understand the limbo experience they encounter between an ending and a beginning.

The last stage of transitional management is the beginning. Beginnings are a mental state, initiated by excitement and vigor (Bridges, 2009). If an organization can make it through the endings, the neutral zone, then they have amassed a stockpile of good will that will carry them through the transition and support them in a new beginning, be it a new building, structure or philosophy.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the MPS transition by examining faculty perceptions of the change process utilized in MPS throughout the transition. Within the context of this study, the following research question was addressed: What are the perceptions and expectations of teachers in a Secondary School Reorganization? These findings, and their relationship to the applicable literature, as well as inferences about this study overall and its implications for future research and practice, will now be discussed.

While the Secondary School Reconfiguration of Midwest Public Schools was not district-wide, it still qualifies as fundamental change. The entire school district was



impacted, even elementary schools, because this transition affected where elementary students would go for middle school, what teachers would move from fifth to sixth grade, and when buses would pick up based on changed start times (Midwest Public Schools, 2012).

There are some things in my study I would have done differently if I had to complete a research study again on this topic. I would start from the beginning of the transition and look at how this Secondary School Reorganization policy was created. Completing a policy analysis on the structure and foundation of the Secondary School Reorganization would be a fascinating study, and I would concentrate on the main actors involved in this reorganization, the ways the public and teachers were introduced to it for the first time, and how the rationale for a Secondary School Reorganization was introduced to stakeholders of Midwest Public Schools. A focus on policy implementation and the major school district players and their perceptions would make an interesting study.

### **Approaching Transitions – Endings**

Business and school administrators are advised to start change with an ending (Bridges, 2009). Letting go is the first step of transition, but it must be accompanied by understanding what happens next. Transition experts have many pieces of advice for those leaders embarking on a transition – the change will be uncomfortable for most, but meeting as a team, thinking about physical and mental space in the new entity, as well as considering the need for new employees, are crucial items to discuss for a successful end (Bridges, 2009).

Leaders are encouraged to be honest about change and the chaos that comes from it, and the effect of that change on some members of an organization (Bridges, 2009). Leaders also teach themselves about what transition means to the stakeholders in an institution (Bridges, 2009). Especially in a school setting, where teachers' lives are intertwined with one another, transition through an ending is essential. The conclusion of a previous structure, culture, or way of doing things (like having only two comprehensive high schools), is a mourning period for those who have worked under the old system. Leaders need to identify what is ending and who is losing something with that end (Bridges, 2009).

Compassion and understanding can override hurt feelings when those in charge are able to communicate and share information regarding loss and change. People recuperate more quickly from grief if they can actually talk open and honestly about the loss (Bridges, 2009). Administrators also need to realize that a token of appreciation or trust will go a long way (Bridges, 2009).

Misunderstandings and confusion accompany any change (Bridges, 2009). One of the ways leaders can help is detailing what the institution is leaving behind and what will continue, be it tradition, infrastructure, or policy (Bridges, 2009). Employees sometimes utilize the old ways of doing things, as well as the new protocols of their new job together, and don't discriminate between them, picking and choosing what they want to keep and what they want to get rid of (Bridges, 2009). This can lead to inconsistency, confusion, and lack of a clear workplace objective (Bridges, 2009).

Leaders fuse the opposition against a transitional shift by criticizing the past (Bridges, 2009). If employees feel it is safe to remember the past with fondness and happiness, they might be more likely to celebrate the future, as endings are easier if people can honor and respect their past by being supported in its memory (Bridges, 2009). If teachers can take a little bit of their previous school or experience with them, they are more likely to celebrate the changes of their new environment and circumstance. “Whenever something that is viewed as a break with the past turns out successfully, people forget the loss they felt when the change happened and begin to celebrate it as a tradition. But the status quo is just an innovation brought about by a transition that people have forgotten” (Bridges, 2009, p. 36).

The biggest reason change fails in an organization is because the leaders forget about celebrating endings and leading their employees through the transition to a new beginning (Bridges, 2009). People are, by nature, able to make transitions but need support to make those changes permanent. Leaders sometimes forget that the first mission of transition is to get people to leave what they are comfortable with (Bridges, 2009).

If one thinks about the reverse of what is usual, that organizations should solve problems, not create problems, then one discovers a new layer of thinking about change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005/2011). Some change agents use the system of Appreciative Inquiry, which is defined as, “the cooperative, coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005/2011, p. 397). Using this system of thinking about change, we can compare the

sense of endings people have in relation to loss and grief, and turn those around to consider the positive aspects of transformation. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) supposes that each entity considered through its lens is a positive one, and that all institutions have positive, and perhaps hidden, treasures of positivity and optimism.

Another way to think of endings is in the context of the battle over resistance. Garvin and Roberto call this “Setting the Stage for Acceptance” (2005, p. 20). This consists of shaking up the system so that people realize that endings, or acceptance, are needed. Sometimes this strategy includes revealing truths about an organization which might be shocking: the purpose being to ward off any claims of obliviousness or ignorance employees might transfer to leaders to protect themselves from grief about the old system (Garvin & Roberto, 2005). This acceptance model is widely used and more widely accepted in industry or business models (Garvin & Roberto, 2005). It could come across as being a bit too harsh or sudden for those engaged in the business of supporting public schools.

