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# Evaluating School Size; An Analysis of the Parent Perspective of a Small Versus a Large High School

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EVALUATING SCHOOL SIZE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PARENT  
PERSPECTIVE OF A SMALL VERSUS A LARGE HIGH SCHOOL

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Floun'say, and my children, Taj and Mya. Thank you for being my inspiration and motivation.

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the parental perspective of the former small school initiative at Euclid High School as compared to the traditional large high school setting. Small school researchers have argued that smaller schools are better environments for educating children (Cotton, 1996). However, in the research on small schools the literature neglects to substantially examine the perspective of parents. Parental satisfaction and support are key elements of a school districts ability to successfully educate children. Therefore, schools that are considering transitioning to or eliminating small school settings should take the parental view into consideration when implementing changes.

This study uses a mixed method design to gain insight on the parents' perception of school size and its impact on the academic environment, the school atmosphere, and relationships within the high school. The study commenced with a questionnaire being distributed to approximately 300 parents. There was a 14% response rate for the questionnaires. The second phase of the study utilized a case study approach with individual interviews of 10 participants. All of the quantitative and qualitative data collected were analyzed and compared in order to form final results.

Several findings showed favorable perceptions towards small schools, consistent with much of the previous research on small schools. However, the

results also indicated that perceptions of the large school and the small schools were similar in many areas. Therefore, the results illuminated that administrators that are considering or forced to eliminate small school initiatives should not merely abandon their small school programs for the traditional large school but rather, attempt to incorporate some of the components of the small schools to the traditional large school setting in order to increase parental satisfaction and support.



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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of school size has been a topic of discussion for over half a century. Barker and Gump (1964) started the discussion with their publication indicating that student participation in activities is better in smaller schools and students are more eager to learn. This conclusion was published only five years after James Conant's book, *The American High School Today*, had urged educators to consolidate small schools into larger schools based on his conclusion that high schools should have at least 100 students in the graduating class if they were going to adequately prepare students for the future (1959). Thus, the debate regarding small schools versus large schools commenced and many research attempts began to follow.

In the 21st century, the concept of school size is still deemed important in regards to trying to meet the educational needs of students. Small school advocates argue that some of the benefits of smaller schools include higher academic achievement, more positive student attitudes, less school violence and better behavior, greater student participation in activities, and better attendance rates (Cotton, 1996; Raywid, 1998). In addition, studies have shown

that some parents, teachers and administrators believe that small schools are better for students' emotional well-being as well as their academics (Wasley & Lear, 2001). Nonetheless, there are still those who believe that large schools are more beneficial regarding aspects such as cost, curriculum offerings, and teacher recruitment among other things (Cotton, 1996). Conventional thinking suggests that one huge advantage of large schools is that they will save money because they are "economies of scale" (Sergiovanni, 1995). Therefore, the small school debate is still a topic of interest in American education.

### **Small Schools in Ohio**

Over the past decade, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have led a nation-wide small school movement. According to the Washington Times, as of spring of 2003 the Gates Foundation had already given over \$447 million to school districts and universities to transform large schools into smaller learning centers (Archibald, 2003). In 2002, \$20 million of the Gates Foundation funds were given to Ohio's largest education philanthropic organization, KnowledgeWorks Foundation, to transform large urban high schools in the state of Ohio (KnowledgeWorks, 2008). The Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI) was created in order to address problems facing Ohio's large urban high schools. The purpose of the OHSTI was to create smaller, personalized, high schools where students could be academically engaged and motivated to achieve (KnowledgeWorks, 2008).

In 2002, KnowledgeWorks Foundation announced the availability of a \$31.5 million grant for the OHSTI. The grant was initially made possible through

the financial support of the KnowledgeWorks Foundation and the contribution from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. However, in subsequent years, additional funding and support came from the Ford Foundation, Project GRAD USA, and the U.S. and Ohio Departments of Education (KnowledgeWorks, 2008).

The OHSTI was met with overwhelming support by leaders at that time such as Bob Taft, Governor of Ohio, Congressman Ralph Regula, and organizations such as the Ohio Federation of Teachers and the Ohio Department of Education. The support along with enthusiasm and an unforeseen demand led to the awarding of planning grants to 42 schools in 17 school districts instead of the original four to six districts (KnowledgeWorks, 2008). School districts that received planning grants included Akron, Canton, Columbus, Cleveland Heights-University Heights, Cleveland, East Cleveland, Dayton, Euclid, Lorain, Toledo, and Youngstown, among others. The schools were to utilize the grants to develop plans as to how they would transform their large urban high schools into small schools with less than 400 students that focused on high-quality curriculum and instruction, as well as community involvement (KnowledgeWorks, 2008). The goal was to create schools that could foster relationships in which students could be successful. During this research and design phase, known as phase one, schools were supported with coaches, training, and relevant research. Implementation grants would be awarded to schools with the best designs.

In 2003, eight high schools from six districts were originally awarded implementation grants under OHSTI. The eight high schools were Cleveland



Heights High School, East High School in Cleveland, Brookhaven High School in Columbus, Shaw High School in East Cleveland, Libbey High School in Toledo, and Chaney, Rayen, and Wilson High Schools in Youngstown. However, six additional high schools were awarded grants during the second round of selections, which included Buchtel High School in Akron, Linden McKinley High School in Columbus, Admiral King High School in Lorain, Euclid High School, Canton McKinley High School, and Rogers High School in Toledo. After receiving additional money from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, three additional high schools were selected during the third round to include Southview High School in Lorain, Lima Senior High School, and Scott High School in Toledo. The original implementation grants were provided to fund the small school initiative for a total of three years.

All of the selected schools entered into a three-year implementation phase, known as phase two, which included additional support and training through the KnowledgeWorks Foundation. The technical assistance provided by KnowledgeWorks was centered on five areas: The Leadership Institute, school change coaches, community engagement, the Small School Leaders Network, and other key components, which included standards and curriculum development, as well as teacher union relations (KnowledgeWorks, 2008). During the implementation phase, schools agreed to abide by 15 principles in their development of small schools. The 15 principles, known as “non-negotiable attributes” were as follows:

1. Autonomous governance, budgets, structures, and staffing; flexible use of resources
2. Distributed leadership
3. Open access and choice for students
4. Identification and release time for principals in the first year of implementation
5. Professional development that clearly linked changes in teaching practice to improved academic student achievement
6. A clearly-defined system of central office support of small school design and implementation
7. A curriculum aligned with state standards and focused on helping students use their minds well
8. Non-traditional scheduling that promoted deep student learning and meaningful relationships with teachers
9. Clearly demonstrated use of technology and advanced communications resources
10. Clearly stated benchmarks for improved student achievement
11. Performance assessments for students
12. Authentic community engagement as defined by substantive community conversations that engaged a broad array of stakeholders; and connected with and influences official decisions
13. Clear community involvement in the daily life of the school
14. Individual teacher advisors for each student

15. Target maximum population of 400 students (KnowledgeWorks, 2008).

Overall, 20 high schools in 10 school districts were to open their doors as new small schools in the fall of 2004 and 2005. However, as late as spring of 2006, Akron Butchel High School had not yet opened as small schools. In addition, Euclid City Schools had decided to drop out from under the KnowledgeWorks umbrella in the fall of 2006, although they continued with the small school initiative in their district until the end of the 2009 school year. Lorain City Schools is another district that exited the OHSTI and reverted back to the traditional large school setting in 2008. Nonetheless, as of 2007, there were 44 small schools under the KnowledgeWorks umbrella (KnowledgeWorks, 2008). The Gates Foundation had also contributed an additional \$7.4 million to KnowledgeWorks for the continued support of the OHSTI for an additional three year period. The districts receiving support for an additional three-year period were: Canton, Columbus, Cleveland Heights-University Heights, East Cleveland, Lima, Lorain, Toledo, and Youngstown (KnowledgeWorks, 2008). The grant was also extended in 2009 to continue with the initiative in Ohio school districts until June 2010.

Although the OHSTI has received continuing financial support, some questions remain unanswered for school districts involved in this initiative. The first question is how will districts finance and continue with the implementation of the small schools once the external funding stops? Other questions for these school districts are what are the results they are getting from this initiative, and is

it worth them continuing with this project? All of these questions will surely need to be answered in the next few years.

### **The Case of Euclid High School**

Euclid High School is located in northeast Ohio in the city of Euclid. As of the 2008-2009 school year, the final year of the small school initiative in Euclid, the school was comprised of approximately 2200 students with a racial composition of 74.4% African American, 20.8% Caucasian/White, and approximately 5% Other. With a school rating of continuous improvement the high school was in its sixth year of school improvement status meaning the students were eligible for school choice options under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The school also had attendance and graduation rates of 94.2% and 88.3%, respectively. The mean ACT score was 18 on a scale of 1–36, and the mean SAT score was 906 on a scale of 600–2400. At this time, the school was considered to be 59.2% economically disadvantaged (Ohio Department of Education, 2009).

In the 2003-2004 school year, the year before the commencement of the small school initiative in Euclid schools, the high school had an attendance rate of 92.9% and a graduation rate of 97.7%. The student enrollment was 1884 with a racial composition of 59.9% African American, 37.4% Caucasian/White, and approximately 3% Other. The school was in its first year of school improvement status and the students were eligible for school choice options for the first time

under NCLB. The school had a school rating of continuous improvement and was considered to be 2.6% economically disadvantaged (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).

When Euclid schools decided to implement the small school initiative in the fall of 2004 there were several goals the high school wanted to achieve: narrow the achievement gap between African American and White students, increase academic achievement for all students, improve relationships between all stakeholders, and reduce drop-out rates (Euclid City Schools, 2003a). In order to achieve these goals, the high school planned to team with the community and parents, provide continuous professional development, use the small schools to build continuous long-term relationships with students throughout their high school experience, and provide “personalization, meaningful instruction, authentic assessment, and service learning” in order to increase student achievement (Euclid City Schools, 2003a). The underlining theme of the small school initiative was to focus on the three R’s – (academic) rigor, relevance, and relationships.

To ensure that the small school initiative was a collaborative effort, the design teams for the schools included parents and community members from the very beginning (Euclid City Schools, 2003b). The designs of the small schools also incorporated aspects such as Leadership Teams and Partnership Development Teams to ensure that partnerships were created and sustained with community and parent groups to make the initiative a success. The goal was to empower stakeholders in all aspects of the small school initiative with shared

decision-making authority and site-based management, as well as foster relationships that allow the community to be a part of the educational experience in Euclid (Euclid City Schools, 2003b).

In 2004 Euclid High School opened its doors as six different small schools operating under one building. Each school averaged approximately 375 students and had independent administrators, faculty, and staff. The six schools were as follows:

- Euclid Academy of the Arts (AA)
- Business and Communications (BC)
- The Professional Path (PP)
- The Academy of Intellectual and Interpersonal Development (AIID)
- STEM: School of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)
- The International Academy for Accelerated Achievement (IAAA).

After two years of implementation of the small schools project, the Euclid City Schools decided to drop from under the KnowledgeWorks umbrella. The decision was made to continue with the small school initiative under the direction of the school district alone and without the funding from the outside source. The Euclid small high schools operated independently for an additional three school years.

In January 2009, the Euclid School Board voted unanimously to convert Euclid High School back to one large campus with one principal starting in the fall of 2009 (Euclid Board of Education, 2009). A presentation by the Superintendent pointed out that there apparently had been some successes from the small

school initiative such as relationships, but other issues in the schools still needed improvement such as academic achievement and discipline. Other input that affected the decision to convert to the large school setting included consideration of Ohio Senate Bill 311, an external evaluation report from SOPRIS, input from the teachers' association, and expenses (Euclid Board of Education, 2009). Therefore, in August of 2009 Euclid High School once again opened its doors as one large comprehensive high school with approximately 2200 students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Many researchers and supporters have indicated that smaller schools are better environments for educating children (Cotton, 1996; Edington & Gardener, 1984; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Grabe, 1981; Haller, 1992; Lee & Smith, 1995; Lindsay, 1982; Schoggen & Schoggen, 1988). However, the literature also suggests that just changing school size does not necessarily equal better schools (Raywid, 1998; Vander Ark, 2002). Tom Vander Ark, the executive director of education initiatives at the Gates Foundation states, "Although the research on school size is compelling, size alone does not make a good school" (2002, p. 57). In addition, Mary Ann Raywid warns, "What succeeds with one child or in one community won't necessarily do so in another" (1998, p. 38). Therefore, it is important for school districts across the nation to evaluate their small school initiatives and determine if it is meeting the needs of the educational community that they serve.

