PARENTAL EXPERIENCES RELATED TO AN
INTRA-DISTRICT BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT TRANSITION
AT THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL.

A thesis presented by
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to
The School of Education

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

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
November 2013
Abstract

School districts at times need to implement structural and programmatic changes requiring students to attend a different school, which tends to elicit strong parental emotions. This qualitative study analyzes how parents in one suburban Rhode Island district responded to a large-scale redistricting at the elementary level in order to (a) attain a better understanding of parental experiences related to a large-scale district-initiated change and (b) delineate supports, initiatives, and strategies facilitating this type of change.

Analyses of data collected from parent focus groups, School Committee members and the Superintendent reveals that parent responses evolved over time due to the mediating influence of cost-benefit analyses. Factors negatively impacting parental experiences consisted of socio-economic divides within the community; inadequate district communication; parental projection of emotions onto their children; the rupturing of social connections; feelings of disempowerment, loss, and outsider status; and differences among schools with regard to instruction, supports, and practices. Transition activities, support from teachers and principals, cohort-based transitioning, the opportunity to offer full day kindergarten, and the Superintendent’s outreach and vision exerted a positive influence. This study concludes with the delineation of a proposed theoretical model reflecting parental responses to a redistricting initiative and provides recommendations to facilitate large-scale change in school districts.

Keywords: Organizational change, School boundaries, Redistricting, Transition, Parents, Loss.
Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my dissertation advisor, Dr. Chris Unger, for his ongoing support combining contagious excitement, insightful questioning, and sound technical guidance. Most of all, I have thoroughly enjoyed his intellectual inquisitiveness both during the coursework and dissertation stages of our collaboration. The feedback provided by Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed and Dr. Lisa Colwell was greatly appreciated.

The following people provided crucial logistical support: Judith (Judi) Bassignani; Barbara Brunelle; Cindy Chabot; Lisa Colwell, Ed.D.; Antonio (Tony) DiManna; Cindy Giroux; Linda Jackvony; Laurie Jencks; Nidia Karbonik; Sandy Pickering; Marguerite Savickas; Judy Thomson; and Phil Thornton, Ed.D.

I am extremely grateful to all the parents and School Committee members who participated in focus groups as well as Dr. Phil Thornton, Superintendent of Schools. Their information and insights form the cornerstone of this project.

Finally, the person I am most indebted to is my fiancé Saul Olyan. Without his unrelenting support, unconditional love, and sage advice this project might not have come to fruition.
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Chapter I: Statement of the Problem

Topic

School districts for a myriad of reasons including but not limited to programmatic improvements, efficiencies, legal mandates, and enrollment fluctuations at times have to engage in large-scale structural change. This study presents an in-depth analysis of parent experiences regarding a specific large-scale structural change at the school district level. In order to introduce full day kindergarten, the Cumberland (RI) School Department decided in 2012 to redistrict and adjust the boundaries determining which elementary school residents’ children attend. As a consequence, approximately 430 children attending grades K-4 had to transition to a different school for the next school year. While the focus of this project is restricted to one district (Cumberland, Rhode Island), one kind of large-scale structural change (redistricting), and one type of transition (a mandatory change in schools due to an internal boundary adjustment), the findings may have a more universal applicability as well as, potentially contributing to an enhanced understanding of change processes at the school district level and providing guidance to administrators regarding stakeholder involvement, communication strategies, and supports.

Internal redistricting proposals involving students being reassigned to a different school can encounter fierce opposition from parents as evidenced by websites such as Save Neighborhood Schools in Cumberland, RI (www.savecumberlandschools.webs.com), Carlynton S.O.S. (www.carlyntonsos.org), and Save Austin Schools (www.saveaustinschools.com). Concerns frequently revolve around perceived quality differences between schools; transition-related academic achievement declines; socio-emotional problems; and disbanding existing social nexuses of parents, teachers, and students (Meenan, 2007; Stansbury, 1994; Ward and Rink, 1992; Yuen, 2007). Both No Child Left Behind as well as Race To The Top contain stipulations
related to optional and mandatory school restructuring in cases of chronic underachievement. In addition, changing demographic patterns, charter school expansion, and increasingly precarious finances may result in more frequent school reorganizations in the near future (Engberg, Epple, Gill, Sieg, Zamarro, and Zimmer, n.d.; The Boston Consulting Group, 2012).

Organizational change theory posits that feelings of powerlessness tend to fuel opposition and resistance by stakeholders (Burke, 2008). From a psychoanalytical perspective, resistance is attributed to mostly subconsciously experienced anxiety originating from feelings of loss (Levinson, 1972; Levinson, 1976). A better understanding of how parents experience large-scale structural change and associated transitions could assist school board members in either supporting or opposing proposals and provide administrators with guidance on how to better support families with the adjustment to a new school, which can play a pivotal role in post-transition student success (Feinberg and Cowan, 2004; Rindge, 2012; Travis, n.d.; Williamston, 2010). In addition, this project may help parents attain a better understanding of their own transition-related emotions.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and analyze how Cumberland parents experienced a mandatory transition of their child to another school within the same district due to a large-scale elementary school reorganization requiring internal redistricting. Complementary foci include identifying a) supports, strategies, and initiatives which alleviated negative emotions associated with the transition and b) internal (psycho-emotional) and external (social and environmental) factors deemed to hamper the transition process. Three research questions guided this study:

- How did parents experience a mandatory transition of their child to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative?
• Which internal and external factors are considered to have negatively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent and School Committee members?
• What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent and School Committee members?

Context

On March 8, 2012, the Cumberland School Committee in a 7-0 vote unanimously approved an elementary school redistricting plan (Jackvony, 2012) proposed by the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Philip (Phil) Thornton. This redistricting adjusted the internal boundaries determining which elementary school residents’ children attend (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Cumberland elementary school boundaries pre- and post-2012 redistricting.
While intra-district adjustments are typically implemented in response to changed enrollment and residency patterns, to address racial imbalances, or to alleviate fiscal pressures through efficiencies (Redistricting, 2012), the 2012 Cumberland redistricting proposal was developed in order to create space in each of the five elementary schools for housing full day kindergarten starting in the 2012-2013 school year (Cumberland Year in Review, 2012; Jackvony, 2012). A different redistricting proposal formulated in 2010 by the previous Superintendent, which focused on savings through grade-span reductions, was rejected by the School Committee after significant community opposition ensued (Save Cumberland Schools, 2011; Save Neighborhood Schools in Cumberland, RI, 2010). The 2010 proposal did not include full day kindergarten.