One of the key factors that was largely overlooked by Midwest Public Schools was a systemic way to say “goodbye” to former staff members, as recommended by Bridges (2009). While many principals at former junior highs took this on themselves, the district did not send a clear message about the potential depression people might feel saying goodbye to colleagues and buildings. Teachers didn’t overtly mention this, however, in their interviews and focus groups. They talked about missing colleagues, traditions and a comfortable structure, but not one teacher I talked to requested a celebration (almost a funeral) for their former school culture as they knew it.

Interpretations for endings could be that teachers didn't know it was an option, or they didn't realize they needed it. MPS seemed to be so rushed in opening a third comprehensive high school that little thought was given to the grieving process of letting go of teachers' former buildings. There was an undercurrent of sadness or remorse from some teachers who mourned the loss of their previous buildings, but I wonder if they had time to see the benefit of going through that grieving process. Only one teacher, Margaret, mentioned her mild depression at leaving her school family, which lifted upon being fully engulfed in the excitement and prospect of opening Victory High School. Teachers were not encouraged to forget the past, but mentioned that the draw of talented colleagues and the opportunities they would have professionally helped them mourn the loss of their former building.

The issue of stress created by "The Draft" was another difficulty for MPS teachers. Their ending was symbolically represented by electronic surveys about where educators wanted to potentially spend the rest of their careers. If teachers knew with certainty where they wanted to be, this did not appear stressful. The teachers who struggled with this decision were caught in a quagmire of self-doubt and uncertainty, however, which made their transitions from ending their relationship with their old school to creating a new affiliation with another school even more acute.

Freshman teachers were caught in the middle during Secondary School Reorganization: they had to choose to stay in their building and get re-certified, or move to one of the two established high schools, or the new Victory High School. The perceived inequity they thought they would encounter at either Roseman or Elizabeth

Bergman High Schools was a deterrent to those who transferred to Victory. Teachers interviewed thought finding their space in a pre-existing school would be a challenge and they would be seen as lower class in either of the two established high schools. This created stress for those teachers and could have contributed to a more negative emotional ending to their junior high career.

### **Taking Stock – Neutral Zones**

There is a time between transitional endings and beginnings, which can be confusing if not handled in the right vein. The neutral zone is the period between endings and beginnings. If leaders don't acknowledge the importance of the neutral zone, the tendency is to rush past or totally ignore it, which does not work (Bridges, 2009). If we think of our own history of loss, perhaps the most significant and depressing time was that neutral zone, the period of uncertainty when loss was not tempered with resilience or hope.

Many employees are more anxious in the neutral zone than in the endings or beginnings phases (Bridges, 2009). Those who do not embrace the neutral zone and try to evade it will “not only compromise the change but also lose a great opportunity. The neutral zone is the individual's and the organization's best chance to be creative, to develop into what they need to become, and to renew themselves” (Bridges, 2009, p. 9).

This period between endings and beginnings is an opportune time for renewal or an organizational renaissance (Bridges, 2009). Management and care during the neutral zone is the most successful way of traveling through transition and ending up relatively unscathed on the other side (Bridges, 2009). Managing this transitional period saves time

because the change is moving through and forward (Bridges, 2009). Leaders optimize the neutral zone and ensure that employees think about their situation, self, support and strategies for approaching transitions (Goodman et al., 2006).

We are reminded as leaders that the neutral zone is a new place to create the environment of collegiality and shared experiences (Heifetz & Linksy, 2002). Leaders and managers can be seen as being in the same boat as employees, and that shared experience in the neutral zone can solidify that camaraderie (Heifetz & Linksy, 2002). The temptation is to coast through the middle cycle of transition, pretend that things aren't changing, or aren't changing as much as one might expect. Leaders are cautioned to make strides in the neutral zone, continue their zeal for employee support, and clear the metaphorical path for organizational member development and enhancement (Bridges, 2009).

Fullan reminds us that trust is essential for organizations going through the neutral zone (2001). While managers embrace the connection with employees regarding collegiality and shared experiences during this time, all of that will be for naught if employees do not trust the organizational leaders. The neutral zone is typically the period of time where knowledge about the change is shared; schools administration "must frame the giving and receiving of knowledge as a responsibility and must reinforce such sharing through incentives and opportunities to engage in it" (Fullan, 2001, p. 86). This trust, through shared communication, is the foundation of strength organizations need to truly find success in their journey through the neutral zone to the beginnings stage of transition.

Teachers didn't reference the neutral zone by name, but in many interviews and focus groups, the participants mentioned taking care of themselves and their families, relying on each other for support, and getting through the tough and frustrating times, knowing things would get better. They mentioned these characteristics of being in limbo, an association often compared to the neutral zone. Not knowing when they would receive their transition letters, for example, was one extreme case of distress caused by being in the neutral zone.

Many teachers cited the "shiny newness" of Victory High School as exciting – they were looking forward to being in a fresh, clean building. Several also referred to the fact that with a new building came the new 1:1 technology initiative, which was exciting for them. Some teachers mentioned the exhilaration that came from the experiencing the jewel of the VHS building and grounds: everyone in Halpin was talking about the building and how nice it looked, even from the outside when people just drove by. This positive anticipation helped many teachers through the neutral zone. Although they could not yet occupy the building of Victory High School, and still had anxiety and apprehension over leaving established positions at conventional schools, the eagerness to watch VHS being built, along with meeting new colleagues and students a year before its opening, aided in teachers' transition from endings, through the neutral zone.

Leaders at Victory High School invested time in the transition through community and culture building, expedited by meetings that began a year before Victory opened its doors to students. VHS teachers mentioned they felt they were given grace and time to reflect over what would be best for Victory students and staff. Decisions



were not rushed, nor was there the expectation that all problems had to be solved a full year before the doors opened. For some, this sensibility and respect led them safely and calmly through the neutral zone.