Parental support has been proven to be a very important contribution to the success of students and schools. Over the past half of a century, researchers

have provided evidence of the impact and need for parental participation and guidance in the educational process (Comer & Haynes 1991; Davies, 1987; Epstein, 1987; Griffith 2001; Snodgrass, 1991). For instance, in a recent study Jeynes (2007) found that the positive effect of parental involvement on academic outcomes is applicable regardless of race. In addition, a report by the Center on Education Policy (2007) acknowledged the importance of parental guidance and support on academic success. As the research indicates, parental involvement, support and guidance are important aspects of education. Therefore, gaining insight on the parental perspective of school structure is an important endeavor. Since parents are also consumers of education, it is important for educators to be aware of what satisfies this customer base. With school choice policies in effect all across the nation, in certain areas parents can now select the school that their child will attend. Parents have power because they have a choice of where to send their children to school. They can take advantage of school vouchers, open enrollment programs, and charter schools to name a few options. As Davies (1987) states, "Parents and students are not simply passive recipients of educational services."

The aforementioned views of parents in the educational arena imply that parents are key components of education. Therefore, educators should be encouraged to acknowledge the views of the customers that they serve which includes parents. In addition, they should try to meet the needs and preferences of this customer base in each community in order to foster collaborative programs that will benefit the students they are serving. The purpose of this



study is to investigate the parental perspective of school size in a suburban school district in the state of Ohio. Since school size reform has been such an important policy consideration nationwide and specifically in Ohio over the past few years, it is important to ascertain what the constituents of these communities believe about this endeavor. Specifically, this study hopes to gain insight on the parents' perception of the comparison of a small and large high school on the academic environment, the school atmosphere, and relationships in the school. Euclid High School has been selected for this study because it has implemented both small and large school settings in recent years. For that matter, selected parents of this community have had first-hand experience with both the small and large school structures. Therefore, these parents of Euclid High School students should be able to compare and evaluate some of the key aspects of a small and large high school and provide significant insight on the parent perception of school size.

### **Significance**

This study will serve as a guide for school administrators when discussing converting large high schools into smaller schools or vice versa. This study will also serve a purpose for the approximately 44 schools in the state of Ohio and others that are deciding whether they should continue with the small school initiative. It will illuminate the parental preferences on important aspects of schools such as environments and relationships, thereby giving administrators more information to consider at their next decision point. Overall, this study will help to ensure that future school reforms are designed in the best way to

accommodate students in the community they serve, consciously considering the perspective of parents.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions will be used for clarity and consistency of terms in this study.

- Small schools – schools that are freestanding or housed within one large building that are autonomous when it comes to identity, budgets, leadership, and operate independently from one large school (Wasley et al., 2000, p.10).
- School-within-school (SWS) – small schools that are located in one building, have their own missions, but are lead by one school principal and budget (Wasley, et al., 2000).
- School size – refers to the number of students enrolled in a school. Small school size is considered 200–400 students (Cotton, 2001).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **School Leadership**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the school administrator serves in a very dynamic capacity. School systems are constantly bombarded with the challenges of rapidly changing environments due to growth or decline, demographics, and financial resources to name a few. Therefore, good educational leadership is vital to the progress and quality of education for children.

In order to be successful in this dynamic position, educational leaders must serve in different capacities in educational environments. Portz, Stein, and Jones (1999) sum up the role of an educational leader into three dimensions: educational, managerial, and political.

The educational dimension of school leadership deals with setting a vision and creating a path to achieve that vision. Educational leaders must create and sustain school climates and cultures conducive to achieving academic excellence. They must set the tone for positive student outcomes through the implementation of the instructional program, educational practices, interactions,

and models of personal growth that they embody. Therefore, having an individual that can see the bigger picture and has the knowledge of how to attain their goals is very important in leading a school system.

The managerial aspect of educational leadership is comprised of overseeing the day-to-day operations of the organization. Educational leaders must make decisions, manage resources (whether human, financial, or tangible), guide and support staff, and complete tasks to ensure that schools are operating efficiently and effectively. The managerial aspect of education is just as important as it is in any organization. Whether it is making payroll, feeding the students, or supporting staff, being an effective manager is a critical part of school leadership.

The last dimension of an educational leader's position is dealing with the political aspect of the job. Administrators must work collaboratively with community members such as elected officials, business leaders, unions, and parent groups to develop positive relationships for the benefit of the students (Portz, Stein, & Jones, 1999). Understanding the political context of the community they serve is a big part of successfully leading educational institutions. Therefore, it is advantageous for educational leaders to tend to the political aspects of their administrative positions in order to reach the goal of successfully educating children.

Serving as an educational leader is a challenging role in an ever-changing environment. To be successful in this position, one must understand the importance and significance of the dimensions of the position and possess the skills to properly address the requirements of this role. The educational leader

who meets the expectations and demands of these different aspects of the job will ensure that their schools are excellent places of learning and working for students, staff, and the community as a whole.

### **Parents and Education**

In the past, some school reforms have viewed educating children as a partnership between the school and the home (Davies, 1987). The responsibility for learning has not been just on the school, but on the home and community as well. In fact, parental involvement in education is now accepted as essential to effective schooling (Comer & Haynes, 1991). This view has been so widespread that even federal legislation has called for the encouragement of parents in the educational process (U. S. Department of Education, 2001). Therefore, educators should view parents as key partners in education and acknowledge them as valuable resources when educating children.

#### ***Parental Involvement.***

Over many decades, the literature has asserted that parent involvement benefits children's learning (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). From helping with homework to volunteering at school, or simply displaying values that uphold education as beneficial, parents are key components to enhancing the education of students. "Parents bring a community perspective to planning and management activities. They also bring an understanding of needs and experiences of their own children" (Comer & Haynes, 1991, p. 273). This is why parental involvement plays such a critical role in the success of students.

Not all parental involvement is contained in the same category, but the variation in involvement has still been proven to be beneficial. In their meta-analytic study of parental involvement, Fan and Chen (2001) defined the following indicators as those most commonly used to describe parental involvement: parent-child communication, home supervision, educational aspiration for children, and school contact and participation. Their analysis revealed that parents' aspirations and expectations for children's educational success had the strongest correlation with students' academic achievement, whereas supervision or rules for children at home had the weakest correlation with academic achievement.

In Jeynes' (2007) meta-analysis of 52 studies on parental involvement, results indicated that once again parental involvement and parental involvement programs have a positive impact on children's academic achievement. Similar to Fan and Chen, he found that certain aspects of parental involvement such as parental style and expectations influence student success more than others such as household rules or parent participation at school. In addition, Desimone's research utilizing 12 indicators of parental involvement showed that students' grades are affected more by parental involvement than standardized test scores (1999).

Since research has shown the importance of partnerships between schools and homes as indicated above, it would benefit educators to encourage parental involvement in their schools. Joyce Epstein is one of the researchers that have created a six part typology of parental involvement in schools over the

years with her colleagues (1992; Desimone, 1999; Fan & Chen, 2001). This typology is well recognized as ways for parents and schools to work together to educate children. The six components are as follows:

1. the obligation of families to provide parenting practices that prepare children for school,
2. the obligation of schools to communicate with families,
3. providing school volunteer opportunities,
4. involving parents in learning activities at home,
5. involving parents in school decision-making, and
6. school-community collaboration (pp. 1145-1146).

All of these components of parental involvement can be beneficial to the success of children at school. Therefore, this model can serve as a guide for school administrators when designing and implementing parent programs.

“Parents have a strong impact on their children’s success. [They] are key contributors to the learning process as a result of their position in the home and their subsequent participation in children’s overall development” (Snodgrass, 1991, pp. 83 & 86). For that matter, parents cannot be ignored when it comes to the educational process of children. According to Myers and Monson (1992, p. 14), the benefits of parental involvement include:

1. high achievement
2. improved school attendance
3. improved student sense of well-being
4. improved student behavior

5. better parent and student perceptions of classroom and school climate
6. better readiness to complete homework
7. higher educational aspirations among students and parents
8. better student grades
9. increased educational productivity of the time that parents and students spend together, and
10. greater parent satisfaction with teachers.

Therefore, high levels of parental support should be advocated in schools. As evidenced in this paper parental support and involvement can be displayed in many ways. Nonetheless, the important concept is for educators to understand that all aspects of parental involvement are beneficial to student success. For this reason, “meaningful parent participation [in schools must be recognized] as essential for effective schooling” (Comer & Haynes, 1991, p.276).

### ***Parents and Choice.***

School choice programs have been advocated for over half of a century. In the 1950s, economist Milton Friedman advocated the use of school vouchers as a way to end a failing public educational system in America (Friel, 2005; Witte, 2000). Since that time, Friedman and other school choice advocates have exclaimed that educational choice options are a way to improve public schools since failing public schools would be forced to close in a consumer approach to education (Friel, 2005). Whether these advocates are correct or not still remains to be seen; however, in the current educational system in America, schools cannot ignore the power that parents have as consumers of educational choice.



There is a continuum of school choice options that covers public schools or “residence choice,” academies/magnet schools, charter schools, voucher programs, and eventually ends with choice options available under NCLB (Godwin & Kemerer, 2002; U. S. Department of Education, 2001). Over the past decade school choice options have spread across the U.S. dramatically. In the past some parents have utilized choice options by selecting where to reside or choosing to send their children to private or specialized schools. However, under NCLB the choices for many parents have been expanded due to the choice provisions of the act. Under NCLB parents can elect to send their children to a charter school or another public school, once the home school enters into school improvement status for not meeting adequately yearly progress (AYP) (U. S. Department of Education, 2001). In addition, transportation must also be provided by the district for these students until the home school is no longer in school improvement status. For these reasons, NCLB has definitely expanded the notion of parents as consumers of education and as having a right to choose where their child attends school.

School choice advocates argue that the goals of the reform are to improve education and offer parents more control over the educational process (Lanis, 1999). As evidenced by the school choice policies all across the nation, parents are surely empowered now more than ever to select the school of their child and be a part of the educational process. For this reason, educators cannot ignore the demands or desires of these educational consumers. Consequently, fully

acknowledging and understanding the views of parents in the educational process is now a concept that cannot be ignored.

### **Educational Reform**

The 1960s and the establishment of the Title I Act of 1965 marked the beginning of the nationwide school reform movement in the United States that still exists today. Title I was the first big effort to reform the American education system, specifically in underprivileged areas. The goal of Title I was to help improve education by providing financial assistance to impoverished areas or districts serving impoverished children (Borman, 2005). Since the enactment of Title I in 1965, the school reform movement has gone through what Borman (2005) calls four stages of reform.

The first stage of school reform was during the late 1960s. The Title I Act of 1965 called for ensuring that children were provided additional services to supplement their education and meet their needs. The act provided federal money to school districts, but it had very loose guidelines for district implementation or use of the funds. This stage of reform has been characterized as lacking research-based practices proven to help increase the achievement of underprivileged children (Borman, 2005).

The second stage of school reform was during the 1970s and early 1980s. Due to the loose guidelines of the original enactment of the Title I Act of 1965, the federal government decided to put more regulations or guidelines in place during this era to direct the use of the Title I funds by the school districts

(Borman, 2005). The programs still focused on providing additional or support services to students to increase achievement.

The third stage of school reform during the 1980s and early 1990s was marked by accountability measures. This reform era was influenced by the National Commission on Excellence in Education's, *A Nation at Risk* report. *A Nation at Risk* raised concerns about America's educational system, and sparked the need for standards in education (Borman, 2005). In 1994, Title I was reauthorized with requirements to state educational systems to implement accountability measures to ensure that students were benefiting from the use of the funds provided by the federal government (Borman, 2005). Therefore, this reform era was a period marked by the implementation of educational standards and higher expectations within school systems all across America.

The current stage of reform began in the 1990s and is still playing out in the American educational system. It is marked by the implementation of research-based programs that are aimed at improving the quality of education for all students. In 1998, the federal government started the Comprehensive School Reform Program (CSRP) that gave money to schools that were geared towards "scientifically-based" reform efforts (Borman, 2005). The CSRP was incorporated into the reauthorization of Title I in January of 2002 under the new name of the No Child Left Behind Act. The impact of NCLB and the trend of implementing research-based programs proven to improve or enhance education is still taking place today.

Researchers such as Brower (2006) argue that research-based methods of school reform that are proven to work must be utilized in order to maximize the potential of the educational system. Over the years, strategies specifically for urban school reform have included items such as implementing standards and assessments, training programs, and choice options to name a few (Hill and Harvey, 2004). One of the popular reform movements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the small schools movement. The small schools movement is aimed at addressing the needs of students by placing them in smaller environments that are conducive to learning (ARI/SRI, 2006). Utilizing the small schools reform in high schools across the nation in the last decade has been aided by the financial support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

### **Small Schools**

Small school researchers generally address topics such as academic achievement, attendance rates, graduation and/or dropout rates, student attitudes and behavior, and student participation in extracurricular activities. Many studies have yielded positive results in the direction of smaller school size (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Grabe, 1981; Haller, 1992; Lee & Smith, 1995; Lindsay, 1982; Schoggen & Schoggen, 1988; Wasley et al., 2000). In a review of over 50 documents of research and literature on small schools, Kathleen Cotton (2001) found the following results pertaining to small schools:

1. Academic performance in small schools is higher than the performance in large schools.
2. Small schools have higher graduation rates.