The town of Cumberland, settled in 1635 and incorporated in 1746 (Cumberland, Rhode Island, 2012; Town of Cumberland, 2009), is located in northern Rhode Island. According to 2010 United States Census data (United States Census, 2010), 33,506 people or 13,143 households reside in this 28 square mile suburban locale. Its racial profile is predominantly white (95.5%) with 2.1% Hispanic, 0.8% Asian and 0.5% Black residents (City-data, 2012). The estimated 2009 median household income amounted to $70,834, which is approximately 24% higher than the state average of $54,119 (City-data, 2012). The FY2013 property tax of $15.61 per mil (i.e., per $1,000 of a residence’s assessed value) is lower than the rate levied by 25 of the 38 other Rhode Island communities (Division of Municipal Finance, 2012).

The Cumberland School Department consists of five elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school educating 4,648 preK-12 students (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2012). Based on October 2012 enrollment data, Cumberland is the largest suburban and the eight largest overall school district in Rhode Island (Rhode Island Department of
Education, 2012). Per pupil expenditure is the lowest in the state at $11,222 compared to an average of $15,024 (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2011). Cumberland’s more urban area south of Interstate 295 is ethnically diverse and less affluent than the northern town section. Table 1 specifies how each of the five elementary schools is located in a distinct socio-economic enclave as reflected by property values and student profiles.

Table 1

*Cumberland Elementary Schools: Socio-Economic Profile of Neighborhoods.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elementary School</th>
<th>Geographic location (residency area)</th>
<th>Property value per square foot</th>
<th>Racial profile students(^1)</th>
<th>Socio-economic profile students (^1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Farthest North</td>
<td>$347</td>
<td>White: 95% Hispanic: 0%</td>
<td>Full cost lunch: 93% Reduced lunch: 1% Free lunch: 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$161</td>
<td>Black: 1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland Hill</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>$213</td>
<td>White: 88% Hispanic: 0%</td>
<td>Full cost lunch: 86% Reduced lunch: 3% Free lunch: 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$120</td>
<td>Black: 3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashton Central</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>$151</td>
<td>White: 88% Hispanic: 0%</td>
<td>Full cost lunch: 82% Reduced lunch: 2% Free lunch: 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>Black: 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garvin South</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>$132</td>
<td>White: 87% Hispanic: 0%</td>
<td>Full cost lunch: 72% Reduced lunch: 4% Free lunch: 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$107</td>
<td>Black: 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF Norton Farthest South</td>
<td>$116</td>
<td>$89</td>
<td>White: 79% Hispanic: 0%</td>
<td>Full cost lunch: 50% Reduced lunch: 9% Free lunch: 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Black: 7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)Does not include mixed-race designations.

*Research Problem*

When school districts engage in large-scale structural and programmatic change, resistance tends to emerge. The Cumberland School Department in 2012 decided to adjust the internal boundaries determining which elementary school residents’ children attend, resulting in parental opposition. Prior to this study, little was known about how parents experience a mandatory transition of their child to a different school because of a large-scale structural change. The literature had mainly focused on the academic and socio-emotional impacts of
students transitioning from elementary to secondary education. Moreover, previous research about parental opinions and emotions regarding transitions could be described as rather fragmentary and focused on parents imitating their own parents’ behavior when assisting their child with the transition into kindergarten (Barnett and Taylor, 2009), academic encouragement and high expectations by parents translating into superior achievement (Chen and Gregory, 2010), parents voluntarily moving to another community with a better school system leading to achievement gains in math (Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin, 2001), family mobility in general negatively impacting achievement (Lehana and Reynolds, 2004), and students according to their parents adjusting to middle school within four weeks after the transition (Akos and Galassi, 2004), substantiating the need for a more holistic, integrated and comprehensive knowledge base. This project by focusing on one specific case aims at attaining a better understanding of parental responses to a large-scale change initiative and providing guidance to administrators on supporting children and their parents throughout the entire process.

**Justification**

While the research corpus on school transitions is significant, a bird’s eye perspective (including a categorization of transition types) had been lacking, complicating arguments and limiting the external validity of findings. A transitions taxonomy therefore had to be established in order to position this study within prior research (see Appendix A).

Schwartz, Stiefel, Rubinstein and Zabel (2011) distinguished between two types of transitions: structural and non-structural with the former referring to “articulation points . . . at which students move from one school to the next” (p.295) and the latter being the result of a personal or family decision. The distinction structural versus non-structural change provided a first sublevel within the taxonomy. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2001) assessed the impact of
two types of what Schwartz, Stiefel, Rubinstein and Zabel (2011) labeled non-structural moves—pursuit of a better education versus negative circumstances such as divorce, job loss et cetera—on students’ math achievement thereby specifying two types of non-structural transitions.

The virtually universal experience of grade configuration transitions such as starting kindergarten (Barnett and Taylor, 2009; Nelson, 2004; Peters, 2012) and entering secondary education (Akos and Galassi, 2004; Alspaugh, 1998; Alspaugh and Harting, 1995; Butts, 2012; Chen and Gregory, 2010; Duchesne, Larose, Guay, Vitaro and Tremblay, 2005; Flannery, Sugai, Braun and Cochrane, 2008; Mehana and Reynold, 2004; Smith, Akos, Lim and Wiley, 2008; Suit, 2007; Williamston, 2010) may explain why the majority of research has focused on the academic and socio-emotional impacts related to this subtype of structural school transitions.

Court rulings have exerted a significant impact on issues regarding inter- and intra-district boundaries. The U.S. Supreme Court in its 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling and the acceptability of the “separate but equal” principle stipulating that students could be forced to attend different schools within the same district strictly based on their race. The Court in 1954 ruled that separate but equal violated the Constitution’s Fourteenth Amendment (Brown and Knight, 2005; Gresham, 2010). Support for racial desegregation was bolstered in the 1971 *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg Board of Education* decision when the country’s highest court affirmed the use of busing to achieve this purpose. A side effect of the *Swann* ruling has been increased frequency of intra-district boundary adjustments in response to population shifts (Murphy, 1995).

*The No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and *Race To The Top* (RTTT) initiatives established a legal framework geared towards raising student achievement, including the possibility of
mandatory structural adjustments at the school and district level in cases of chronic student underperformance. At times, this has resulted in children transitioning to a different school. NCLB stipulates that parents of students attending schools failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets for two consecutive years are entitled to execute their school choice rights and transfer their children to a school within the same district which has met AYP targets, provided the destination school has open slots (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In addition, the NCLB law contains provisions increasing the number of charter schools, offering a second type of legislatively mandated choice option to parents which could result in a transition (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The RTTT initiative delineates four options for the 5% lowest achieving schools in each state: turnaround, restart, transformation, and school closure (The Wallace Foundation, 2012) with the last choice (closure) requiring that students transfer to a different school. While voucher programs first introduced in Milwaukee in 1990 ultimately were not included in RTTT, a number of governors such as Mitch Daniels (Indiana), Rick Scott (Florida) and Tom Corbett (Pennsylvania) have introduced voucher legislation at the state level (Ravitch, 2010b; 2013).