Various teachers mentioned the stress of being in their old buildings for a full year before the actual transition to VHS. While the one year out meetings were taking place, some teachers were on leadership teams at both schools. Department chairs who were doing that job at both their old school and Victory reported stress at dealing with both jobs at the same time. Other teachers conveyed unease about moving from a junior high to a high school. They wondered if they would be good enough, if they would be able to challenge students academically and significantly prepare them for college. These teachers were less likely to ease through the neutral zones of transition to Victory High School.

Hardships during the neutral zone manifested themselves in the variance of opinions on whether “The Draft” was successful in Midwest Public Schools. Those who quickly received their first choice of schools and assignments were more positive than individuals who had to wait longer to be notified, or those who heard from friends that their wishes had not been respected. Some educators traveled through the neutral zone quickly, while others had an agonizing wait.

Personal hardships were also considered during the neutral zone. Along with collegial and community building, many participants related the stress involved in choosing a school and opening a new building and how that stress affected their emotions and personal life. Teachers who had not fully considered the change of Secondary

School Reorganization were sometimes overwhelmed by the resolve needed to head to a different school and take on new challenges. Personal life and emotions affected teacher perception in Midwest Public Schools, especially when MPS was in the middle stage of transition.

### **Taking Charge – Beginnings**

The third phase of transitional management is beginnings. Just like the other two areas of transition, institutions have to journey through the neutral zone desert, through messy emotions and hard conversations, to emerge victorious into the beginnings phase (Bridges, 2009). If an organization can make it through the neutral zone, they have invested in some good will that might carry them through the transition and support them in a new beginning (Bridges, 2009).

Employees who move through endings and neutral zones have a better opportunity to work successfully through beginnings. Leaders realize that beginnings are controlled by the mind and heart and are not congruent with a schedule (Bridges, 2009). Some people will resist a new beginning, however, even though the promise of something new can be exciting. Just because employees have gotten through the neutral zone, doesn't necessarily mean that beginnings will be an easy undertaking. Beginnings can reactivate some of the old anxieties that were originally triggered by the ending.

Beginnings must be overt and planned by leaders to make the most of the impact of the transition (Bridges, 2009). Administrators can do a lot to help teachers get through this last stage by nurturing and nourishing the change. Leaders bolster and support

employees by explaining the purpose, the transition picture, the change plan and the part workers will play in the changes (Bridges, 2009).

Bridges (2009) emphasizes that only after adults in work transitions get through endings and neutral zones can they concentrate on beginnings. It was interesting to see a metamorphosis start to take place at the end of every interview and focus group I completed. I think actually going through the questions presented to each teacher created a cathartic event in their lives (some more than others, of course). Particular teachers I spoke with had thought of Secondary School Reorganization through a lens that did not become clear until I came around and demanded they confront it. Other teachers had very specific views on the MPS transition and had thought about it before and after I asked them for their time and thoughts. They were excited to share their opinions, emotions and experiences.

Beginnings are more than just starting something new. If we take into account the stages of endings and neutral zones people go through when embarking upon a transition, then this final stage in transition is valued, especially when the experience of going through endings and the wilderness of the neutral zone pays off. Marquardt (2011) believes that beginnings must include a focus on mission, values, stratagem and structural configuration. These four elements of transition, especially apparent in the beginning, or last stage of transition, are important to keep the organization on a clear and steady course, while allowing room for innovation, energy, learning, and the accumulation of institutional information (Marquardt, 2011).

French and Raven (1959/2011) would argue that the beginning stage of transition must come about from psychological change in relation to outside forces that either push or pull us to connect with (or reject) change (French & Raven, 1959/2011). This acknowledgement of change is constructed through uses of referent, expert, reward, coercive and legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959/2011). Schools rely most on social power to manage opinions or change, since the community and collegiality is honored in schools – referent power is “the feeling of membership” people get from joining an organization (French & Raven, 1959/2011, p. 303). Referent power can be most useful, and strongest, during the neutral zone and the period of beginnings after a transition. Referent power is seen in the beginnings stage at VHS: those who made it through the neutral zone cited their experience with colleagues as being one of the strongest areas of support.

Victory High School teachers recognized the emphasis VHS building leaders and MPS administrators placed on the importance of taking time to build community, team and culture. VHS teachers were able to focus on the energy and excitement of opening a new building and the momentum and vigor of the beginning of the school year. Teachers at VHS said that the mindset of building something new was the most common feeling they experienced and added to their evolution to the end stage of transition: beginnings.

Beginnings aren't always completely positive, however. In interviews and focus groups, research participants reported stress in relation to iPads; they were not used to all the applications and programs their students were using, and certainly were not accustomed to teaching a classroom full of students with devices. Many teachers related

they did not have enough professional development in relation to technology. They said there were too many items on the technology PD list. Issues of discipline, dress code, schedules, Warrior Time, and the normal stress of the start of school clouded some teachers' perceptions of the transition to Victory High School.

### **Implementation and Future Research**

As I was beginning to do some cross thematic analysis, I noticed many correlations between my study of Victory High School and MPS' Secondary School Reorganization and the work researchers have done around change and program application. I went back to explore the conceptual framework and noticed overlaps from bodies of literature that might be appropriate in taking this research further.