3. Small schools have higher student attendance rates.
4. Small schools are better at preparing and steering students toward college.
5. Students are better behaved at small schools.
6. Students feel more connected or have a greater sense of belonging at small schools.
7. There is more parental involvement and parent satisfaction at small schools.
8. There is increased extra-curricular student participation at small schools.
9. Teachers are more satisfied in small schools.

***Student Achievement.***

In 1991, Fowler and Walberg investigated the effect of school and district characteristics such as school size, number of schools in a district, teacher characteristics, socio-economic status (SES) and low-income families on various educational outcomes, including student achievement, school activities, college attendance, and retention. Statistical regression showed that SES and the percentage of students from low-income families in the school were the most consistent and influential factors related to school outcomes. The results also showed that large school size was negatively related to student achievement.

Lee and Smith (1995) evaluated the effect of the high school reform movement or restructuring on student achievement and engagement. Their results indicated students who attended schools with practices consistent with

the restructuring movement learned significantly more than those who attended schools that did not have these practices, and the same applied for students attending smaller schools. Results also indicated that students in smaller schools and schools with restructuring practices were more engaged in their academic courses. Lee and Smith's research has also led to indications that smaller schools are better at closing the achievement gap.

In a study of Chicago schools, Wasley et al. (2000) also found an increase in academic achievement in small schools. They state, "The relationship between school size and student achievement suggests that students' attachment, persistence, and performance are all stronger in the small schools as compared to the system at large," (2000, p. 20). Their study also noted that smaller schools had an increase in attendance rates, lower dropout rates, improvements in behavior, parents that were more satisfied, teachers that were more connected with the parents and students that felt safer (Wasley et al., 2000).

### ***Student Behavior and Morale.***

Haller, Edington and Gardener are some of the researchers looking at student attitudes and behavior. In 1992, Haller investigated student behavior in relationship to school size. He asked the question of whether the creation of large rural schools is likely to increase student disciplinary issues. Data was used from the High School and Beyond (HS&B) survey of 1980 and 1982 to determine whether it was the smallness or ruralness of small rural schools that was responsible for the lower levels of student misbehavior as compared to large urban or suburban schools. The results were inconclusive in terms of determining

if it was the small school size or the ruralness that accounted for the observed differences in discipline. They also indicated that consolidating small rural schools into larger schools would only create a small increase in discipline problems. However, other small school researchers and advocates have noted a decrease in student discipline problems and violence and better behavior in smaller schools (Raywid, 1998; Wasley et al., 2000).

Edington and Gardener's 1984 study addressed the relationship between school size and learning in the areas of communication attitude, attitude towards school, character, cooperation, and change, otherwise known in this study as the affective domain. Their results indicated that students in smaller schools had more positive attitudes in the affective domain toward their schools and themselves.

Public Agenda, a non-profit organization, conducted a survey of public school teachers and parents with children in public schools. The survey results indicated that more people believed that smaller schools had a stronger sense of belonging and community among the students, students are more alienated or socially isolated in larger schools, and larger schools have more discipline problems (Johnson, 2002). However, the survey also revealed that more parents did not feel that school size was particularly important in determining where to send their child to school.

### ***Student Participation.***

In the area of student participation, Schoggen and Schoggen (1988) used 10,412 seniors in 27 non-urban public high schools from New York State to study

the relationship between high school size and student participation in voluntary extracurricular school activities. They used the lists of members given under or near the photographs of student activity groups in the yearbooks as the source for participation in school activities. Regression analysis revealed on average higher levels of participation in activities at smaller schools than at larger schools.

Lindsay and Grabe have also conducted studies on school size and student participation rates. Lindsay (1982) examined the relationship between school size and student participation, satisfaction and attendance rates of high school seniors across the United States. Student participation was measured in four categories: athletics, drama, music, and debating. Student satisfaction was examined in relation to academic work and overall total experience, and attendance rates were reported by school administrators. School location, socio-economic status, and academic ability were controlled for in the study. Data was obtained from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS), and the results indicated higher participation, satisfaction and attendance rates for students at smaller schools.

In 1981, Grabe investigated school size in relationship to student participation in school activities, their self-concepts, and their feelings of alienation. Twenty high schools in the state of Iowa decided to participate in the study, and the students consisted of 803 male and 759 females from the 20 schools. Students completed a questionnaire concerning school activities, an alienation scale constructed by Kunkel, Thompson and McElhinney, and the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. Students at smaller schools were shown to



participate in more school activities and had more strong feelings of personal self-worth. However, students of smaller schools were also found to be more alienated and the researcher discussed possible reasons for that outcome.

### ***Relationships.***

Another important characteristic of small schools exclaimed by supporters is better interpersonal relationships. In smaller schools, students and teachers usually have more contact time, which should lead to more opportunities to get to know each other and build relationships (Copland & Boatright, 2004). It is important to note that these relationships are not only with students and school personnel but also extend to the parents of the children in the small schools. As Copland and Boatright (2004, p. 768) state, "Small schools foster deeper, more robust connections with families and community. Successful small school leaders take advantage of a unique opportunity to touch every parent and every family in their communities and to involve these parties in ways that are simply impossible for the staff of large, comprehensive schools." In addition, Cotton (2001) points out that parent involvement in small schools is critical and much easier to accomplish than in larger schools. Therefore, the relationships built in small schools are considered one of the keys to their success (Vander Ark, 2002).

Overall, the benefits of small schools have been captured by many researchers. Small schools advocates suggests that better relationships with parents, students, and staff, distributed leadership, increased achievement, community engagement, better discipline, lower drop-out rates, more student participation, and site specific professional development are all reasons that

smaller schools are more successful than larger schools (Vander Ark, 2002).

Wasley et al. (2000) suggests that smaller schools yield the previously

mentioned results because of the following reasons:

- Teachers engage students with broader strategies.
- Teachers have high expectations for students.
- Teachers know students well.
- There is more accountability between students, parents and teachers.
- Teachers are more satisfied and work better with colleagues (p. 34-37).

Small school advocates believe that all of these results are more than sufficient evidence that smaller schools are better environments that are more conducive to learning for children.

### ***Creating Small Schools.***

Small school research is continuously being conducted as this type of school reform is currently at the forefront of America's high school reform efforts. Researchers such as Fouts and Associates are being hired to evaluate the effects of the small school reform in order to better guide school administrators when developing or converting to small school structures. In an evaluation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's high school conversion initiative, Fouts, Baker, Brown, and Riley (2006) offer the following recommendations to administrators when converting to small schools:

1. School leaders must focus their efforts on the human and organizational dynamics and barriers and on becoming change agents.

2. Begin with the moral imperative of why the school must change – and keep that message in front of the educators and the public throughout the process.
3. Once leaders have established the moral imperative to change, they must focus their efforts on ensuring that teachers view small learning communities (SLC) (or small schools) as a means to an end and on professional development activities for teachers that enable them to take advantage of the opportunities that SLCs provide.
4. Leadership must make a careful assessment of the degree of support the conversion has among teachers, district administrators and board members and plan and act accordingly.
5. Leaders in the conversion process must anticipate and plan for the human factors that will impede conversion to SLCs and other changes.
6. Leaders must anticipate and plan for the potential problems with the phase-in and full-implementation approaches, with the thematic and generic models, with contiguous space, and with student fidelity to the SLC (pp. 10-13).

The aforementioned recommendations are based on the issues or concerns that the evaluators of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's initiative encountered when evaluating the program. Although this is just one of the small school evaluations, other researchers such as Mohr and Dichter (2002) have also provided recommendations or insights into issues that administrators should

address when creating small schools. Their insights are described as needs that leaders must balance. Those needs include, but are not limited to the following:

- Wanting to provide choice/variety for adults and students without having to make hard decisions about what can be provided and what cannot.
- Knowing the importance of teachers spending time together developing curriculum and instructional strategies with knowing the importance of not overloading staff.
- Needing to have a clear plan to share with the community relative to the importance of getting parents and the community involved in the conversation early.
- Wanting to honor the varied subject matter area required/presented and wanting to respond to student interest with knowing that less is more.

The research conducted on the benefits of small school programs is compelling and comprehensive. However, the literature neglects to substantially examine the perspective of parents. As shown in the research mentioned above, the usual focus of small school research is student-centered, ignoring this other important stakeholder in the educational process. Parental satisfaction and support are key elements of a school districts ability to successfully educate children. Therefore, schools that are considering transitioning or continuing small school settings should take the parental view into consideration. The goal of this study is to gain insight into the parental perspective of school size. It is intended to determine how parents view school size and its impact on various educational outcomes.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions to be addressed are:

1. Do parents perceive differences in the academic environment of the large school as compared to the small schools?
2. Do parents perceive differences in student behavior and discipline in the large school as compared to the small schools?
3. Do parents perceive differences in student morale in the large school as compared to the small schools?
4. Do parents perceive differences in the student or parent relationships and interactions with school staff in the large school setting as compared to the small schools?

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Mixed Methods**

Mixed method studies use both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures. These procedures might include using statistical and narrative data, using closed and open-ended questions, or using predetermined as well as emerging questions to guide a research project (Creswell, 2003).

Although mixed method studies have been around since the beginning of the 1900s, the approach was not popularized until 1959 when researchers used it in a study of psychology (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In addition, the concept of triangulating multiple data sources, which was introduced in the late 1970s, has helped to strengthen the legitimacy of using mixed method designs (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Researchers argue that the advantages of using mixed method designs are the ability to gather a wide range of information while also gaining in-depth information, and being able to cover more viewpoints (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). It has been described as a way to get breadth and depth when answering

a question or explaining a problem (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). However, a challenge of using a mixed method design is that the researcher must be familiar with both quantitative and qualitative research methods and be capable of analyzing both numeric and narrative data (Creswell, 2003). Nonetheless, mixed method designs are beneficial because they may help a researcher to gain a better understanding of something when investigating and answering research questions.

This research project utilizes a mixed method design. It is considered mixed method because both quantitative and qualitative data were collected sequentially (Creswell, 2003). It is also considered mixed methods because the data were conveyed through descriptive words as well as numbers (Merriam, 2001). The research process for this study commenced with a quantitative approach by gathering data through a questionnaire that was distributed to a random sample of approximately 300 parents from Euclid High School. However, in the next stage of data collection, a qualitative research design was employed with a case study approach utilizing 10 individual interviews to collect detailed data about the parent perspective of school size. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized to compare and confirm findings from the different data sources in order to gain a better understanding of the information gathered (Creswell, 2003). The data obtained from the multiple methods were compared to enhance the internal validity and reliability of the results.

### ***Survey Design.***

This study began with a survey design using a questionnaire. Surveys or questionnaires give researchers the advantage of gathering information from large groups of people rather quickly (Gillham, 2000). They also have the advantage of being more efficient than others methods, relative to time. In addition, a structured closed-end questionnaire has pre-determined answers to select from, which can make the responses easy to analyze (Gillham, 2000). For these reasons, a questionnaire was utilized in this study to gather primary data that were analyzed and later compared to the data gathered from the individual interviews.

### ***Case Study.***

A case study is an in-depth analysis of something particular (Merriam, 2002). The case could be a group, a person, a school, a class or anything that can be described as a bounded system (Stake, 2000). The goal of a case study is to research, analyze, and tell the story of the specific case. A case study is not intended to be representative or used for generalizations. It is for the reader to determine when a case applies to another situation (Stake, 2000). Nonetheless, case studies are useful in many fields for various reasons. According to Olson (in Hoaglin, Light, McPeck, Mosteller, & Stoto, 1982, p. 138), some of the reasons a case study can be useful include the following:

- It can suggest to the reader what to do or what not to do in a similar situation.
- It has the advantage of hindsight, yet can be relevant in the present.



- It can explain why an innovation worked or failed to work.
- It can evaluate, summarize, and conclude, thus increasing its potential applicability.

Therefore, a case study can be a powerful learning tool in the educational arena.

Robert Stake (2000) describes case studies in three categories: intrinsic, instrumental, or collective. An intrinsic case study examines and portrays one particular case; however, an instrumental case has the intention to give information that can be generalized. A collective case study looks at several cases in order to examine an issue (p. 437). More specifically, qualitative case studies have been categorized as historical, observational, or life histories to name a few (Merriam, 2002). They can also be described by their purpose. There are descriptive case studies, interpretive case studies, and evaluative case studies (Merriam, 2001). All of the categories of case study research have one aspect in common, which is to give an intensive analysis and understanding of a specific unit.