Federal law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA) Part 300 B 300.115(a) requires that school districts provide students with disabilities a Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and offer a continuum of placements ranging from full inclusion to residential schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Some legally mandated options, for example specialized programs and segregated
placements, may involve a transition to a different school either within or outside the district of residence.

An array of inter- and intra-district restructuring options not mandated by law but usually proposed by administrators for cost-efficiency purposes in response to declining or increasing student enrollment (Anderson, 2009; Brown and Knight, 2005; Gresham, 2010; Lemberg and Church, 2000) constitutes a third subtype of structural transition. While the distinction between inter- and intra-district boundary adjustments or redistricting has only been sporadically addressed in the research (for instance by Barron (2008-2009)), this dichotomy proves significant in light of this study.

Inconsistency in terminology has complicated debates and exacerbated confusion, potentially resulting in inappropriate generalizations of research findings as evidenced by Cumberland parents opposing a grade-level reconfiguration proposal in 2010 citing research findings by Alspaugh (1998) regarding existing grade configuration limits, thus reflecting a different type of structural transition (see Appendix A). Howard and Wrobel (2010) use “reorganization” in reference to changing a school district’s management structure. Anderson (2009) as well as Augenblick, Meyers and Silverstein (2001) on the other hand choose the same term to refer to districts merging or consolidating while Kingston (2009) opts instead for the term merger. The Pennsylvania Economy League (2008) provides a nomenclature that could end the inconsistent use of terms and concepts such as “consolidation” and “reorganization”:

- **functional consolidation**: districts sharing resources (also called a Strategic Alliance Agreement in corporate environments (USLegal, 2012)),
- **merger**: one school district absorbing another, and
- **physical consolidation**: two or more districts forming a new combined entity.
While the Pennsylvania Economy League only applies these terms to inter-district scenarios, using the same labels in reference to identical processes at the intra-district level enhances the internal consistency of the proposed taxonomy. Other types of intra-district boundary adjustment/internal redistricting initiatives discussed in the research consist of school closure (De Witt and Moccia, 2011; Finnigan and Lavner, 2012), grade level reconfiguration (Brown, Schwartz, Stiefel, Rubinstein, and Zabel, 2011; Seller, 2004; Valencia, 1985), and expansion (Rogers, 2012; Thomas, 2012). This study focuses on a related yet distinctly different type of structural transition not mandated by law, policy, or court ruling: A teaching and learning initiative (in this instance offering full day kindergarten) necessitating an intra-district boundary adjustment or internal redistricting.

A number of studies have incorporated parent perspectives on their child’s transition into a school system or, when already enrolled, to a different school. Barnett and Taylor’s (2009) analysis of interviews with parents whose children were entering kindergarten reveals a correlation between parental participation in transition activities and their recollections and perceptions of their own parents’ involvement in their early school experiences. Peters (2012) compared parents’ with children’s understanding of kindergarten and points to the influence of parental conceptual constructs related to kindergarten and associated transitions on children’s understanding of expectations and actual functioning in the classroom. Akos and Galassi’s (2004) as well as Smith, Akos, Lim, and Wiley’s (2008) mixed methods research investigating students and stakeholders’ perceptions of the transition to middle and high school demonstrates generally optimistic attitudes—a finding echoed in Butt’s (2012) survey-based quantitative study—potentially pointing to a differential attitude towards and impact of transitions depending on the grade level at which those occur, with apparently decreasing negative opinions as students
grow older. With the exception of Barnett and Taylor (2009) and Yuen’s (2007) studies, parent voices have been included to confirm information obtained from students as opposed to representing the primary focus and data source. Considering the proposed taxonomy of school transitions in light of the aforementioned studies reveals that no previous research focuses on structural transitions not mandated by law, policy or court ruling. Instead, the emphasis has been on structural transitions associated with existing grade configurations: starting kindergarten (Barnett and Taylor, 2009 and Peters, 2012) or entering secondary school (Akos and Galassi, 2004; Butt, 2012; Yuen, 2007; and Smith, Akos, Lim, and Wiley, 2008).

Prior studies have mainly focused on student rather than parental experiences. Notable exceptions are Pappas’ (2012) research on the negative effect of a Race To The Top-mandated school closing on parent engagement and Yuen’s (2007) study analyzing how low-income parents experienced their child’s transition to middle school revealing the negative impact of a lack of outreach by the destination school as well as significant parental concerns regarding anticipated transition-related achievement declines. Moreover, Yuen’s study provides support for the appropriateness of a psychoanalytical lens for studying parental experiences associated with school transitions by pointing to the prevalence of fear, anxiety and feelings of loss. Concerns about transition-related achievement dips seem to indicate the presence of a fifth type of loss unmentioned by Harry Levinson (1972) in Easing the pain of personal loss: loss of performance or productivity, which was confirmed in the data collected for this study. Pappas’ (2012) and Yuen’s (2007) research however once again focuses on different sub-branches of the proposed taxonomy’s structural transitions section in contrast to this project: mandated by law, policy, or court ruling: closure (Pappas) and existing grade configuration limit (Yuen).
Deficiencies of the Current Literature

Existing research has been primarily preoccupied with parent-initiated non-structural transitions (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin, 2001) and structural transitions due to grade-configuration limits such as students entering school in kindergarten (Barnett and Taylor, 2009; Peters, 2012) and moving from elementary to middle school or junior high as well as from middle school or junior high to high school (Alspaugh and Harting, 1995; Alspaugh, 1998; Duchesne, Larose, Guay, Vitaro and Tremblay, 2005; Mehana and Reynold, 2004). Structural transitions not mandated by law, policy, or court ruling due to an intra-district boundary adjustment or internal redistricting initiative have not represented a major research topic. Instead a preoccupation with inter-district consolidation is evidenced for example by Ward and Rink’s (1992) case study.

Many studies have employed a quantitative research paradigm to investigate transition-related research questions. Some rely on standardized testing data to demonstrate the negative impact of transitions on student achievement (Alspaugh and Harting, 1995; Alspaugh, 1998; Brown, 2004; Duchesne, Larose, Guay, Vitaro and Tremblay, 2005; Mehana and Reynold, 2004; Schwartz, Stiefel, Rubinstein and Zabel, 2011). In other instances, self-reporting tools measuring students’ socio-emotional functioning reveals diminished levels of support and concomitant elevated anxiety levels during or after a transition (Grills-Taquechel, Norton, and Ollendick, 2010; Martínez, Aricak, Graves, Peters-Myszak and Nellis, 2011; Proctor and Choi, 1994). Akos and Galassi’s (2004) survey-based study assessing parent, teacher, and student perceptions of transitions to middle and high school shows that, according to parents, the vast majority of students had adjusted within four weeks. Students themselves reported a similar ease of adjustment though teachers indicated higher levels of transition-related concerns.
The amount of qualitative research is rather limited and deserves expansion in order to obtain a better understanding of large-scale structural change and related student transitions. Ward and Rink’s (1992) case study specifically analyzes local stakeholder opposition to consecutive elementary school reorganization proposals involving consolidation at the district level in central Illinois. Several factors appeared to contribute to ongoing resistance including perceived socio-economic differences among neighborhoods resulting in higher-SES parents refusing to be associated with lower-SES families, opposition to redistribution of local property taxes for providing additional supports to lower achieving schools, loss of identity and community connections fostered through the local neighborhood school, fear of reduced resources and increasing property taxes, longer bus rides, perceived lack of information, fear of the unknown, distrust of the motivation behind the proposals, the assumption that central office administrators had developed the plans to enhance their professional reputation and advancement, and claims that alternatives had been insufficiently explored. Ward and Rink published their case study almost two decades ago using a retrospective lens analyzing events dating back to the mid-1980s. The significant parallels with my research project’s findings may suggest some universal aspects related to large-scale change involving school districts across time, locations, and initiatives.