**District reorganization.** One thing that became clear through this process, and sparked further thinking, was the idea of a complete district reorganization. What I discussed in this research study was partially centered around a school district. Future research might consider an entire school district, or even an all-inclusive reorganization of the structure of a school district, the underpinnings of grade configuration, assessment expectations, or curricular area focus.

**Student impact of reorganization.** An important aspect of this Secondary School Reorganization transition is the effect on students. A facet of study that I could modify is the addition of a strand to include students' perception of change during Secondary School Reorganization, especially those students entering high school as freshmen. The question I would add could be something related to my primary research question: Within the context of this study, what are the perceptions and expectations of

students in a Secondary School Reorganization, especially in relation to ninth grade transition? Research could include evaluating factors linked to student success and their potential to avoid dropping out, including Roybal, Thornton and Usinger's (2014) six recommendations in regards to freshman support: environmental belonging, parent involvement, removing obstacles to success, concerned and compassionate teachers, program evaluations of these factors, and using those program evaluations as a basis for making goals and encouraging progress.

### **Implementation Theory**

Now that MPS has experienced this transition for two years, there are more questions and numerous other research paths that have become revealed to MPS. Because I focused on teacher perception of Secondary School Reorganization, it may be time to see if the other six stages of Implementation Theory are represented in the Secondary School Reorganization of Midwest Public Schools (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009). Even though MPS is in the "initial" stage of transition implementation, it will be interesting to gather opinions of the post-transition MPS environment, and to measure if the transition as a whole was completed with fidelity. These implications could guide future study of a five to ten year change or school reconfiguration process, comparisons between MPS and other districts, or even a contrast between the transition teachers make and evolutions industry employees go through in their jobs, would make for an interesting and rich study.

This study maintained that Implementation Theory is the core of any research in relation to the step after transition. Implementation Theory, especially the components of

Core Implementation, are particularly apropos in this study. Fixsen et al., (2009) contend that research in education, and more broadly, social services, is not up to the same level as research in science fields or industry. They surmise this is because social sciences are so complex: it is much easier to run an experiment on bacteria, or how a machine works, than it is to truly understand the human mind. Such elements of humanity – how we think, feel, or our perspective on a situation or problem, are complex and intertwined with our background knowledge, inference skills, and life experience. In manufacturing and industry, “the product is the intervention and its performance depends very little on the user of the product” (Fixsen et al., 2009, p. 532).

When research deals with human beings, “the practitioner is the intervention” (Fixsen et al., 2009, p. 532). Much like the theories of Schlossberg (1995) and Bridges (2009), Implementation Theory deals with the way change, or execution of a program, occurs. Implementation does not happen immediately; it might take as long as four years to actually transpire. It is a recursive process: people will have to go through the cycle of implementation several times for it to actually persevere (Fixsen et al., 2009). Implementation research is the study of how change occurs in a program, industry, or organization, particularly related to service to people. Instead of a submissive transfer of research to practice, Implementation research depends on a dynamic transference; participants are required to take part in the change (Fixsen et al., 2009).

Regarding the process of implementation, there are six stages we must consider: “exploration, installation, initial implementation, full implementation, innovation, and sustainability” (Fixsen et al., 2009, p. 533). These stages were apparent in the research

already completed at Victory High School. The exploration took place at the Neal Neal Board Office and with distinct committees at the beginning of the Secondary School Reorganization process. Installation occurred when the new principal was named, the architectural plans were created, and when ground was broken on the new high school facility. Initial implementation transpired when staff was hired, trained, and engaged in community building activities. Full implementation could be considered the first day, and certainly the first year, of school, as well as the years to come. Teacher interviews and focus groups cited evidence of innovation when they spoke of the changes that were needed to raise the level of implementation of student support, technology, and building a cohesive collegial group within their departments. Finally, sustainability is ongoing. Victory High School teachers have reached the point of sustainability after achieving a successful first year as a comprehensive high school, and spoke of the excitement and positive outlook they now have on the future of VHS students and their program.

**Core implementation components of implementation theory.** There is also importance in understanding the key mechanisms of the Core Implementation Components of Implementation Theory. These are the devices that guide the foundation of the theory (Fixsen et al., 2009) The goal is to have the people affected by an intervention to successfully use that intervention (Fixsen et al., 2009). The first element of Implementation is staff selection – who will be affected by a new program, and who will carry it out (Fixsen et al., 2009)? At VHS, this included the first steps of “The Draft”, and subsequent selection of quality teachers and staff. The second important step of Implementation is professional development (Fixsen et al., 2009). At Victory, this



included the meetings teachers participated in a year before the doors of VHS opened. It also includes the need for more professional development regarding technology, thus necessitating VHS leaders to remember that implementation and change is recursive, and will never be “finished”. This was not salient in my findings, but now aligns with the second component of core implementation.

Fixsen et al., state the need for the third and fourth Core Implementation Components of Implementation Theory, which are “ongoing coaching and consultation” and “staff performance assessment”, respectively (2009, p. 534). These suppose the need for one-on-one enhancement and assessment of teachers at VHS, a process which is achieved with the state and district mandate of mentors for new teachers, and performance based teacher evaluation, also mandated by the state and MPS.

The next step in the Core Implementation Components of Implementation Theory relates to “decision support data systems” (Fixsen et al., 2009). This is a way to measure crucial features of the establishment’s performance as a whole, and deliver data to support decisions that encourage and support continued progress toward program goals (Fixsen et al., 2009). At VHS, as well as all MPS schools, data based decision making is a part of the school fabric and structure, through their work with professional learning communities (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004).