A case study approach was utilized for this study because of its potential benefit to school administrators in understanding how parents have felt when it comes to school reform involving school size. It is a case because a particular group of parents from one high school were selected for interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of their perspective of school size. This study was intended to be evaluative since the information gathered and descriptions were beneficial in evaluating what this group of parents thought about school size and its effects on school outcomes. The goal was to try to explore and illuminate the opinion of

an educational stakeholder that is sometimes ignored when it comes to the educational process or decision-making in schools. Therefore, this case tells the story of parents who have had personal experience with changes in school size for their children, and express their overall opinion on the issue of school size reform in their particular school district.

## **Instruments**

### ***Questionnaire.***

The questionnaire used in this study was developed by the researcher. It used a four point likert type scale, which was intended to eliminate neutral responses and ensure that participants had to make a choice (see Appendix A). The items included on the questionnaire were determined by a thorough examination of the literature on small schools. The prominence of issues such as school size, academics, behavior, morale, extra-curricular participation, and relationships can be found in many articles and books on small schools (Edington & Gardener, 1984; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Grabe, 1981; Johnson, 2002; Lee & Smith, 1995; Raywid, 1998; Schoggen & Schoggen, 1988; Wasley et al., 2000). After reviewing the literature, it was evident that these items were appropriate to associate with a school size measure. Nonetheless, when developing a questionnaire, one must ensure that the psychometric issues have been addressed. In order to ensure the content validity of this questionnaire several individuals with Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.) degrees were asked to evaluate the items to determine if they were characteristics that pertain to school size. Based on the feedback from the raters, one item was deleted from the

questionnaire. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was then used to calculate the inter-rater reliability following the procedure of Ebel (1951).

According to the Ebel formula,  $r = \frac{MS_r - MS_e}{MS_r}$ , the reliability coefficient of this

school size questionnaire was  $r = 1.0$ , indicating inter-rater agreement. In

addition, a content validity ratio (CVR) was calculated for all of the items on the

questionnaire using the formula provided by Lawshe (1975),  $CVR = \frac{n_e - N \div 2}{N \div 2}$ ,

whereas  $n_e$  = the number of experts rating the item as a characteristic and  $N$  =

the total number of experts rating the questionnaire. The mean CVR for this

questionnaire was .95. The individual CVR value for each item is listed in Table

1.

Although closed-end questionnaires are a good way to find out how people evaluate certain items regarding school size, they do not necessarily tell you why people selected certain responses. The questionnaire used in this study provided insight on the parents' perceptions regarding school size and its impact on educational outcomes; however, the other qualitative methods were employed to gain an in-depth understanding of how parents felt about the school size dilemma.

Table 1

*Content Validity Ratios*

Item	CVR
School size	1
Adequacy of course offerings	.33
School's academic achievement	1
Student behavior	1
Student morale	1
Students' sense of community/belonging	1
Availability of extra-curricular activities	1
Student-administrator relationships	1
Student-teacher relationships	1
Administrator accessibility	1
Teacher accessibility	1
Parent-teacher relationships	1
Parent-administrator relationships	1
Parental involvement	1

***Semi-structured Interviews.***

Interviewing is a way to learn about a topic through someone's experience (Siedman, 1991). It allows the researcher to gather descriptive data from participants so the researcher can try to determine individual perspectives and relay them in the words of the participants. Interviews help the researcher to find

out the participants' views (Merriam, 2001). Semi-structured interviews ensure that the researcher has some way of comparing the data obtained because the conversation is somewhat guided with questions about a relevant topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

This study used a semi-structured interviewing format where participants were sometimes asked to elaborate on a question in an open-ended format in order to elicit more information and gain a clearer understanding of their perspectives. This type of interviewing format was selected to obtain as much information as possible about the parents' perspective of the school size structure. The semi-structured interview questions were developed from the literature regarding school size (see Appendix B).

### **Sample**

In order to try to reduce bias, only 10<sup>th</sup>-grade parents were selected for participation in this study so that they would have had approximately one year of the small high school setting and one year of the large high school setting. At the time of this study there were 443 students in the 10<sup>th</sup>-grade at Euclid High School. One hundred fifty parents of those 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students were randomly selected to complete the questionnaires during the first round of distribution. Due to a low response rate during the first round, another 150 parents of the remaining 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students were randomly selected to complete the questionnaires in a second round of distribution. The final response rate for the questionnaires was 14%. The individual interview participants were selected on a

first come first serve basis from those 10<sup>th</sup>-grade parents who volunteered to participate.

### **Procedure**

Three hundred randomly selected parents of 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students were sent the school size questionnaire devised by the researcher to complete regarding Euclid High School. During both rounds of distribution, every fourth person from the list of 10<sup>th</sup>-grade parents was selected to receive a questionnaire to complete the randomization process. The questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the research being conducted, introducing the researcher, and asking for consent for participation. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it along with the consent form to the researcher in the provided pre-paid envelope. The parents were also asked to enter their contact information on the appropriate form (see Appendix C) if they would like to complete an individual interview about the school size structure at Euclid High School. They were offered the opportunity to be entered in a drawing for a \$25.00 Visa gift card for their participation in the individual interview session.

Ten out of twelve participants were selected from the responses to complete the semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The interviews were approximately one hour in length and were conducted at the local library or over the telephone for convenience. The interviews proceeded until the researcher believed that data saturation had been achieved. All interviews were audio

recorded and transcribed in order to conduct data analysis. Brief notes were also taken during the interview sessions.

## **Analysis**

All of the data collected through the various research methods were analyzed and compared to gain an in-depth understanding of parental perspectives on school size. First, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data. Then categories or themes for the qualitative data were pre-determined from the research questions and the literature on school size. In addition, there was also a category called “other” that was utilized when important information was presented that did not fit into any of the existing categories. Each of the categories were assigned a color for representation. As the researcher read through the transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews, responses were highlighted with the colors that corresponded to the applicable categories. Then a matrix was developed with each category heading and the names of the participants (see Appendix D). The comments from the interview sessions were placed under the proper categories based on color-coding. Finally, the qualitative data were analyzed to identify recurring patterns or themes that cut across the data. The themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis were compared and integrated with the data collected from the questionnaires. The final results were a consensus determined from all of the analysis of the data collected.

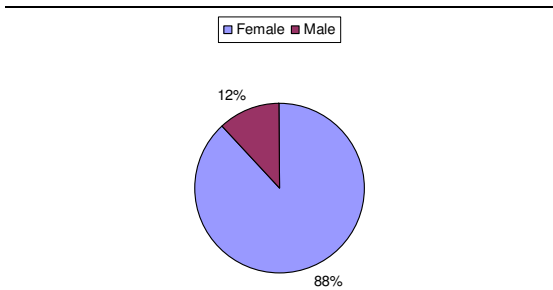
## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

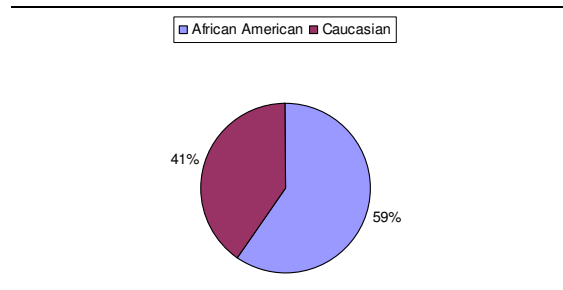
#### **Quantitative Data**

There were a total of 42 questionnaires returned out of the 300 that were distributed. The demographic information revealed that the mean age of the questionnaire participants was 43.90 with a standard deviation of 7.037. Eighty-eight percent of the participants were female and 12% were male (see Figure 1). The racial composition was 59.5% African American and 40.5% Caucasian (see Figure 2). In addition, the data revealed that the majority of parents had students that previously attended the International Academy of Accelerated Achievement, 26.2%, with STEM coming in second place with 21.4%, and Business and Communication following behind with 16.7%. The complete composition of previous small schools attended by the children of the participants is listed in Figure 3.

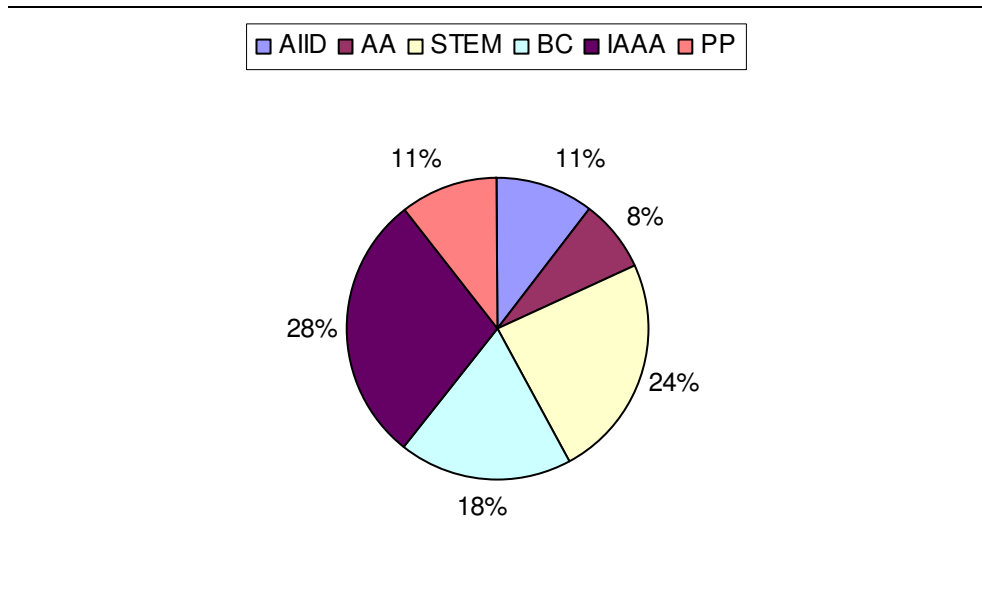




*Figure 1. Questionnaire Respondents by Gender*



*Figure 2. Questionnaire Respondents by Race*



*Figure 3. Composition of Respondents by Child's Previous Small School*

There were fourteen items on the questionnaire distributed to the tenth grade parents. The number of responses for each item as well as the mean and standard deviation of each item is listed in Table 2.

Table 2

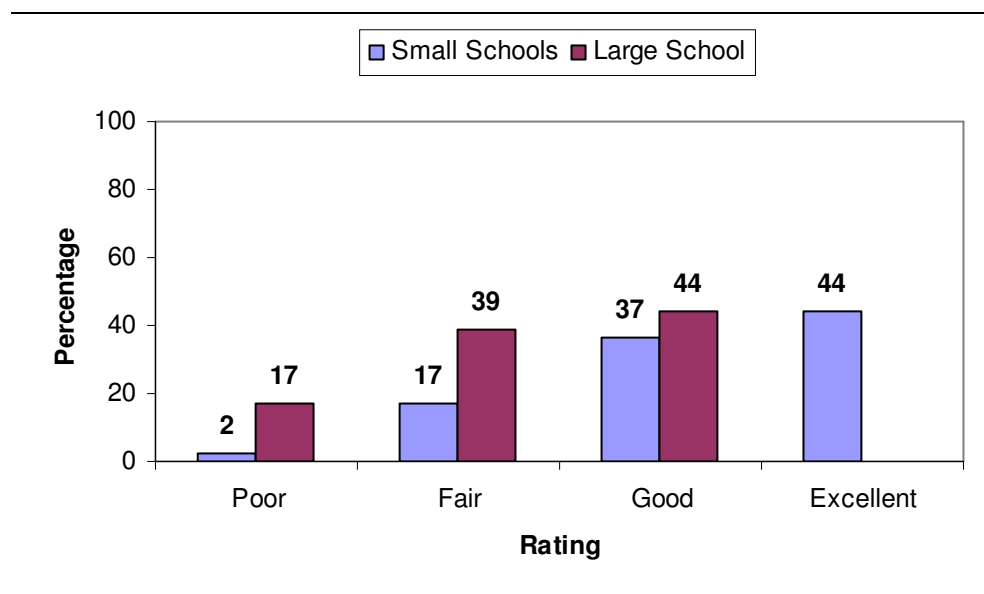
*Questionnaire Items Descriptive Statistics*

Item	Small Schools			Large School		
	N	Mean	St. Dev.	N	Mean	St. Dev.
School size	41	3.22	0.822	41	2.27	0.742
Adequacy of course offerings	42	3.05	0.854	42	2.76	0.821
School's academic achievement	41	2.83	0.834	40	2.22	0.800
Student behavior	42	2.79	0.842	42	2.12	0.832
Student morale	41	2.83	0.946	42	2.26	0.912
Students' sense of community/belonging	42	2.86	0.926	42	2.33	0.874
Availability of extra-curricular activities	42	3.21	0.750	42	3.14	0.783
Student-administrator relationships	41	2.98	0.908	41	2.41	0.805
Student-teacher relationships	42	3.05	0.882	42	2.48	0.833
Administrator accessibility	41	2.88	0.872	41	2.51	0.810
Teacher accessibility	42	3.00	0.855	42	2.62	0.854
Parent-teacher relationships	42	3.00	0.883	42	2.50	0.862
Parent-administrator relationships	41	2.78	0.909	41	2.56	0.808
Parental involvement	42	2.57	0.966	42	2.38	0.795

**Quantitative Results**

In order to determine parental perceptions on school size, the respondents began with rating the category of school size on the questionnaire. They had to

rate the small schools and the large schools on a scale of one to four with one being poor and four being excellent. From the very first item on this questionnaire it was evident that the parents were more favorable to smaller school sizes. Eighty-one percent of the parents surveyed rated the small schools as excellent or good when it comes to school size, whereas none of the parents rated the large school as excellent and only 44% rated it as good. Figure 4 shows that when it comes to just evaluating school size these parents definitely preferred the smaller school design.