Suburban settings have largely been overlooked in transition research limiting the generalization of knowledge and findings. Prior research has focused on rural schools and districts situated in the Midwest (Alspaugh, 1998; Alspaugh and Harting, 1995; Brown, 2004; Martínez, Aricak, Graves, Peters-Myszak and Nellis, 2011; Proctor and Choi, 1994; Smith, Akos, Lim, and Wiley, 2008; Ward and Rink, 1992) or the South (Barnett and Taylor, 2009;
Grills-Taquechel, Norton, and Ollendick, 2010; Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin, 2001). None of these studies include schools or districts in the Northeast.

Barnett and Taylor’s (2009) study comparing intergenerational patterns of parental involvement in a kindergarten transition arguably implicitly incorporates a psychoanalytic dimension. The authors however do not acknowledge or discuss the influence of a Freudian paradigm on their methodological approach notwithstanding a focus on cross-generational imitative behavior patterns related to early childhood formative experiences. The psychoanalytical lens employed for the analysis of data pertaining to the Cumberland redistricting initiative has resulted in a deeper understanding of parental psycho-emotional responses originating from fear of loss (loss of support, loss of love, loss of organizational ideal (Levinson, 1972) and fear of declining performance or achievement) as well as other core psychoanalytical concepts such as anxiety and Id-driven desires (Levinson, 1976).

**Audiences**

Enhanced understanding of how parents of elementary school students experienced a transition to another within-district school due to a large-scale structural change at a mid-sized suburban district in northern Rhode Island primarily benefits the district’s Superintendent, central office leadership team of which this researcher is a member, and the School Committee. Results should also be relevant to parents, administrators, and school boards in other districts debating or considering redistricting or a related type of large-scale change initiative. In addition, this project provides recommendations for facilitating redistricting projects and a discussion on social stratification-based barriers to change.

While qualitative research emphasizes in-depth understanding of a bounded situation or phenomenon rather than external validity or generalization, the selected site from an enrollment
perspective arguably represents a fairly typical suburban school district. According to the Aspen Student Management System, preK-12 enrollment on October 23, 2012 amounted to 4,750 students. This places Cumberland in the third most common district size overall (urban, suburban and rural locales combined) (between 2,500 and 4,999 students; 14.6% of districts) after 1,000 to 2,400 students (23.8% of districts) and 1 to 299 (19.9% of districts) based on the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES, 2011) 2009-2010 data. The average suburban district’s enrollment in 2003-2004 equaled 3,664 students (Jacobs, 2007). This study as such could fulfill an instrumental function.

Large-scale structural change such as redistricting is likely to become more commonplace due to changing demographic patterns nation-wide as well as the increasing prevalence of charter schools and school choice offerings impacting enrollment in many school districts (Engberg, Epple, Gill, Sieg, Zamarro, and Zimmer, n.d.; Ravitch, 2013; The Boston Consulting Group, 2012). In addition, stagnating or declining funding in large part caused by the ongoing economic downturn is forcing administrators to investigate more cost-efficient alternatives for educating students. The in-depth analysis of how Cumberland parents experienced a mandatory transition of their child to a different elementary school within the same district may provide other parents going through a similar or related type of transition with a framework for anticipating, framing and understanding their emotions.

At the macro (federal) and meso (state) levels, this study could be instrumental for policy makers. Enhanced understanding of parental experiences may result in better-informed decisions and votes, for example related to charter schools, school choice, turnaround and take-over proposals requiring children to attend a different school. However, as with all qualitative
studies, a bounded scope requires careful examination of parameters prior to generalizing findings to other settings and transition types.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

School reconfiguration proposals appear to have become quite commonplace. In Rhode Island alone, the South Kingstown and North Smithfield public school districts have recently debated restructuring their elementary schools due to budgetary constraints and declining enrollment (Phaneuf, 2012; Tiernan, 2011). In response to a proposal to revamp its lottery-based assignment policy requiring potentially thousands of students to switch schools, Boston Public Schools parents expressed concerns about negative academic impacts, socio-emotional problems, and rupturing existing social connections fostered through the existing school communities (Vaznis, 2012) echoing objections mentioned by Meenan (2007) and Stansbury (1994) regarding proposals in New York City and Hartford, CT. In addition, accusations that fiscal exigencies were the true driving force behind the plan mirror findings by Ward and Rink (1992). Similar parental concerns were expressed in reaction to recent restructuring proposals in New Britain, CT (Storace, 2012), Patterson, NJ (Malinconico, 2012), Bainbridge Island, WA (Sooter, 2012), Kingston, NY (Wind, 2012), and Nyack, NY (Staff, 2012).

Large-scale structural change is arguably an inevitable, dynamic and cyclical process. The frequency with which a need for mandated and non-mandated structural adjustments (including redistricting) emerges depends, as systems theory posits, on variables in the external and internal environments such as enrollment; number of district schools; student achievement; live birth rate; migration patterns; charter school prevalence; local, state, and federal policies and mandates; as well as fiscal and economical soundness at the local, state, federal, and global levels. However, as an open system, school districts need to respond adaptively to these changes.
in order to survive (Burke, 2008). Parental opposition to reorganization plans and redistricting seems to originate from a belief that change is optional, which in most case is likely a fallacy. A better understanding of psychological processes associated with same-level school transitions could therefore result in targeted supports assisting parents with processing feelings of resistance and opposition towards acceptance.

**Positionality Statement**

The Cumberland School Department central office leadership team consists of seven members including four administrators (Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Special Education and Deputy Director of Special Education) with the author of this project being the Deputy Director of Special Education. Cumberland has the lowest per pupil expenditure of any public school district in Rhode Island (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2011) necessitating a constant focus on cost efficiencies. The often precarious financial situation in light of state and federal mandates, as well as the advent of a local charter school, Blackstone Valley Prep, have created a culture embodying tenets of Frederick Taylor and Ellwood Cubberley’s efficiency-based management styles. The current emphasis on market-based approaches in education such as competition (charter schools), focus on outcomes (Value-Added Assessment or the practice of using student scores on standardized tests for evaluating teachers and schools), and specialization (learning defined as student scores on reading, writing, math, and science tests) (Ravitch, 2010b; 2013) has arguably conditioned how administrators conceive, construct, and interpret educational processes guiding decisions and proposals.