The last two steps on the cycle of Core Implementation Components of Implementation Theory are “facilitative administration” and “systems intervention” (Fixsen et al., 2009, p. 535). Victory High School is presently working through these two stages. These steps require the use and application of long range data, which VHS does

not yet have, and the use of strategies to plan long-term in regards to facility management, budgeting, and staff retention.

The elements of the Core Implementation Components of Implementation Theory in particular, and Implementation Theory, in general, are key to understanding the many facets of this study. Research and implementation or intervention in regards to how people feel and act are complex (Fixsen et al., 2009). Implementation Theory and the Core Implementation Components show researchers and leaders how to recursively manage and plan for the stakeholders' journey through the change process. All elements are contained in the expedition VHS took through Secondary School Reorganization in Midwest Public Schools, and this process and theory would be an excellent way to continue this research.

### **Future Research**

These components of school reform constitute a larger umbrella under which all sorts of considerations regarding change and systems change can be found. Additional literature review around different types of reorganization is necessary to truly understand both the inferences for future research and also implications for school change in the future. Emphasis on curricular areas, change theory, school reform, and school reorganization will enable researchers to envision the possibilities for 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> century learning.

**Checklists.** The outcomes of this study suggest implications for future research regarding the issues of transition, especially in a large school district like MPS. I can see a need for research to include a checklist and timeline for specific steps in the transition

stage, as a combination of both transition research and organizational analysis. This combination could be a synthesis of organizational research, as in the underpinnings of infrastructure and building, supplies, construction, location assessment, and management, combined with a study of the psychological trials teachers and adult learners go through during the stages of transition. It would be interesting to see how the two timelines match up.

**Ethnography.** Future researchers could complete an onsite observation, like an ethnography, around Victory High School - the leadership, students, and teachers - and how they have all settled in together. Researchers could also complete a longitudinal study five, ten and fifteen years from now on VHS, to track goal improvement, teacher satisfaction benchmarks, and school culture. Implications for future research are infinite. While these don't bear a one to one relation to the theoretical framework, it is easy to see a correlation for future research.

**Organizational and policy analysis.** The organizational lens that particularly deals with the infrastructure and rules of school includes our previous reliance on military models, which led to schools adopting a classical organizational or scientific management aspect to their operation (Rettig, 2004). This included a dependence on an arrangement of superiors and inferiors, a structured operation system, and linear communication through a closed system (Rettig, 2004). Knowing most schools still operate on a classical organizational or scientific management style, no matter how progressive they claim to be, it would be interesting to determine to what extent the infrastructure of Victory High School is dependent on a classic or militaristic organizational theory (Rettig, 2004).

Future research could include an analysis of the organizational lens of VHS leadership, building planning and operational structure.

Part of organizational analysis is behavioral, emotional and cognitive changes or traits of teachers that make them more or less adaptable to transition. Teachers' job efficacy is positively influenced by their ability, enthusiasm, and administrative capability of their organization, especially in the lives of secondary teachers (Arifin, 2014). This is also true in relation to secondary transition or any move a high school teacher must make in relation to their grade level, building or administration. Teachers' prime foundation of job fulfillment is working with students and the actual practice of educating (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Motivation to work in a school, as well as a positive culture, are important to teachers' happiness and the stress they may or may not encounter in their jobs (Arifin, 2014). The most significant issue that affects teachers' efficacy and motivation to do a good job is work fulfillment (Arifin, 2014). Future research could include an analysis of the behavioral, emotional and cognitive traits of teachers that make them more or less adaptable to transition.

**Students.** There is also a great need to research the important student aspect of Secondary School Reorganization. Even though this study pertains to teacher perceptions, a fascinating approach would be to investigate student perceptions of Secondary School Reorganization. This issue came up outside of the scope of this study, but the questions regarding student transition were an underlying theme throughout teacher conversations. Were students made to feel part of the transition process, and was that inclusion genuine or contrived? Does starting your high school career at one school and then graduating

from another leave students with feelings of guilt over disloyalty? At what age is the prime age for expedience in transition? Many transition programs for students in middle school going to high school focus on academic and organizational procedures instead of students' feelings, behavior and social needs (Carmen, Waycott & Smith, 2011).

Transition to secondary school has a momentous influence on students, and that impact is not always a positive one (Carmen et al., 2011). Further study of the impression of Secondary School Reorganization on students might include a focus on their confidence, resiliency, and social expectations (Carmen et al., 2011).

**Those who were left behind.** A more personal source of investigation would be what happened to everyone “who stayed behind”, like myself. I can see this research of transition to Victory High School being initiated in almost the reverse – what happened to those who wanted to go to VHS but were denied? What about the transitional feelings of those who remained at Huff Junior High School (now Middle School) and felt the loss of their thirty or more colleagues who chose to vacate their previous school? What were the growing pains of change when the three former junior highs converted to middle schools? How did the three pre-existing middle schools handle the decision to add an eighth grade and three additional middle schools to the mix?

**Leadership.** A final implication for future research could be a case study on the leadership of Dr. Jennifer Rudy, principal of Victory High School. To what extent does Dr. Rudy embody shared leadership and have the characteristics of a servant or transformational leader? What is her perspective of this transition? What would she recommend to other school districts or building leaders embarking on this mission?

What does she regard as her best work? Biggest failure? A study of her leadership style, coupled with her reflection over the process, might prove fascinating.