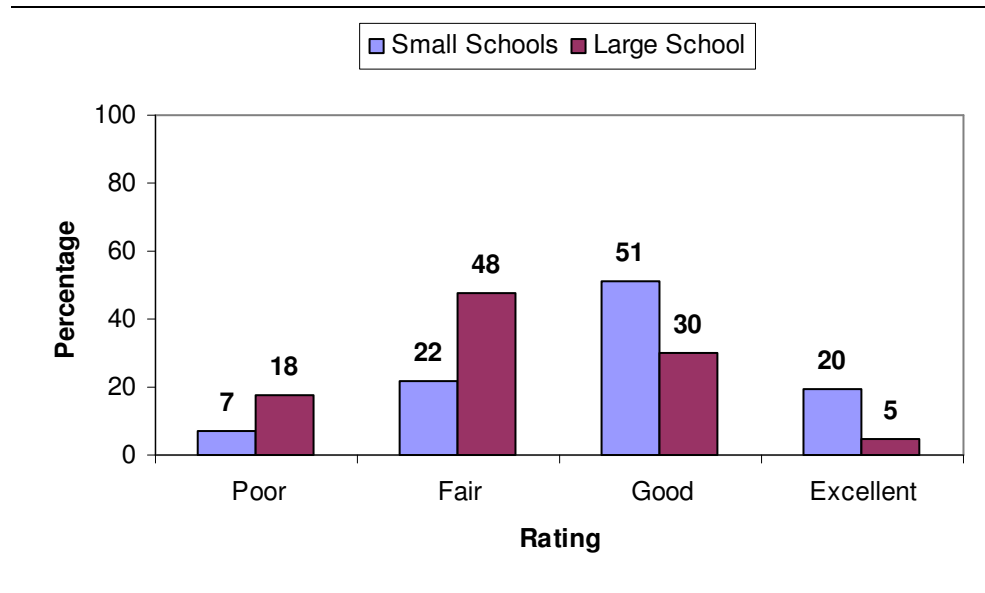


*Figure 4. Parent Evaluation of School Size Item on Questionnaire*

### ***Academics.***

Academic achievement and course offerings were used as indicators of academic perception at the high school. The results indicated that the perception of achievement was slightly higher in the small schools. Seventy-one percent of parents rated the small schools' academic achievement as either good or

excellent, but only 35% rated the large school as good or excellent. Moreover, 48% of the parents perceived the large school's academic achievement as only fair, and 51% rated the small schools' academic achievement as good (see Figure 5).



*Figure 5. Academic Achievement Evaluation on Questionnaire*

The opinions of the course offerings at the small schools versus the large school were slightly more evenly distributed. Twenty-six percent of the parents surveyed regarded the course offerings of both the small schools and the large school as fair. In addition, 72% rated the small schools' offerings as either good or excellent, and 67% rated the large school's offerings the same as shown in Figure 6.

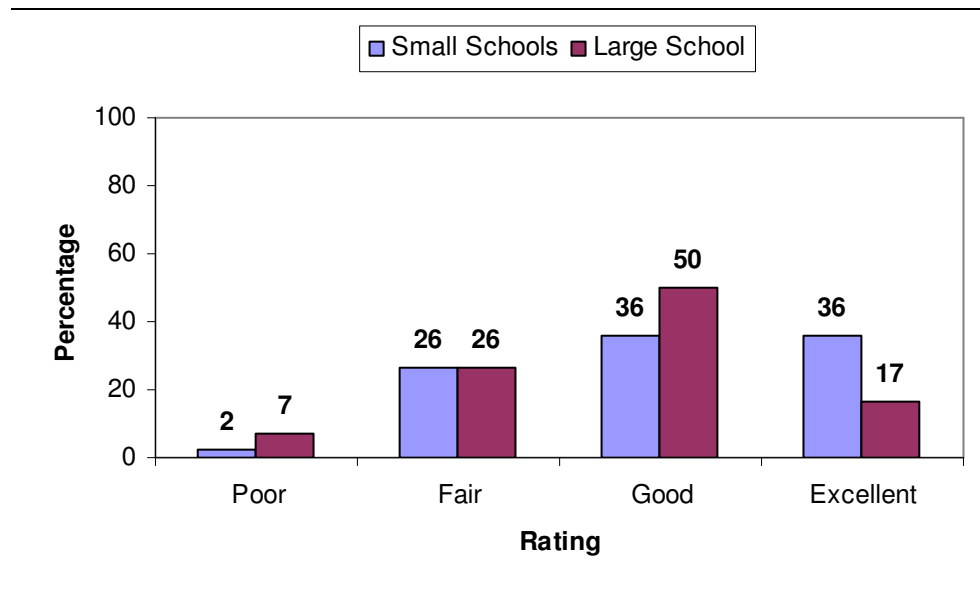


Figure 6. Parent Evaluation of Course Offerings

### ***Behavior and Discipline.***

Student behavior was evaluated as the quantitative indicator of behavior at the high school. Again, the small school setting fared slightly higher than the large school setting in this area. Fifty-five percent of the parents rated the behavior at the small schools as good, whereas 45% of the parents rated the large school as fair. Only 17% of the parents surveyed thought the behavior of the small school was excellent, but that was more than three times the 5% of parents that rated the large school as excellent (see Figure 7).

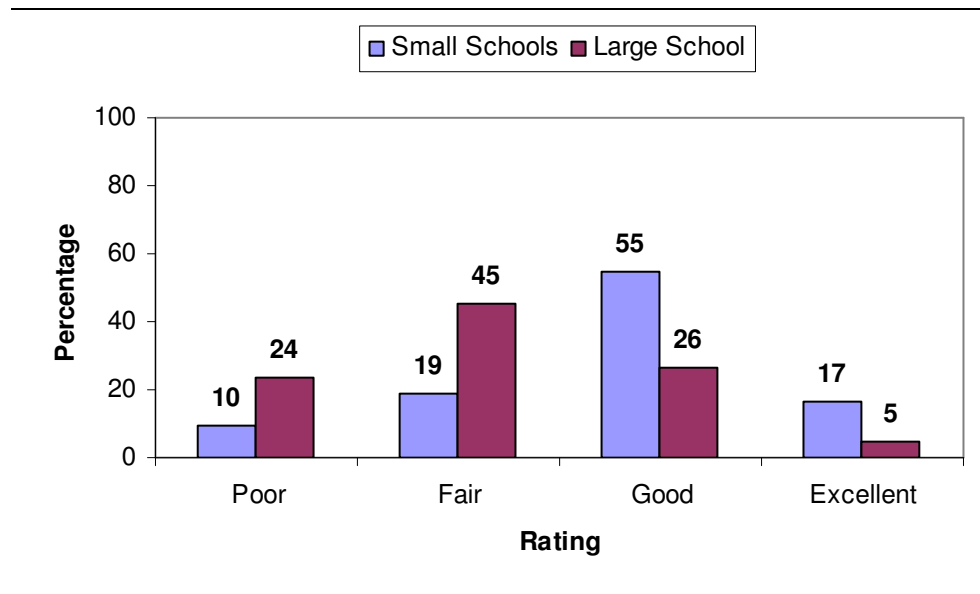
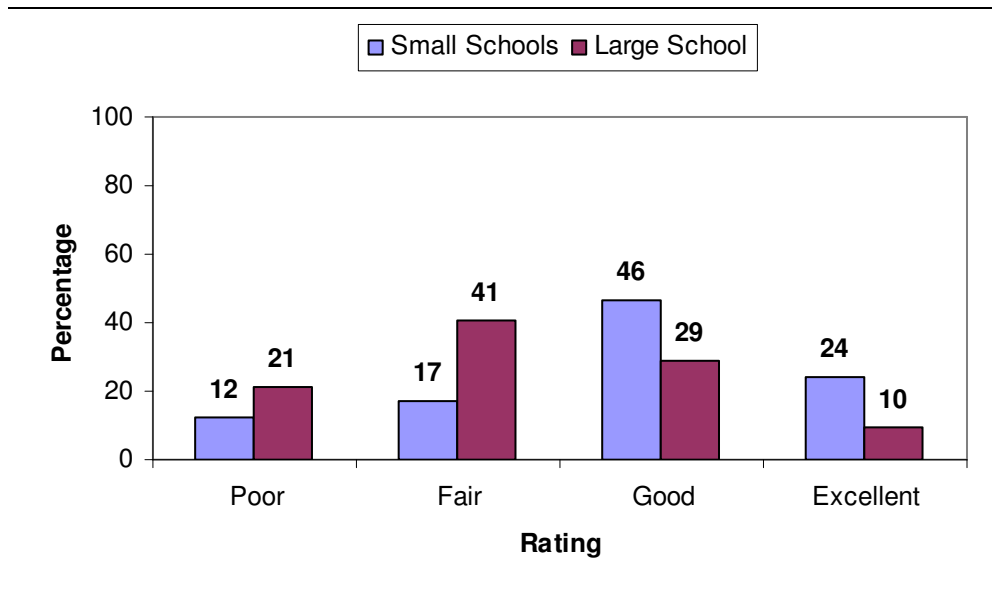


Figure 7. Student Behavior Evaluation by Parents

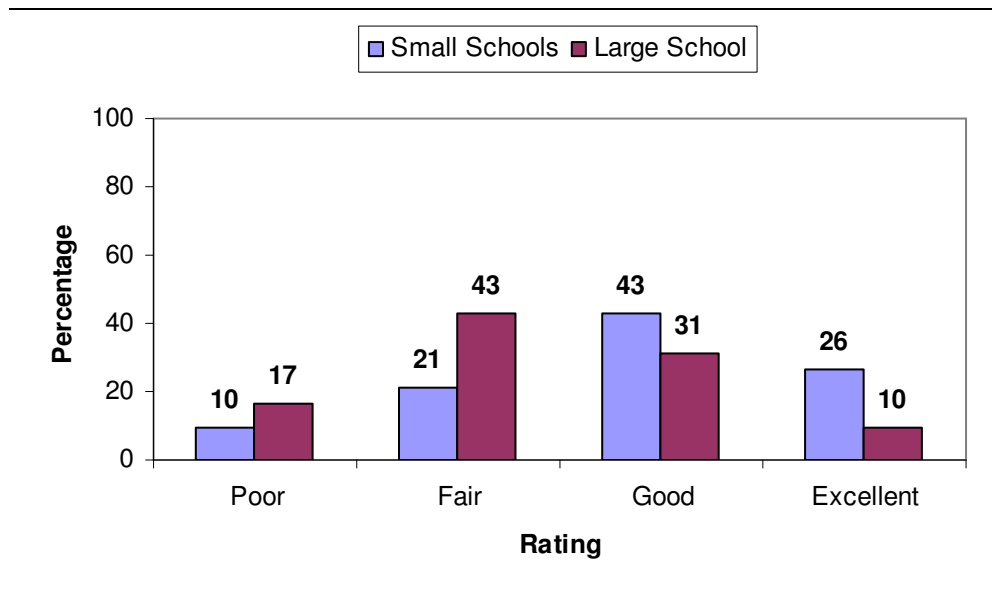
**Morale.**

Student morale at the schools was accessed using three items: morale, students’ sense of belonging/connectedness, and extra-curricular activities and participation. When asked directly about the student morale at the school, the respondents reported that it has decreased since converting to the large school. A combined 70% of parents surveyed reported the student morale in the small schools as either good or excellent, whereas 39% reported the large school as good or excellent. In addition, when asked about the students’ sense of belonging or connectedness to the school, the scores of the small schools were also rated more favorably than the large school. Under the small schools the students’ sense of belonging was considered good by 46% of parents surveyed and excellent by 26% of parents. Thirty-one percent of the parents rated the large school as good and 10% rated it as excellent. Forty-three percent of

parents in this study rated the large school as being fair in this category. Figures 8 and 9 display the comparisons in these areas.