The 2010 and 2012 redistricting proposals arguably reflected a managerial and perhaps myopic preoccupation with productivity and efficiency, possibly superseding concerns related to socio-emotional impacts on students, families, and school staff. The roots of the efficiency
versus holistic dyad can be traced back to the early 20th century debate between a progressive paradigm emphasizing democratic ideals promulgated by, for example, John Dewey and an administrative orientation advocated by Ellwood P. Cubberley (Reese, 2001; Reese, 2011). Administrators’ impatience with parents’ emotional pleas expressed in email correspondence, letters to the editor of the local newspaper, Facebook postings (for example on the Concerned Cumberland Parents page) and during School Committee meetings could be attributed to ‘corporate conditioning’. Levinson (1972) cautions:

> In short, the ordinary person denies many feelings of loss, particularly feelings of depression associated with loss, and therefore is little aware of how it affects him . . . . Managers, in turn, tend to be relatively insensitive to the significance of this phenomenon; they fail to take it into account when changing people’s circumstances, or they simply assume that people will compensate for whatever damage has occurred.

(p.84)

A better understanding of parents’ experiences related to a redistricting transition, in particular the emotional motivations behind stakeholders’ actions, can contribute to a more balanced perspective and improved decision-making processes related to large-scale structural change initiatives. However, this presupposes the prevalence of counterproductive, negative emotions among parents regarding a transition and as such could reflect a research bias.

**Central Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and analyze how parents experienced a mandatory transition of their child to another within-district school due to a large-scale elementary school reorganization with concomitant redistricting. Complementary foci included identifying (a) supports, strategies, and initiatives which alleviated negative emotions associated
with the transition and (b) internal (psycho-emotional) and external (social and environmental) factors deemed hampering of the transition process. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How did parents experience a mandatory transition of their child to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative?

2. Which internal and external factors are considered to have negatively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent and School Committee members?

3. What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent and School Committee members?

**Theoretical Framework: Organizational Change Theories**

A vast array of theories related to organizational change has been developed (Burke, 2008; Bush, 2011). Organizational change is the process by which an organization moves from its present state to a configuration more conducive to meeting future demands (Lunenburg, 2010). Due to the pervasive and dramatic nature of the change, redistricting in most instances represents episodic change as opposed to continuous change (Weick and Quinn, 1999). Three organizational theories were selected, each predominantly focused on one of three levels of social systems (the individual, group and total system level) delineated by Burke (2008, to attain an in-depth understanding of the ramifications of an intra-district boundary adjustment as an example of large-scale structural change within a school district:


2. Group level: Stakeholder theory. Main informants: Parents, School Committee members, Superintendent.

Main informants: Parents

Because of this study’s preoccupation with parental experiences, Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory functions as the main theoretical lens. However, incorporating the Superintendent’s and School Committee members’ viewpoints into the analysis of parent experiences proved essential for triangulation purposes and to establish a robust methodology with attention to validity-enhancing measures.

**Systems theory.** Systems theory posits that organizations in similar fashion to biological organisms should display constant permutation in response to changing demands in the external environment. Hence, successful organizations behave as open systems dynamically interacting with and responding to factors outside of their structural boundaries in an attempt to establish a state of equilibrium within the larger system (Amagoh, 2008; Burke, 2008; Bush, 2011). Changes in the external environment necessitate organizational adaptations which in turn may lead to internal resistance and conflict, especially in case of ambiguity (Amagoh, 2008; Raza and Standing, 2011).

Burke’s (2008) statement that “Social structures, the chain of events between and among people, establish boundaries” (p.51) connects systems theory both with stakeholder theory and its focus on relationships between members of an organization as well as with Levinson’s (1976) psychoanalytical theory of organizational change, especially in light of *reciprocation* or the emotional impact caused by a breach of the implicit contract between an organization and its members. A purely systems theory approach focused on interactions among and between an organization’s internal elements and external forces presents limitations by overlooking the powerful psychological processes underpinning actions and motivations, potentially resulting in
superficial analyses: “Economic, sociological, and technological considerations do make a
difference in motivation and behavior. The operation of these forces is relatively easy to observe
and understand. But these forces interact with a complex set of forces going on within
individuals which are much more obscure and difficult to understand” (Levinson, 1976, pp.2-3).

**Stakeholder theory.** Stakeholder theory attempts to explain responses to organizational change by uncovering and plotting formal and informal connections between members
(stakeholders) of an organization at the individual, unit, and collective levels (Raza and Standing,
2011). As such this theory can be situated at the intermediate level between systems theory’s
primary emphasis on the organization as the unit of analysis and Levinson’s (1976)
psychoanalytical theory exploring responses to change from the vantage point of intra-personal
emotions centered on guilt, fear, and anxiety.

The inclusion of stakeholder theory in the theoretical framework was warranted in light
of research question 2’s focus on external or social factors which are perceived to have
negatively impacted the transition process. In addition, stakeholder theory’s premise that
organizational change ruptures connections between members and modifies group boundaries
augments a purely systems theory approach by infusing a focus on the impact of external change
on intra-organizational boundaries and expands Levinson’s psychoanalytical focus beyond the
intra-personal to also include interpersonal factors shaping people’s responses to change.

**Psychoanalytical theory of organizational change.** Harry Levinson in *Psychological Man* (1976) presented a framework for analyzing resistance to organizational change based on
Freud and Erikson’s psychoanalytical theories emphasizing the experience of loss, which was
also the focus of his 1972 article *Easing the pain of personal loss*. Change according to
Levinson involves severing ties and leaving what is familiar and comforting behind causing
feelings of loss. Levinson further argued in *Easing the pain of loss* (1972) that loss is a fundamental psychological experience involving “deprivation, helplessness, sorrow and anger” resulting in “alienation, rootlessness, and severe stresses in the family” (p.80).

Sigmund Freud’s triadic view of personality consisting of the Id (subconscious drives and memories), Ego (planning and control), and Superego (value system and ethics) formed the basis of Levinson’s psychoanalytical organizational change theory, which includes a number of Ego-based coping mechanisms such as rationalization (action justification), projection (blame), substitution (scapegoating), reaction formation (externally reflecting the opposite of feelings experienced internally), and idealization of another person.