**Curricular reform.** Midwest Public Schools is undergoing yet another change in relation to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). MPS has converted one school into a STEM school in recent years (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Curricular areas are already being reorganized in many school districts with the introduction of STEM schools, which focus on the sciences. The recent expansion of STEM schools in the United States has many researchers and teachers pondering the role of STEM schools in district reorganization (Erdogan & Stuessy, 2015). If a research question was asked regarding these curricular changes, it might be: What are the perceptions and expectations of teachers in a district reorganization to support STEM education? Erdogan and Stuessy report that the increase of STEM schools is in direct correlation to the expansion of our current “global economy” (2015, p. 77). As we see the world change, education must adapt to what is important to business and organizational leaders. A focus on STEM and college and career readiness is vital to improve the workforce of America in the future (Erdogan & Stuessy, 2015).

**Systems change theory.** Systems change theory could be used as an additional lens through which to look at Secondary School Reorganization in Midwest Public Schools. Another concentration topic that could be expanded with further research is the work of psychologists Norcross, Krebs and Prochaska and their identification of five stages of change: “precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance” (Norcross, Krebs, & Prochaska, 2011, p. 144). These five stages of change look at

multiple processes happening at once. It is possible that VHS is heading towards this multiple change system in the near future. The authors make the point that, “the stages of change represent *when* people change; the processes of change entail *how* people change” (Norcross et al., 2011, p. 144). It would be interesting to complete the same research study using these stages of change instead of the Bridges (2009) and Goodman (2006) theory of change that starts with endings and ends with beginnings.

The concept of change theory is much different if the practitioners and participants in a transition or reorganization are actually aware of, and educated in, the theory of change. Anderson and Bacon (2006) explore this process and ask if the knowledge of a theory is critical in training people using that theory. In other words, how would educators respond to knowing what conceptual framework was being used in research they were taking part in?

**School reform.** Another lens through which we can look at the issue of the MPS Secondary School Reorganization is that of school reform. Some school reform leaders believe that the crucial element to school improvement is cultivating and improving the capability and expertise of teachers (Leana, 2011). If the Secondary School Reorganization in MPS took a toll on teachers, was it a necessary venture to improve the high school experience of students? Many would argue that students should always come first; the converse of that is students cannot improve unless teachers do.

An additional key theme is school reform is learning from business and industry models, and bringing outsiders into school districts to solve problems (Leana, 2011). This can sometimes be helpful, but often creates disconnect between the experts and teachers

in the field (Leana, 2011). Principals as instructional leaders is another theme in school reform, and as we saw at VHS, the leadership of Dr. Rudy was instrumental in a successful transition to the new high school. Principals can only do so much, however, and many school reform leaders believe the true power of school transformation is in valuing the “benefits of social capital and stability at the bottom” of schools, i.e. the teachers working in classrooms every day (Leana, 2011).

The issue of Secondary School Reorganization can also be viewed through the lens of school reorganization as a whole. There are some factions who argue that American education has been flawed from the beginning and that nothing will fix it, except deep reforms and complete reorganization (Bigott, 2012). Others want a back to basics model which just teaches students the very minimum of accessible curriculum and focuses on reading, writing, and arithmetic (Biggot, 2012). Like school reformers, school reorganizers believe there will never be a clear answer of how to properly reorganize schools or school districts because the problem is often too intense and convoluted (Biggot, 2012).

### **Implications and Recommendations**

If other school districts take on a significant reorganization, there are many recommendations from this study and implications for practice they might consider. The first is to be aware of research on adult work transitions, namely the work of Bridges (2009) and Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995). So much care was paid to make the students of Midwest Public School successful in their secondary transitions, and



rightfully so, but not as much exploration occurred to ensure a research-based approach to adult work transitions.

Schools who are interested in creating a successful reorganization might take note of the following aspects of secondary school reform – these are my own constructs. I have grouped them into Transition Theory phases.

### **Endings**

**Committees, surveys, community voice, and “The Draft”.** School districts embarking on a transition like the one MPS went through would be best served investing in the study of literature regarding incremental change, fundamental change, and the Implementation Dip (Fullan, 2011). This information can be openly shared with teachers who are assisting the district by becoming members of transition committees to study transition, change, and the how to best serve students. Teachers feel empowered when the culture of a district or school is to include them in brainstorming and decision making.

Teachers can be asked for feedback about what and where they want to teach. Even if teachers take surveys or offer information and then change their mind, this is part of the endings transitional phase that adults going through work transitions must be allowed to travel through. Adults will weigh in on their decision by listening to peers, contemplating their current work environment, and evaluating leaders in different schools.

Districts can keep communication clear regarding when teachers will hear the results of administrator conversations about where teachers will spend the next section of

their careers. Districts must assist teachers in making decisions by supporting their needs – assistance with interviews or résumés, a clear understanding of schools in the area that might be their first choice, and communicating with them if they don't get their first choice, but do get their professional or personal pride wounded.

**Community building and culture.** Schools going through transition must invest time in creating a collaborative culture within the new dynamics of their school; including students, parents, teachers, and community members will benefit all involved. Schools should remember to celebrate the community that will perhaps be lost because of the changes. Part of investing in community building is capitalizing in the time it takes to construct it, as well as the opportunity to create culture, traditions, mascots, themes, purpose, mission and vision.