*Figure 8. Parents' Perception of Student Morale*



*Figure 9. Parents' Perception of Students' Sense of Belonging/Connectedness*

Extra-curricular activities and participation is the last area that was utilized to evaluate student morale at the schools. The evaluations were very similar in

both the small schools and large school when parents rated the amounts of activities available to students. There was a 48% good rating in the small schools and a 45% good rating in the large school. The small schools also had a 38% excellent rating in this area compared to a 36% excellent rating in the large school. The ratings on this item indicate that the extra-curricular participation comparison in both size structures is practically the same as shown in Figure 10.

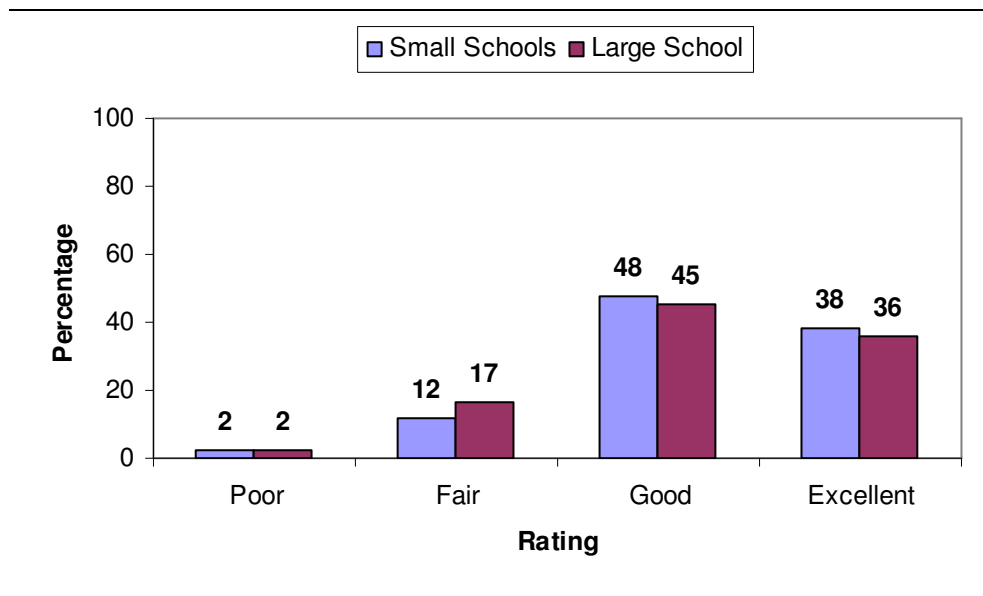


Figure 10. Extra-Curricular Activities Evaluation

***Relationships and Interactions.***

The survey results from this study revealed that the comparisons of the relationships in the small schools and the large school were the same for the parent items; however, the student items favored the small schools over the large school. For instance, parent-teacher relationships were equally rated good at 52%, but the student-teacher relationships were rated good or excellent at a



combined 78% for the small schools, compared to a combined 51% in those categories for the large school (see Figures 11 and 12).

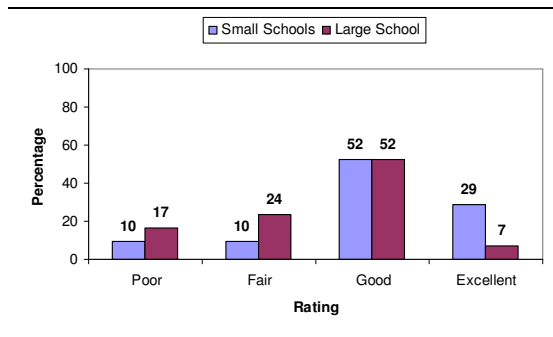


Figure 11. Parent-Teacher Relationships

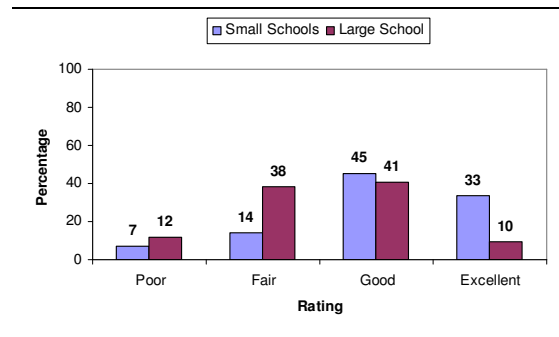


Figure 12. Student-Teacher Relationships

The parent-administrator relationships were also close in comparison with a 51% good rating in the small schools and a 46% good rating in the large school. However, when evaluating the student-administrator relationships, 42% rated the small schools as good compared to 49% rating the large school as fair (see figures 13 and 14). Therefore, the small schools showed a slight advantage over the large school in the aspect of student-administrator relationships, just as they did in the area of student-teacher relationships.

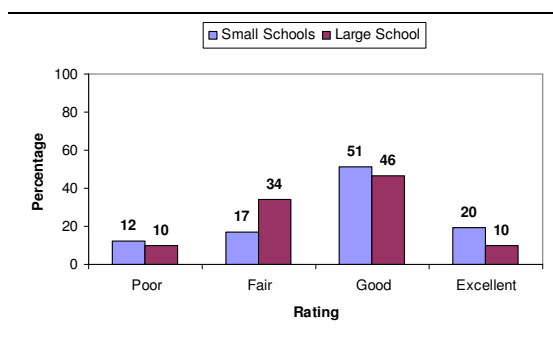


Figure 13. Parent-Administrator Relationships

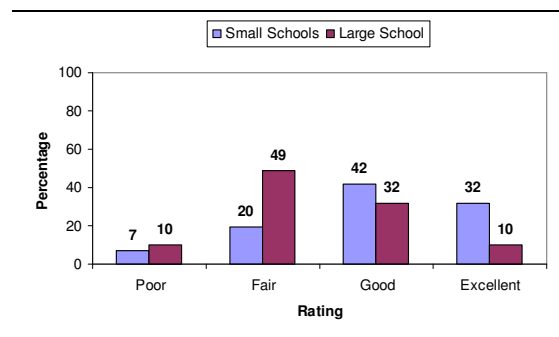


Figure 14. Student-Administrator Relationships

Teacher and administrator accessibility were similar indicating that the interactions in the school are considered about the same. The surveys showed that 43% of parents rated both the small schools and the large school as being good in the area of teacher accessibility, and administrator accessibility was rated as 46% good in the small schools and 49% good in the large school (see Figures 15 and 16).

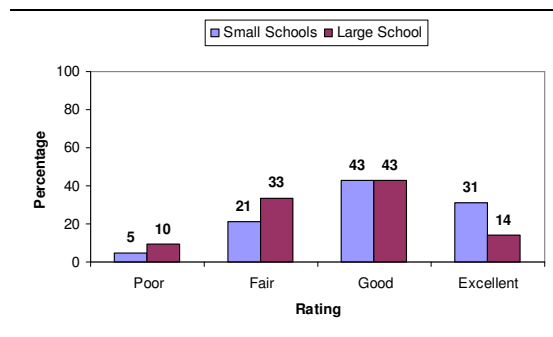


Figure 15. Teacher Accessibility

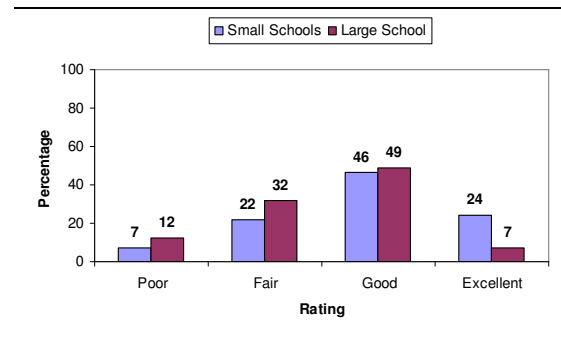


Figure 16. Administrator Accessibility

Parental involvement was the other area used to evaluate interactions with the school. The survey data revealed that parental involvement at Euclid High School has remained the same regardless of the school size. Parental involvement was rated as good in the small schools by 33% of parents and 36% in the large school. It was rated as fair in the small schools by 33% of parents and 45% in the large school (see Figure 17).

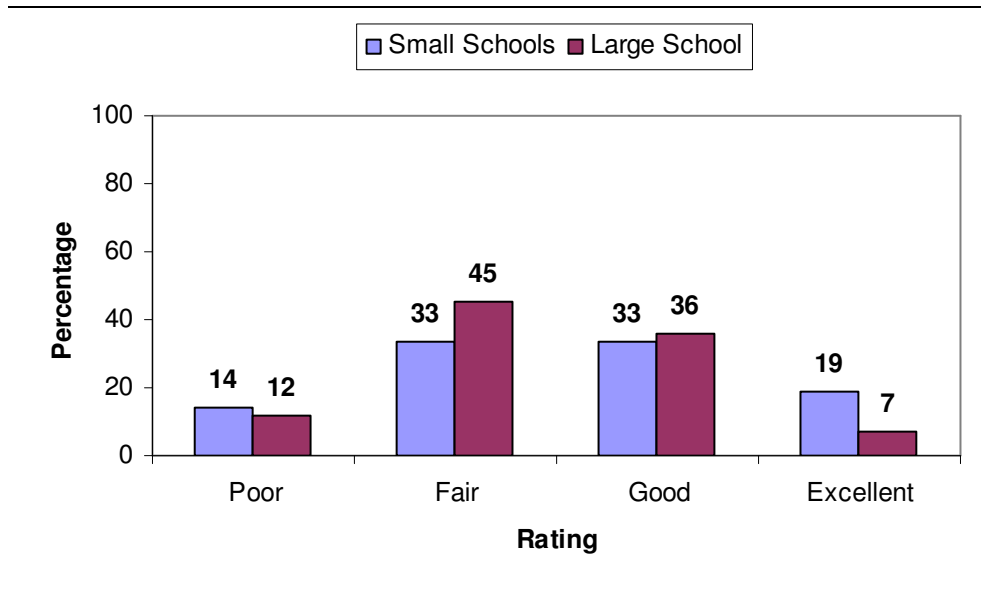


Figure 17. Parental Involvement Evaluation

### Qualitative Data

Ten individual interviews were also conducted to gather the data that are reported in this section. The demographic information from the interviews revealed that nine out of the ten participants were female (see Figure 18). Fifty percent of the participants were African American and 50% were Caucasian, as shown in Figure 19.

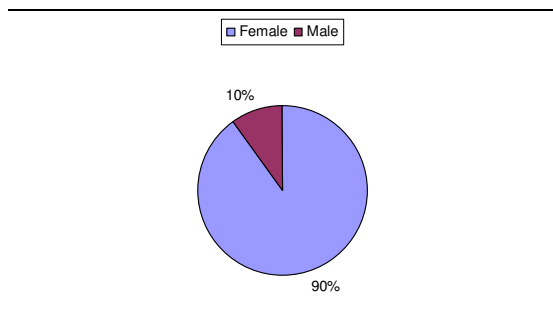


Figure 18. Interview Participants by Gender

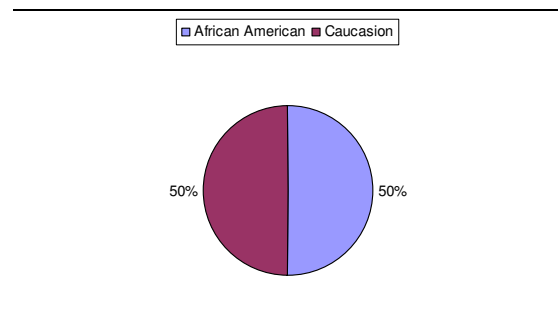


Figure 19. Interview Participants by Race

## **Qualitative Results**

### ***Academics.***

Three indicators were used to determine the parents' perception of the academic environment at the high school. The three indicators were course offerings, achievement, and student engagement. The qualitative data revealed that the majority of individuals felt that the academic achievement of the school was the same, with some variation of individual achievement. Small schools were reported to have better organization in their course offerings, and engagement with the coursework was determined to be more of an individual issue than a school size measure.

The resounding answer of the academic achievement of the school was that it was the same in the large school and the small schools. When asked about individual students' academic achievement, the majority of respondents reported that their child's achievement had remained the same. There were only a few participants that reported either a strong decrease or increase in grades after the transition to the large school. Therefore the results in the area of academic achievement appeared to be the same with a just a few individuals that experienced differences in achievement.

The evaluation of course offerings revealed that most parents felt like the offerings were the same, although many felt that the small schools had an advantage in the way the courses were organized. The organization of the small schools around thematic programs appeared to present more choices that were geared towards certain areas and that was appealing to some parents. On the

other hand, one parent commented that his “options increased with the large school” because his child was “no longer pigeon-holed into the offerings of his small school.” Nonetheless, the responses revealed that the course offerings were about the same in the large and small schools.