People and organizations through a process of *reciprocation* establish an implicit psychological contract. When breached, for example in the process of organizational change, anger and frustration ensue at the individual or collective level (Levinson, 1976). Of particular relevance in light of this project was Levinson’s assertion that a child-oriented culture is omnipresent in the United States, which not only determines the parent-child relationship but also parent-organization interactions:

The heavy emphasis of parental practice in the United States is on maintaining family cohesion and integrity by means of parental affection, guidance, and support in an interactive mode with children. . . . Obviously, people reared in a culture in which parents actively foster these values will come to organizations with expectations that those in leadership roles over them will do the same. (Levinson, 1976, p.72)

All loss leads to impaired levels of control and must be processed through a mourning process (Levinson, 1972; Levinson, 1976) reflecting Hirschowitz’ four-stage process, which appears to parallel Kübler-Ross’ (1969) classic five-stage theory:
- Hirschowitz: 1) Impact (daze and shock) → 2) Recoil-Turmoil (realizing the loss and experiencing feelings of rage, anxiety, depression, guilt, and shame) → 3) Adjustment (hope replacing hurt) → 4) Reconstruction (establishing new connections within the new environment)

- Kübler-Ross: 1) Shock and denial → 2) Anger → 3) Bargaining/Postponement attempts → 4) Depression → 5) Acceptance

Levinson (1972) discerned four interrelated types of loss caused by organizational change: loss of love when interpersonal connections are severed, loss of support networks, loss of sensory input when existing information clarifying rules and practices becomes obsolete resulting in disorientation, and loss of capacity to act.

Organizations can assist with and expedite the healing process by providing people opportunities to talk about their change-related feelings and emotions, limiting the practical impacts of a transition for example by offering relocation assistance, and emphasizing the organizational ideal (Levinson, 1972).

Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory of organizational change supported the main research question’s focus on experiences, which by definition are psychological in nature as parents process information about transitions and transform those into experiences. Additionally, Levinson’s concepts of conscious, subconscious, and preconscious processes contributing to feelings of loss, anxiety, and destructive drives became integrated in the interview questions as well as the attitude rating scale based on Deutsch’s six axes (Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Perez, 2003) and guided the data analysis process in light of the question “Which internal and external factors are deemed to negatively impact the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent and School Committee members?” Levinson (1972) in *Easing the pain of*
personal loss argued that systems approaches to organizational change fail to include covert, unconscious psychological processes—in particular feeling of loss. Including an external (structural, social, environmental) as well as internal (psychological) focus addressed Levinson’s criticism of a pure systems approach.

The question “What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent and School Committee members?” was added to the research design after reading *Easing the pain of personal loss* (1972) in which Levinson detailed strategies for reducing feelings of loss associated with organizational change including opportunities for processing psycho-emotional experiences through communication, offering transition supports, and maintaining the organizational ideal throughout the change process.

A qualitative paradigm is preoccupied with understanding complex phenomena, in this instance how parents experienced their child’s transition to a same-level school due to redistricting. Levinson’s theory provides a framework including vocabulary and concepts as well as concrete guidance for unraveling the complex, covert, and conscious/preconscious/subconscious processes underpinning the observable actions by parents which otherwise might be misunderstood, misinterpreted, or remain unexplored.

**Chapter II: Literature Review**

The literature on school boundaries, redistricting, and affiliated processes is limited (Brown and Knight, 2005; Winer, 2010). Because of the paucity of topic-specific research, literature pertaining to related social and psychological concepts was considered. Findings were extrapolated to the specific topics of internal redistricting and school transitions and explored through the lenses of systems theory, stakeholder theory, and Harry Levinson’s psychoanalytical
organizational change theory culminating in specific research questions. It was hypothesized that parent experiences associated with their child’s mandatory transition to another within-district elementary school due to a redistricting initiative were influenced or even shaped by (1) psychological processes (internal) related to change; (2) social, historical, legal, financial, and political factors (external); as well as (3) existing knowledge and research on transitions.

This literature review includes the following sections: school boundaries and redistricting mechanisms, factors potentially impacting parent experiences with school transitions, current knowledge regarding school transitions, and resistance as a psychological and psycho-social response to organizational change. A concluding section summarizes findings and presents research questions based on the analysis of the existing literature.

**Intra-district boundaries and internal redistricting mechanisms**

*School redistricting* according to Gresham (2010) as well as Caro, Shirabe, Guignard, and Weintraub (2004) refers to adjusting the internal boundaries within an existing school district. However, due to the possibility of *interdistrict* boundary adjustment scenarios (Anderson, 2009; Augenblick, Meyers and Silverstein, 2001; Kingston, 2009; Ward and Rink, 1990), for accuracy reasons the interchangeable terms *internal redistricting* and *intra-district boundary adjustment* are used throughout this discussion. The dichotomy interdistrict/intra-district is also employed by Black (1999) as well as Ryan and Heise (2002) albeit in reference to school choice rather than boundary adjustments or redistricting initiatives.

Intra-district boundaries in the U.S. to a large degree determine which school a student attends based on his or her address—termed the “school-housing connection” by Saiger (2010)—often resulting in racial and socio-economic segregation: “Public schools therefore tend to reflect
the neighborhoods in which they are located. And neighborhoods in most metropolitan areas remain remarkably segregated by income and race” (Ryan and Heise, 2002, p.2093).

Boundaries can be determined by a myriad of at times concurrent factors including current and anticipated future enrollment; natural boundaries such as rivers, railroads, and highways; size of and residency patterns in different neighborhoods; domicile-school radius; and program attendance (Brown and Knight, 2005). School boards are often reluctant to engage in redistricting: “Since boundary changes, schedule changes, and site decisions impact students, parents, traffic patterns, and/or neighborhoods, community harmony is at risk” (Lemberg and Church, 2000, p.161). The result is fairly static and ossified boundaries (Brown and Knight, 2005). Periodic adjustments reflecting systems theory’s core tenet of organizational adaptation to changes in the external environment are nevertheless unavoidable due to fluctuating enrollment patterns (Armstrong, Lolonis and Honey, 1993; Bogart and Cromwell, 2000; Brown and Knight, 2005). In addition, concerns about racial imbalances or fiscal exigencies may also provide the impetus for redistricting (Armstrong, Lolonis and Honey, 1993; Bogart and Cromwell, 2000; Saiger, 2010). Caro, Shirabe, Guignard and Weintraub (2004) describe the process of redrawing intra-district boundaries as an almost always ill-defined, technically complex and politically delicate problem requiring a combination of mathematical-technical precision, objective measures and subjective judgment. Internal redistricting, according to Creighton and Hamlin (1995), can support five at times conflicting goals: improve educational outcomes, generate fiscal efficiencies, introduce enhanced racial and socio-economic heterogeneity, reduce transportation costs as well as travel times, and streamline administrative processes.
Saiger (2010) discerns three contentious interrelated factors associated with school boundaries, which can be analyzed through the lens of stakeholder theory and its assertion that organizational change causes resistance by straining, rupturing and shifting existing connections and allegiances between system members: racial segregation, financial stratification, and differing achievement patterns across schools. “The full school boundary problem thus expresses itself simultaneously in terms of gaps in resources, race, and achievement. It is a toxic, simultaneous geographic concentration of fiscal distress, racial segregation, and depressed academic achievement” (Saiger, 2010, §24). A brief introduction on the origins of public schools in the U.S. prior to exploring these topics is warranted as issues related to ethnic, socio-economic, and academic inequality have been fundamentally influenced by fairly sui generis characteristics of the American educational system such as local control of education and funding predominantly through local taxation.