As well as spending time on the intellectual, physical and professional fiber of a new building, special emphasis can be placed on connecting new teachers together through social events, mixers and family-centered occasions. The knitting together of a teacher's professional and personal life can serve to establish a strong and empowering foundation for work and home life. This will create a saliently efficacious staff. If adults in transition feel a balance between work and home, and are given the opportunity to have families meet coworkers, and vice versa, they are better equipped to be successful in both parts of their lives.

**Emotions of transition and the effect on personal life.** While it is important that the work/home life balance be accounted for and supported, school leaders going through transitions must be aware of the effects of change on teachers' emotions and their

personal lives. Issues like changing start times immediately upon opening a new school will have adverse effects on childcare, after school jobs, and even workout routines.

Leaders can keep in mind the grieving process both for those teachers going to the new school and those left in the old ones. This transition will have a momentous effect on some adults, while others will not be bothered either way. Teachers will have to say goodbye to friends, colleagues, and even students, who have had an impact on their lives. Social relationships, which come from working side by side with others for years, might be broken and split, causing grief to those going through the transitions.

### **Neutral Zones**

**Excitement of transitioning to a new building.** School leaders must capitalize on the excitement of a new building and the fresh, clean and shiny structure. There is much political capital to be earned with stakeholders if the very presence of a new building or concept can be cashed in. Students and teachers who might be accustomed to old and disheveled buildings can be led through the neutral zone by giving them access to the new building, whether it is still under construction or not. Hard hat tours, festivals in the school grounds, and other points of access make the new building become a part of the community's reality, thereby settling it in the psyche of teachers, students and school stakeholders alike.

**Searching for colleagues and opportunity.** School leaders working through a transition must choose teachers for a new building carefully. Educators who will fully invest in community, a positive school culture, and a collaborative spirit are valued for their neutral zone guidance. By offering opportunities for leadership and growth for

those teachers, school leaders show an investment in their employees. Administrators cannot expect teachers to take on every club, sport or activity that other schools have or they will be overwhelmed. Teachers' perceptions regarding transition and the Secondary School Reorganization process in Midwest Public Schools were positively influenced by the opportunities they were offered in association with the new high school, and the bonds they created with their new school colleagues.

**Following the leader.** Districts embarking on a transition can select a leadership team and leader who will devote their lives to the opening of the new building, but also one who understands the true tenets of shared leadership, learning from mistakes, and patience. The importance of choosing a quality leader cannot be dismissed. As well as creating a symbolic persona as the figurehead for the new entity, be it a school or business, the leader is also an embodiment of the change, transition, or reconfiguration, especially in schools.

### **Beginnings**

**Inequity.** A new school's existence could be a breeding ground for envy from other schools, teachers, and students. This does not mean that the excitement over a new school, or the jealousy, conversely, has anything to do with inequity or equality. Districts can make rules that apply to all schools and are fair to the new school, while evaluating budgets and providing a transparent message and bottom line. Teachers at pre-existing schools can be reminded to be welcoming and pleasant with any new people coming in, including those who might take over some highly coveted AP or Honors teaching loads.

Another helpful piece of advice from Secondary School Reorganization research participants is to dismiss department chairs and building leaders from their current work load so they can tackle getting the new school up and running. Keeping school geographical boundaries clear, practicing equity in SES, and paying extreme attention to minority student enrollment, ELL and Special Education status within all schools, the existing and the newly opened, is key to creating an equitable and reasonable school district.

**Technology and the need for professional development.** If a school district is technologically going 1:1, schools can provide extensive technology training over personal devices. They are advised to add only one new thing a year. Including professional development about adults in transition, interviewing skills, technology requirements, block scheduling, and how 14 year olds differ from 18 year olds is also crucial to a Secondary School Reorganization.

### **Summary**

Midwest Public Schools (MPS) restructured their entire secondary system in 2013 by building a third comprehensive high school, converting three junior highs to middle schools, and changing middle school and high school grade configurations. Victory High School opened in August of 2013 with all new teachers; most came from previous MPS schools. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the Secondary School Reorganization and how MPS, as a district, supported or hindered those teachers' transition to a brand new high school building.

Findings that arose from interviews and focus groups were: the importance of community building and culture, finding like-minded colleagues and having the opportunity to take on leadership roles, the excitement of a new building and the appreciation of working somewhere new and clean, the emotions of leaving one school and starting at another, the toll transition takes on teachers' personal lives, perceived continued inequity between the three new high schools, the importance building principal leadership plays to make teachers feel secure and valued, the imperative to begin faculty meetings at least one year before opening a new building, teacher leaders' service on committees and teacher choice surveys, and the significance of technology and continued professional development for problems that will inevitably arise during the first few years of opening a new school.

The implication for a school district ready to embark on adding a new comprehensive high school and/or changing grade clusters is to overly communicate and take into account every aspect of a teacher's work day. Teachers must have buy-in to a new building or structure before that change will ever be successful.

## Appendix A – Interview Questions

Your interview responses will help answer this research question: What are teacher perceptions regarding change and transition during reconfiguration of secondary schools in (Halpin) Public Schools?

This interview will be conducted by the researcher. All responses will be recorded on an iPad and also using a tape recorder. You will now be asked to review the consent form. Please sign the form if you agree with the terms listed.

I have eight questions to ask you. Let's begin. To find out more about each other I would like you to answer the following statement: Please tell me your name, title and/or role, and how long you have been with (Halpin) Public Schools.