Last, the area of student engagement with coursework revealed that it was not a function of large versus small schools. Diane stated, “When you are in high school it is subject dependent. This is where they find out what they are good at, so it depends on the subject and the teacher.” Cathy also reported, “In certain classes my son was more engaged, it really just depended on the course.” Therefore, it appeared that the courses and the individual students’ interest determined how engaged the students were with their coursework more than the size of the school.

### ***Behavior and Discipline.***

Behavior and discipline were evaluated through the atmosphere at the schools, student behavior, and discipline at the schools. The atmospheres of the schools were reported to be better when there were small schools. Both Sue and Sarah described the atmosphere as “calm and pleasant” when there were small schools. The atmosphere of the large school was described as “wild” and “chaotic” by Linda and Sue. However, the behavior at the schools was reported as bad overall by several people. Kim stated, “The students were bad and disrespectful both years.” April stated, “It seems like the violence has escalated in general.” Karen said, “It seems like they just don’t have control over the kids.” In addition, Diane commented, “There were fights and craziness both years.” For

these reasons, behavior resulted in an area that appeared to be slightly better with small schools, but definitely needed to be improved overall.

The discipline at the large school had definitely changed compared to the small schools. Many parents reported the differences in the new rules that were implemented when the schools converted to the large school. The tardiness rules and consequences were mentioned several times as a major change. There were also comments about the consistency and expectations of the new leadership of the large school. Liz stated, "I would say it was a little bit better this year because I think the new principal had very firm expectations about how to go about the school day. I think there was less tolerance for certain behaviors." Sarah commented, "Physical fights were definitely being handled differently." Larry also stated that he was "very impressed with the handling of the discipline now." The comments of the parents portrayed the message that the discipline at the school was definitely different now under the one head principal at the high school.

***Morale.***

Morale at the school was evaluated through the categories of social life, school spirit, connectedness or feeling of belonging to the school, and participation in extra-curricular activities. The recurring theme from the individual interviews was that the morale of the students has been the same in the large and the small schools. All of the indicators were reported positively the majority of the time with only a few exceptions.

First, the social lives of the students were reported to be the same for the past two years. Most of the parents thought their children had good social lives and their relationships with peers had not changed with the school size structure. There were two individuals who had children that did not like the social experience they were having at the high school, but it did not change based on the school size. Additionally, the feelings of connectedness or belonging to the schools were directly connected to the social lives of the students, and did not change based on school size.

When looking at school spirit and participation in extra-curricular activities, the parents felt like school size was not a factor. Linda, April, Larry, Liz and Diane all reported that their children have been involved in the same activities since they entered the high school. Liz reported, "I don't think it has anything to do with small or large schools." Diane also stated, "I don't think that it (school size) might have a different effect on school spirit. I think it has no influence at all." Sue and Kim both reported their children "would participate whether the schools were large or small," indicating that the perception is that the size of the school had no impact on the students participation at the schools.

### ***Relationships and Interactions.***

Relationships and interactions with the schools was the last area of evaluation for this study and it was evaluated through relationships with the students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Parental involvement and communication were also included as indicators of interactions. The results showed that for the most part the relationships and interactions were the same in

the two school structures. However, there were some differences or mixed results in describing the communication between the parents and the schools.

The comparison of the relationships between students, parents, teachers and administrators showed a very similar comparison by many parents. However, it is important to note that a few of the parents felt like the small school setting produced better relationships between the students and the teachers. For instance, April indicated, "Schools were more intimate before, and it was more family-like. I think she would have felt more comfortable going to the teacher before than she did in the tenth grade." Nevertheless, the recurring theme of the interviews was that the relationships were often the same or very similar, including the student-teacher relationships. It is also important to note that many of the students were reported as not having a relationship with the principals at all if they did not get into trouble, and this could possibly explain why the results were considered the same in the two size structures.

Parental involvement is an area that was reported to need improvement regardless of the school size. Parents reported that the same parents have been involved with the schools over the past few years. Larry stated, "This is an area that really bugs me. The same core people would show up this year and last year to meetings and activities." Liz stated, "I saw the same parents over and over again." Some parents even admitted that they have not been as involved as they were when their children were younger. Therefore, the parental involvement at the high school level was reported as not being very high regardless of the school size.



Finally, the results in the area of communication with the schools were mixed. Several parents felt as though they were more informed, specifically with the small schools newsletters. However, there were several reports of extensive communication being sent from the new head principal at the large school. Liz stated, "I talked with some other parents and we said we should call and let him know that we appreciate all the communication. I think that it made me a lot more comfortable with the school." Larry also reported that the new principal sends out lots of voice messages and even uses "Twitter" messages on the Internet for communication. Therefore, the perceptions of the communication with the schools were mixed according to the qualitative data.

### **Analysis**

The results from the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed and compared to determine the final results to the questions in the study. Although there were some straight-forward answers to some of the questions presented there were also some areas that yielded positively in the direction of both the small schools and the large school.

#### ***Academics.***

Although the quantitative data revealed that the academic achievement of the small schools was perceived to be slightly higher than the large school, this perception was not validated through the qualitative data. In fact, the recurring theme of the qualitative analysis was that the school size structure did not affect the achievement at the school overall, nor did it affect the achievement of most of the individual children. In the area of course offerings, the quantitative data did

not reveal a difference in the parents' perceptions; however, the qualitative data showed that although some parents thought the course offerings of the schools were equivalent, they also thought the small school courses were more organized and in sync with their child's interest or goals. Therefore, it can be concluded that the parents' perception of the academic performance of the schools is that the overall achievement was slightly higher in the small schools, but that does not transcend to individual students. The second perception is that even though the course offerings are equivalent in the large and small schools, the grouping of the courses under themes, as was done with the small schools, is an advantage and more helpful to the parents.

#### ***Behavior and Discipline.***

In the area of behavior, the small schools were rated slightly higher than the large school. There were also reports that the atmospheres of the small schools were better. Nevertheless, the ratings and the reports from parents in both school size structures seem to indicate that there is room for improvement in this area. The reports of fighting, as well as behavior of the students in both settings seem to reveal that the parents' perception of behavior at the school is less than desirable, regardless of the school size.

Discipline at the large high school was definitely perceived as different when compared to the previous small schools. From the parents' reports it was evident that some welcomed the change while others did not. The parents indicated that with the conversion to the large school, came new leadership which led to new rules and expectations. However, due to the differences in

opinion of the parents, it cannot be determined as to which discipline policy was considered better.

### ***Morale.***

The quantitative data revealed a completely different picture than the qualitative data when it came to the area of morale. The questionnaires rated small schools more favorably than large schools when asked directly about morale. Even the category of sense of connectedness/belonging, which was used as an indication of morale, was more favorable to the small schools. On the other hand, all of the qualitative data indicated that morale was the same. In fact, during the qualitative phase of this study, morale was the one area that was very consistent as being the same across all indicators. Parents repeatedly reported either their children loved the school and had very high school spirit and participation, or they hated the school and were disenchanted regardless of the school size. There were more parents that reported positive experiences than those who reported negative experiences. Therefore, it can be concluded that individual experiences at the high school indicate that the morale in the large school is very comparable to the small school settings; however, many also believe that the overall morale at the small schools was slightly higher than it is with the large school.

### ***Relationships and Interactions.***

All of the indicators in the qualitative analysis revealed that the relationships in the large and small schools were very similar. However, there were two reports of very strong student-teacher relationships reported in the

small schools. The quantitative data analysis also revealed that the parent relationships in the schools were equivalent; however the student-teacher and student-administrator relationships stood out in the small schools. The student-administrator questionnaire result was ironic because during the interviews many parents reported that their children did not really have relationships with the principals in any of the schools. Parents often commented that they did not think the children developed relationships with the administrators unless they had some type of disciplinary issue. Therefore, it seems strange that this item was rated higher in the quantitative data.

Parental involvement and communication were used as indicators of interactions with the schools. The quantitative and qualitative analysis both revealed that the perception of parental involvement was the same toward the large and the small schools. All data indicated that parental involvement at Euclid is relatively low at the high school level regardless of school size and could definitely be increased. However, the area of communication revealed mixed results from the parents' perspective. Several parents indicated that they felt like they were more informed with the small schools. On the other hand, other parents thought the new principal kept them informed better than the small schools with all of his messages and use of technology. Therefore, the perception of parents in the area of communication is mixed between the small schools and the large school.

## Summary

The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data yielded results that showed the small schools and large school to be comparable in several areas. However, there were some specific indicators that showed the small schools to be rated more favorably than large schools. Table 3 captures the overall picture of the results of both the quantitative and qualitative data.

Table 3

### *Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Results*

	Quantitative	Qualitative
	Small vs. Large	Small vs. Large
<b>Academics</b>		
Achievement	Small is better	No difference
Course offerings	No difference	No difference
Student Engagement	N/A	No difference
<b>Behavior</b>	Small is better	Small is better
Atmosphere	N/A	Small is better
Discipline	N/A	Mixed Results
<b>Morale</b>	Small is better	N/A
Social Life	N/A	No difference
Feelings of Belonging and Connectedness	Small is better	No difference
Extra-Curricular Participation	No difference	No difference
School Spirit	N/A	No difference

	Quantitative	Qualitative
	Small vs. Large	Small vs. Large
<b>Relationships and Interactions</b>		
Student-Administrator	Small is better	No difference
Student-Teacher	Small is better	No difference
Parent-Administrator	No difference	No difference
Parent-Teacher	No difference	No difference
Teacher Accessibility	No difference	N/A
Administrator Accessibility	No difference	N/A
Parental Involvement	No difference	No difference
Communication	N/A	Mixed

N/A indicates that data was not obtained for this item.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

In an environment defined by testing results and school rating systems, many school administrators have sought to reform their school structures. Small school initiatives have been a big part of school reform efforts in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This school reform option had its foundations in educational research which suggested that smaller schools yielded higher academic achievement as well as environments that were more conducive to educating youth. The adoption of small school initiatives was accelerated by the financial support predominately provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The financial support/incentive resulted in many school administrators choosing to adopt small high school structures.

In 2004, the Euclid City Schools transformed its large high school into six small schools with grant funding from the KnowledgeWorks Foundation. In the fall of 2006, Euclid City School dropped out of the KnowledgeWorks Ohio High School Transformation Initiative, electing to continue to operate small schools in its district independently. The district continued its small school commitment for

three additional years until the end of the 2008-2009 school year. The district returned to the traditional large school format in the fall of 2009.

The Euclid City School's small school reform effort presents an interesting case where a district moved from a traditional large school, to six small schools, and then back to a traditional large school. This progression presents a learning opportunity for school administrators who are at a decision point as to if or how to continue with small school initiatives. The Euclid City School superintendent noted that the financial efficiencies played a role in the district returning to the traditional large school format. The current economic climate of declining local tax revenues and state and federal cutbacks, suggest that more school districts may find it more efficient to return to the large school format. However, as school administrators make the necessary financial decisions, they should be cognizant of the parental perspective of their school's size.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

This study utilized mixed methods to gain insight on the parents' perception of school size and its impact on the academic environment, student behavior and morale, and relationships at Euclid High School. Some of the results were favorable in the area of small schools, just as some of the research on small schools had indicated. However, the results also indicated that the large school fared just as well as the small schools in certain areas.

This section reviews the research objectives of this study along with the outcomes. In addition, recommendations for school administrators are also presented.



*Question:*

1. Do parents perceive differences in the academic environment of the large school as compared to the small schools?

*Results:*

The parents' perception of the academic performance of the schools was that the overall achievement was slightly higher in the small schools according to the questionnaires; however, parents did not believe that their children were particularly affected by the size structure. In fact, the theme of the individual parents interviewed in this study was that the school size did not affect their child's academic performance. The second perception is that even though the course offerings are equivalent in the large and small schools, the grouping of the courses under themes in the small schools was more organized and helpful to parents and students.

If administrators are returning to a large school setting, it is very important for them to present the data of the academic performance of the school under the large school and small school structures if it is available. In the case of Euclid, the administration reported that they were not getting the academic achievement benefits that they were expecting under the small school setting (Euclid Board of Education, 2009). In addition, the school state report card did not show increases in academic achievement or school ratings during the years of the small school era in Euclid (Ohio Department of Education, 2004, 2009). Perhaps if Euclid found a way to emphasize these results to the parents and the community, the

perceptions of parents would change in the overall picture of the academic performance at the school.

It appears that it would also be helpful for large schools to organize their course offerings in some type of units or themes that are easily understood by parents and students. The thematic programs of the small schools in this study were preferred because they clearly identified choices such as when one chooses a college major. If a traditional large high school created and publicized major class tracks similar to the one presented in Table 4, parents might have a clearer understanding of the courses offered at the school and how these courses may benefit their child presently and/or in the future.