**School District Boundaries: The Larger Framework**

District boundaries often demarcate more than school attendance areas. They may simultaneously represent and reflect social, racial, socio-economic, fiscal, and political markers steeped in custom, tradition, legal rulings, and societal forces resulting in a clustering of equals by separation from unequals (Bishop, 2008; Tiebout, 1956). The following discussion presents five perspectives on school boundaries focusing on (1) Historical roots of racial and socio-economic separationist tendencies; (2) Trends in legal rulings supportive of integration versus segregation; (3) Social class, social mobility and impact on residency patterns; (4) Inter- and intra-district socio-economic and fiscal stratification; and (5) Suburban locales as nexuses of political decision-making and power.
Public schools in America: Historical framework. Education in the colonial era consisted of a predominantly privately funded, locally provided, mostly religious, and short-term enterprise with unequal access (Odden and Picus, 2008): “Town meetings often voted to provide elementary schooling for ten or twelve weeks a year. They often favored boys over girls and charged parental fees to supplement the town’s support” (Mondale and Patterson, 2001, p.11).

The idea of local control over schools can be traced back to the founding of the nation and reflects the early discomfort with any form of centralized government (Gomez-Velez, 2008), an attitude still prevalent today, for example in criticism of contemporary federal initiatives such as the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and more recently President Obama and Arne Duncan’s Race To The Top initiative (Berlak, 2005; Ravitch, 2010a; Ravitch, 2013; Toppo, 2004).

In the early 19th century, Thomas Jefferson asserted that local schools were to fulfill a dual purpose: instill democratic values and provide citizens with self-governance skills (Mondale and Patton, 2001). The concept of common schools providing a universal education governed by state mandates, receiving state funding, and operated locally by a school board was born in the mid-19th century (Gomez-Velez, 2008; Odden and Picus, 2008). The onset of the Industrial Revolution in the Northeast increasing the amount of urban centers and causing a large influx of immigrant children who had to be assimilated quickly and efficiently into the mores and habits of the host culture sparked the genesis of the common school movement (Mondale and Patton, 2001). The concept of neighborhood schools educating all children residing within a specified geographic area was first introduced in Massachusetts in the 1850s (Barron, 2009). Noteworthy in light of claims of contemporary racial and economic resegregation influencing parental attitudes towards intra-district boundary adjustments is Gomez-Velez’s (2008) assertion that
racial, gender, and socio-economic inequalities have plauged the common school model from its inception.

Plaintiffs in legal cases starting as early as 1896 have sought relief from conditions establishing de facto racial and socio-economic segregation and discrimination. While a number of Supreme Court rulings between 1954 and the early 1970s initially resulted in mandatory racial desegregation efforts, more recent rulings in turn have limited integration requirements. Beginning in the late 1960s concurrent legal challenges related to school funding have worked their way through the courts. These initially focused on fiscal inequities between districts though more recently have mainly relied on adequacy arguments (Odden and Picus, 2008).

Current research reflects a macro-perspective discussing how historical events and concepts have shaped public education in the U.S. An analysis of the implications and ramifications at the level of a suburban school district, in particular with regard to parental responses associated with internal redistricting and mandatory transitioning of students to a different within-district elementary school, therefore offers a complementary micro-level perspective.

**Public schools in America: Legal framework.** Before the advent of common schools in the 1840s typically only white children (predominantly boys) from wealthier families who could afford to pay tuition and temporarily relinquish the extra set of hands for labor were afforded access to any form of schooling (Mondale and Patterson, 2001; Odden and Picus, 2008). Racial discrimination and segregation—superimposing a contemporary lens onto historical events—were rampant prior to the latter half of the 19th century (Mondale and Patterson, 2001).

The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case presented an early challenge to the then-prevalent “separate but equal” principle. The U.S. Supreme Court however contended that separate
facilities for black and white children were allowable as long as those could be considered equal (Barron, 2009; Brown and Knight, 2005). The tide started to turn half a century later in the mid-1950s. On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court in the seminal *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision unanimously struck down the “separate but equal principle” as inherently discriminatory: “It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity . . . is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms . . . . Separate facilities are inherently unequal” (Chief Justice Earl Warren as cited in Mondale and Patterson, 2001, p.138).

Liu and Taylor (2005) have argued that the *Brown* decision, rather than being grounded in genuine educational concerns, reflected the “inability of the legalized caste system imposed by segregation laws to withstand honest scrutiny under the Fourteenth Amendment” (p.791). The ruling, some scholars have argued, was inherently flawed. For example, the Court failed to delineate a specific solution (Barron, 2009; Holley-Walker, 2012) though this was somewhat rectified a year later in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (II) declaring that integration plans had to be implemented with “all deliberate speed” under the oversight of local school districts (Barron, 2009; Holley-Walker, 2012), reaffirming that education is locally organized rather than a state or federal enterprise. Opposition to desegregation requirements (especially in Southern states) spawned the emergence of freedom-of-choice plans in which districts allowed parents to select which school their children were to attend resulting in de facto instead of de jure segregation (Ryan, 2004). Conservative voices have argued that the *Brown* ruling has actually exacerbated racial segregation by accelerating the white flight to the suburbs in an attempt to escape mandatory integration (Mondale and Patton, 2001).
Discouraged by the pace with which local school boards had implemented integration plans, the Supreme Court in *Green v. County School Board* (1968) ruled school choice plans unconstitutional and assigned oversight of desegregation efforts to federal district courts (Barron, 2009; Holley-Walker, 2012), creating the concept of *unitary status*: “District courts were to evaluate whether school districts were able to create a ‘unitary’ school system in which schools were no longer identified along racial lines. There were clear measurements for unitary status, including the racial composition of staff, school resources, and, of course, the student body” (Holley-Walker, 2012, p.428). The authority of district courts to demand mandatory desegregation initiatives was reinforced three years later in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg Board of Education*. While Holley-Walker (2012) claims that *Milliken v. Bradley* in 1974 presented a turning point from integration to condoned segregation under specific circumstances, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg Board of Education* in effect three years prior established that intra-district segregation due to local racial imbalances or de facto segregation is constitutionally acceptable (Barron, 2009). However, the court simultaneously endorsed actions to mitigate racial imbalances such as “cross-district busing as a means for urban areas to achieve desegregation. Other integration strategies that resulted from the *Swann* decision included paired schools, magnet schools, and schools with constantly changing boundaries responding to demographic shifts” (Brown and Knight, 2005, pp.400-401). The reference to intra-district boundary adjustments in light of changing demographics resonates in light of my project’s focus on parental experiences related to an internal redistricting transition.