1. What considerations did you take into account when you decided to work at (Victory) High School?
2. How did (MPS) prepare you for this transition?
3. How did your colleagues' choices affect your decision?
4. How did the expected culture of (Victory) High School affect your decision?
5. What was done by (Victory) High School administrators to help you feel a part of this new team?
6. Now that you have been a part of (Victory) High School for a year, what else could the school district have done to help your transition?
7. What was the biggest personal transition you had to make to work at (VHS)?
8. I appreciate your help today. Is there anything that I missed? Is there anything that you came wanting to say that you didn't get a chance to say?

## Appendix B – Focus Group Questions

Thank all of you for your participation. I wanted to remind you that notes will be taken using my personal iPad or a notebook. Focus group conversations will also be audio recorded and audiotapes transcribed. I have a few broad questions to start with. However, I may have additional questions that allow you to expand or clarify on a response or to offer additional information. Although you have signed the consent form, is there any reason you cannot begin at this time? Let's begin. Please tell us your name, title and/or role, and how long you have been with (Halpin) Public Schools.

1. Tell me in general how you feel about the school reconfiguration plan.
2. What are some of the positive characteristics of the recent (MPS) transition? Why? What are some of the negative characteristics? Why?
3. Think back to when you first became aware of the potential (MPS) transition to six middle schools and three comprehensive high schools. What were your initial impressions? Why?
4. What kind of support did you receive during the change and transition into this new configuration? What were obstacles or difficulties during the change and transition? What was particularly helpful about the transition process? What was particularly frustrating?
5. Do you think this change has been successful? Why or why not? What would make this change successful? What more do you think (Midwest) Public Schools needs to do through this change process?
6. What are the most significant issues about the reconfiguration?
7. If you had a chance to give advice to other school districts going through a similar process, what advice would you give?
8. Is there any additional information you would like to offer to help me better understand this district reconfiguration and your perceptions about it?
9. If there is additional information you would like to offer that you would like to say outside of the group, please contact me at the confidential Gmail account or using the telephone number I have provided.



## Appendix C – IRB Approval



**Campus Institutional Review Board**  
University of Missouri-Columbia

485 McReynolds Hall  
Columbia, MO 65211-1150  
PHONE: (573) 882-9585  
FAX: (573) 884-0663

August 6, 2014

Principal Investigator: Porter, Helen M  
Department: ELPA

Your Application to project entitled *TRANSITION TO A NEW HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES* was reviewed and approved by the MU Campus Institutional Review Board according to terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	1211974
Initial Application Approval Date	August 6, 2014
IRB Expiration Date	August 6, 2015
Level of Review	Expedited
Project Status	Active - Open to Enrollment
Expedited Categories	45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(6) 45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(7)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Type of Consent	Written Consent

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems, serious adverse events, and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 days.
3. All modifications must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Continuing Review Report must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date.
6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
7. Utilize the IRB stamped consent documents and other approved research documents located within the document storage section of eIRB.

If you have any questions, please contact the Campus IRB at 573-882-9585 or [umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu](mailto:umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu).

Thank you,

Charles Borduin, PhD  
Campus IRB Chair

## Appendix D – Characteristics of Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Former Grade Level</b>	<b>Subject Area</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>DL, EL, AL</b>	<b>FG or I</b>
Adam	High School	Math	M	School Leader	AL	I
Angie	Junior High	Special Education	F			FG1
Caroline	Junior High	Language Arts	F	School Leader	AL, DL	FG2
Cynthia	Junior High	Science	F	School Leader	DL, EL	I
David	Junior High	Math	M	School Leader	AL, DL	I
Emma	Junior High	Outreach Counselor	F	School Leader	AL, EL	FG1
Hugh	Junior High	Social Studies	M	School Leader	EL	I
Jean	Middle School	Language Arts	F			FG3
Joseph	Junior High	Math	M	School Leader	EL	I
Logan	Junior High	Language Arts	M			FG3
Lorraine	Junior High	Social Studies	F	School Leader	DL, EL	FG1
Margaret	Junior High	Social Studies	F	School Leader	EL	I
Marie	Junior High	Math	F	School Leader	EL	I
Mark	Junior High	Science	M	School Leader	EL	FG3
Miles	High School	Instrumental Music	M	School Leader	DL	FG2
Shelly	Junior High	World Language	F	School Leader	EL	FG2
Thomas	Junior High	Math	M	School Leader	EL	I
Tony	Middle School	Industrial Tech	M			FG2
Trevor	Junior High	World Language	M	School Leader	EL	I
Willem	Junior High	Gifted	M	School Leader	EL	I

M= Male

F= Female

AL = Academic Leader

DL = Department Leader

EL = ECA Leader

I = Interview

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## Vita

Dr. Helen Porter was born in Southport, England, and immigrated with her family to the United States when she was three. Helen graduated from Hickman High School in Columbia, MO, in 1992. Helen has been married to Jeff for seven years, and they have one daughter, Lucy, who is three.

Dr. Porter received Bachelor degrees in English and English Education in 1997, a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction as a Teaching Fellow in 1998, and a Specialist degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis in 2007, all from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She spent a year studying at the University of Manchester, England, in 1994. Dr. Helen Porter received her doctor of education degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2015.

Dr. Porter is currently a middle school principal in Columbia Public Schools. She served as a Language Arts teacher for nine years, and an MU Clinical Associate for three years, supervising the Teaching Fellowship Program while also teaching a class at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She was an assistant principal for three years before becoming a principal. Dr. Porter has been with Columbia Public Schools for eighteen years. Helen received the University of Missouri College of Education High Flyer award for excellence in teaching in 2004, and also won Columbia Public Schools Teacher of the Year in 2009.