Table 4

*Sample of Course Offerings According to Prospected Professions*

Engineering	Nursing	Business	Sociology/ Social Work
Physics	Anatomy	Accounting	Psychology
Chemistry	Biology	Statistics	Government
Calculus	Algebra	Psychology	History
Statistics	Psychology	Journalism	Statistics
Geometry	Nutrition &	Government	Family Relations
Drafting/Design	Wellness	Computers	Criminal Justice
		Finance	
		Business Law	

*Question:*

2. Do parents perceive differences in student behavior and discipline in the large school as compared to the small schools?

*Results:*

Both school size structures seem to indicate that there was room for improvement in the area of behavior; however, the behavior at the small schools was perceived as being slightly better by parents. Discipline at the large high school was definitely perceived as different when compared to the previous small schools. However, due to the differences in opinion of the parents, it could not be determined as to which discipline policy was considered better.

It is important for schools like Euclid to consider implementing policies or programs that will help to reduce the poor behavior of the students at school. According to parents, Euclid High School recently adopted or implemented something called the "Stand Up" committee. During this same time the new leadership had implemented many new rules, expectations, and consequences at the large school. Some parents disagreed with some of the changes, while others welcomed them as being timely and necessary. Only time will tell if the changes are helpful in improving the student behavior at Euclid. Nonetheless, in the eyes of parents, administrators should take action to try to improve the student behavior, which is needed regardless of the school size.

*Question:*

3. Do parents perceive differences in student morale in the large school as compared to the small schools?

*Results:*

The individual experiences at the high school indicate that the morale in the large school was very comparable to the small school settings. In fact, when students' connectedness, participation, and spirit were used as indicators of morale in the qualitative phase, there were no reports that the morale was different in either school size structure. On the other hand, the questionnaires revealed that many also believe that the overall morale at the small schools was slightly higher than it is with the large school. It is ironic, how there were no specific examples that stood out as the morale changing in the qualitative phase, but the questionnaires rated the small schools more favorable. These results just point out how important it is to monitor perception in the public eye. A person's perception can be altered, even if they do not have a personal experience with the matter. The results in this area also revealed that it is important for administrators to keep the same student activities in the school regardless of the school size. By keeping the same activities, the students extra-curricular participation is less likely to be disrupted, thereby presenting more of a chance for students to remain active and connected to the school and keep morale the same regardless of school size.

*Question:*

4. Do parents perceive differences in the student or parent relationships and interactions with school staff in the large school setting as compared to the small schools?

*Results:*

All of the indicators in the qualitative analysis revealed that the relationships in the large and small schools were very similar. The quantitative data analysis also revealed that the parent relationships in the schools were equivalent; however, the student relationships favored the small schools. The student-teacher and student-administrator results in the quantitative data were directly aligned with the perception of the school district. According to the administration, relationships at Euclid High School was the one area that school administrators perceived to be the biggest advantage of the small school initiative (Euclid Board of Education, 2009). Apparently, some parents must have had the same perception.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis both revealed that the perception of parental involvement was the same at the large and the small schools. All data indicated that parental involvement at Euclid is low at the high school level regardless of school size. One of the PTA members presented examples of how the school and the PTA were trying different activities in hopes of increasing parental involvement at the school. It is evident through research that administrators should make every effort to increase parental involvement for the benefit of their students. Hopefully, some of the new initiatives at Euclid will yield positive results in the near future.

The area of communication between parents and the schools revealed mixed results from the parents' perspectives. Some parents preferred the communication they were receiving in the small schools, and others preferred the

communicative actions of the large school. In this study it was evident that the perception of the parents did not really rely on whether the school was small or large, but rather was judged on the actions of the leaders of the schools. The differences in opinions with communication were more than likely due to whom the parent was comparing and the actions that were taken by those individuals. Therefore, it is probably best for administrators to combine the approaches used in both the small schools and large school, which includes utilizing a personal touch of notes and newsletters, along with technological messaging on the internet and telephones to keep the lines of communication open with parents regardless of the size of the school.

## **Discussion**

This study finds that Euclid City School parents had favorable ratings for several aspects of the small school as compared to the large school format. The findings illuminate an interesting facet of parental perception, one that administrators would benefit from understanding. The quantitative research method finds that parents favored the small school over the large school in several areas. However, in the personal interviews parents appeared to view the school and their child's interactions through an individualist perspective. For instance, one parent said, "Engagement is dependent upon my child's interest in the class." Another parent noted that the extra-curricular participation was dependent upon the student. During the qualitative phase of the study, the parents appeared to express a belief consistent with rational choice tenets. In particular, they appeared to view their child's success and behaviors as a set of

self-maximizing decisions made by either the child or the parents. This leads the parents to orally suggest that the school size does not matter for the majority of school issues.

When presented with issues or questions that require a decision to be made, many Americans view the answer through rational choice. For instance, most individuals view their purchasing choices as solely decided by themselves. That is the individual believes that he/she makes the final decision. However, students of institutional school understand that institutional norms, constraints, and rules aid or compel certain decisions (Portz, Stein, & Jones, 1999). If this is the case then the parents who suggest that their child's involvement is dependent upon (a choice) the child, may be underestimating the effect of the structure. Moreover, if the school administrators create an environment with institutional norms that call upon involvement, then the child who thinks that he/she chose to be involved may have merely been acting in accordance with the institutional norm and vice versa.

Rational choice answers are imbedded in the American way; where an individual's success or lack of is attributed to their own choices. This leads many to overlook the importance of institutions, groups, and norms. School administrators must not rely upon logic that suggests that structures are unimportant or the accumulation of individual conversations or meetings. School administration and choices are strengthened by the use of quantitative measurement via surveys, as utilized in this study. For-profit consumer research has a long history of using quantitative survey instruments to guide customer-

facing decisions. In this case, the quantitative survey illuminated that parents indeed had some preferences with the small school. A careful understanding of that fact tells the administrators of Euclid City Schools that it would be beneficial if the administrators brought those small school items along to the traditional large school setting if possible.

A broader implication is that as administrators realize that the parents are similar to customers, then the quantitative research techniques becomes more important. Educational reforms throughout time have had a tenuous road where many reforms fail to deliver on their promises and goals. This can occur due to lack of support, executive turnover, financial realities, or the like. As such, it is important to quantify the parental perceptions relative to desired reform efforts. In the business sector, company executives spend millions understanding their customers' likes, desires, and views of their products or brands. Most educational institutions spend nothing on parental surveys. If parents are customers of the school district, then it would be logical to suggest that a program aimed at parental satisfaction and thoughts on major decisions would be warranted.

A way to empower individuals is to give them a voice through surveys. A regular surveying program would make it easier for individuals to enter and influence local decisions. The benefit for the administrator is that decisions will be made with more input from their largest customer and therefore, "better policies" may be implemented. Here, the term "better policy" means policies that are consistent with or influenced by the parents' input. It must be noted that these



policies may not necessarily be consistent with those preferred by the elected officials (the school board) or the professionals (school superintendent and administrators). I argue here that the accumulation of customer input will more often lead to a better product, just as it does in for-profit environments.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation to this study was the small sample size. The low response rate limited the type of statistical analysis that could be performed in this study. Another limitation to the study was that it did not compare multiple schools. Comparing multiple schools or types of schools such as an urban, suburban, and rural school may have helped to strengthen the generalizability of this study to other schools.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Although this study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data as a means for analysis, a larger quantitative study may be helpful in the future. A larger quantitative database would afford a researcher the opportunity to perform statistical analysis such as chi-squared tests to explore whether there are differences due to age, race or gender of the participants. This information could be helpful for administrators when determining if the results of the study are indicative of the community that they serve.

Another recommendation for future research is to explore relationships and interactions more closely by discriminating between comparing the head principal with the small school principals or by comparing the small school principals with the unit principals of the large schools. Exploring the relationships

and interactions with these discriminating factors may be helpful in understanding whether it is the roles that the principals serve in the different school size settings or the individual characteristics of leaders that determine the parental perception of the relationships and interactions that people have with the schools.

## **Summary**

This study utilized a mixed method design to investigate the parental perspective of the former small schools initiative in Euclid High School as compared to the traditional large high school setting. It gave parents the opportunity to voice their opinions about the two different high school structures and provided meaningful insight for educational administrators whom are faced with decisions regarding keeping or implementing school size reforms in their districts. This study showed that school administrators stand to improve parental satisfaction and support by not merely abandoning small school programs for traditional large schools but instead, by attempting to incorporate some of the components of the small school promise to the traditional large school.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A

### School Size Questionnaire

*The Parent Perspective of School Size at Euclid High School*

This questionnaire is regarding the previous small school setting and current large school setting of Euclid High School. Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire. Return the completed questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope along with your signed consent form.

**HOW DO YOU RATE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS OF EUCLID HIGH SCHOOL?**

Please circle the appropriate number in the **left-hand** column that corresponds to your evaluation of the former **small school** setting.

Please circle the appropriate number in the **right-hand** column that corresponds to your rating of the current **large school** setting.

<b>Small School Evaluation</b>					<b>Large School Evaluation</b>			
Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent		Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4	1. School size	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	2. Adequacy of course offerings	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	3. School's academic achievement	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	4. Student behavior	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	5. Student morale	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	6. Students' sense of community/belonging	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	7. Availability of extra-curricular activities	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	8. Student-administrator relationships	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	9. Student-teacher relationships	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	10. Administrator accessibility	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	11. Teacher accessibility	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	12. Parent-teacher relationships	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	13. Parent-administrator relationships	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	14. Parental involvement	1	2	3	4

Go to next page

**Demographic Information (circle one):**

**Gender:** Female Male

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Ethnicity:** Hispanic African American Asian  
Caucasian Native American Other (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Number of your children currently attending Euclid High School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please circle the small school/s your child/ren previously attended:**

The Academy of Intellectual & Interpersonal Development Euclid Academy of the Arts  
School of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Business and Communications  
The International Academy for Accelerated Achievement The Professional Path

**Child/ren's Current Grade Level (circle):** Freshman Sophomore  
Junior Senior

**Child/ren's Gender:** Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any children who attended or graduated from Euclid High School before 2005?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_ **No** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### School Size Interview Questions

#### *The Parent Perspective of School Size*

##### Academic Environment

1. What is your opinion of the academic course offerings at the school currently as compared to the former small schools?
2. Has there been a change in your child's academic achievement over the last two years, and if so how?
3. Do you think the school's size has had an impact on the academic achievement at the school? Why or why not?
4. How would you describe your child's engagement with the coursework this school year as compared to last school year?

##### Behavior and Discipline

5. Please describe the atmosphere in your child's previous small school as compared to the current large school.
6. How would you describe the student behavior currently at the high school and how does it compare to the previous small school settings?
7. Do you think there is a difference in the discipline of the students currently as compared to last school year?

##### Morale

8. Can you describe your child's social life at school? Has it changed over the past two years and if so how?
9. Does your child feel any different about coming to school now as compared to when there were small schools?
10. Can you describe the current school spirit at the high school and compare it to the previous year.
11. How would you describe the students' sense of community/belonging this school year as compared to last school year?
12. Has the school size structure impacted your child's extra-curricular participation at school and if so how?
13. Is there a difference in the amount of activities available to students in the current large school as compared to the former small schools?
14. Does your child feel more or less compelled to participate in school activities now that the school is one large school structure than when it was several small schools?

##### Relationships

15. How would you describe the relationships your child currently has with his/her teachers as compared to last school year?
16. How would you describe the relationship your child currently has with his/her principal as compared to last school year?

17. How would you describe your current relationships with your child's teachers as compared to last school year?
18. How would you describe your current relationship with your child's principal as compared to last school year?
19. How would you describe your level of parental involvement at the high school this year as compared to last school year? What about others?
20. Do you perceive any changes in the communication with parents and the school this year as compared to last year?

## Appendix C

### Interview Interest Form

*The Parent Perspective of School Size at Euclid High School*

**Please provide your contact information if you are interested in participating in an individual or a group interview regarding school size. All interview participants will be entered into a drawing to win a \$25.00 Visa gift card.**

**Contact information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Qualitative Matrix Template

	Academics
April	
Cathy	
Diane	
Karen	
Kim	
Larry	
Linda	
Liz	
Sarah	
Sue	
	Behavior
April	
Cathy	
Diane	
Karen	
Kim	
Larry	
Linda	
Liz	
Sarah	
Sue	
	Morale
April	
Cathy	
Diane	
Karen	
Kim	
Larry	
Linda	
Liz	
Sarah	
Sue	



	Relationships
April	
Cathy	
Diane	
Karen	
Kim	
Larry	
Linda	
Liz	
Sarah	
Sue	
	Other
April	
Cathy	
Diane	
Karen	
Kim	
Larry	
Linda	
Liz	
Sarah	
Sue	