Since 1971 a trend towards courts expressing reluctance to interfere both with local control and local conditions resulting in racial disparities can be discerned (Barron, 2009). The U.S. Supreme Court in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) halted desegregation efforts at the inter-district
level barring evidence of cross-district constitutional violations (Ryan, 2004). Specifically, the Supreme Court judges struck down a lower court’s decision mandating busing of inner-city Detroit students to surrounding suburban schools (Barron, 2009), de jure excluding suburban schools from integration mandates (Ryan, 2004). Consecutive Supreme Court opinions in the 1990s, for example *Board of Education v. Dowell* (1991), *Freeman v. Pitts* (1992), and *Missouri v. Jenkins* (1995) further strengthened the idea of local control and acceptance of intra-district racial imbalances across neighborhoods and schools (Holley-Walker, 2012).

Three distinct phases in the history of legal cases involving desegregation can therefore be discerned: (1) separate but equal until 1954; (2) forced integration from 1954 until the mid-1970s; and (3) de facto resegregation since 1971. The seminal *Swann* and *Milliken* decisions granting suburban districts immunity from racial desegregation efforts may in part explain fierce opposition to intra-district boundary adjustment proposals in these locales as evidenced on websites such as *Save Neighborhood Schools in Cumberland, RI* (www.savecumberlandschools.webs.com). Most people prefer to live among ethnic and socio-economic peers. Bill Bishop (2008) has argued that “[o]pposites don’t attract. Psychologists know that people seek out others like themselves for marriage and friendship. That the same phenomenon could be taking place between people and communities isn’t all that surprising” (p.41).

**Public schools in America: Social framework.** The main obstacle to increased racial and socio-economic integration according to Liu and Taylor (2005) is twofold: the home-school connection (students attending school in the neighborhoods where they live reflecting and perpetuating local affluence or deprivation) and local control of education enshrined in the 1974 *Milliken* decision. Ryan (2004) expresses cynicism regarding contemporary integration options.
since in his opinion (1) mandatory integration plans lack any political support, (2) school choice options tend to be limited in scope, and (3) increased heterogeneity of neighborhoods seems unlikely due to the pull of assortative mating and the sorting effect of the Tiebout phenomenon. Assortative mating refers to the tendency of pairing based on similarity: “Mobility enables the sociological equivalent of assortative mating . . . . Our wealth, education, and ability to move have allowed us to seek ‘those places and people that are comfortably akin to one another’” (Bishop, 2008, p.41). Charles Tiebout in 1956 posited that people will flock to communities whose local tax structure and expenditure pattern aligns with their financial abilities and priorities, thereby exerting a homogenizing effect on neighborhoods. The combined result of assortative mating and the Tiebout effect is de facto resegregation, effectively perpetuating social reproduction, increasing class-based isolation (Barron, 2009; Bishop 2008), and causing dual segregation by race and income level (Holley-Walker, 2012).

No Child Left Behind’s foci on accountability and student achievement may simultaneously exert an integrationist and segregationist impact on public schools, especially in suburban and high-achieving neighborhoods (Barron, 2007; Holley-Walker, 2012). Accountability-related transparency could on the one hand exacerbate current segregationist trends as middle class parents attempt to reserve seats in the best schools funded by their tax dollars. On the other hand, provisions for school choice in cases of chronic underachievement represent a concurrent catalyst for intra-district integration: “NCLB is a strong vehicle for socioeconomic integration: only students in low-income schools are eligible to transfer, and busing students to a non-neighborhood school is an acceptable expense” (Barron, 2007, p.396).

Strong resistance to intra-district boundary adjustments fueled not only by loss-induced emotions but also by the power delegated to local communities through the Supreme Court’s
1974 *Milliken v. Bradley* decision may be particularly prevalent and intense in suburban locales where residents possess the social and cultural capital to defend what they perceive as their children’s entitlement to a privileged, racially segregated education safeguarded by protective fiscal measures:

> When suburbanites perceive a threat to their schools, they fight back, and they usually win. . . . Efforts to integrate public schools came to an abrupt halt in *Milliken*, precisely at the point when school desegregation threatened suburban schools. . . . School finance litigation, meanwhile, never got off the ground in the United States Supreme Court, in part because it interfered with the same interest identified in *Milliken*—local control of schools. (Ryan and Heise, 2002, p.246)

Intertwined racial and financial factors have not only shaped a currently highly segregationist residency pattern (Bishop, 2008) but also determine the quality of local schools and by proxy either enhance or limit opportunity for upward mobility (Barron, 2007; Clapp, Nanda and Ross, 2008; Gresham, 2010; Holley-Walker, 2012; Liu and Taylor, 2005; Ravitch, 2013).

Existing research has predominantly focused on the dichotomy between urban and suburban districts as opposed to frictions between social groups within a specific district. Most school districts however consist of multiple neighborhoods with distinct ethnic and socio-economic profiles. Internal redistricting can disturb existing demarcations between social classes and result, according to stakeholder theory (Raza and Standing, 2011), in newly blended schools and neighborhoods, potentially causing social upheaval, discomfort, opposition, and resistance. The impact of internal redistricting on social relationships as well as the psychological dimensions associated with social stratification arguably represent underexplored research topics.
Public schools in America: Socio-economic and fiscal framework. Funding differences between school districts reflect the effect of divergent property tax revenues based on local wealth (Ryan and Heise, 2002), which constitutes on average 40.5% of a district’s operating budget with federal support amounting to 8.5% and state funding 48.7% (Odden and Picus, 2008). “States make varying efforts to equalize funding, but the persistence of inequalities, not to mention the persistence of funding suits, demonstrates that such efforts typically fall short” (Ryan and Heise, 2002, p.2058). The Supreme Court, in its 1973 ruling in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, declined to apply the strict scrutiny test and ruled that unequal school funding does not violate the Constitution’s Equal Protection Clause (Odden and Picus, 2008; Ryan and Heise, 2002) “because education is not mentioned in the Constitution, either implicitly or explicitly. It also determined that low property wealth is not a suspect class” (Odden and Picus, 2008, p.36). Starting with the 1989 Kentucky *Rose v. Council* case, adequacy arguments have over time replaced plaintiffs’ inequity claims (Odden and Picus, 2008; Ryan and Heise, 2002).

Residency profiles according to Charles Tiebout are determined by a supply and demand system in which “autonomous local jurisdictions . . . offer competing baskets of local public goods and associated tax bases to a mobile citizenry” (Saiger, 2010, p.527) resulting in a trend towards assortative mating (Bishop, 2008). Tiebout (1956) presents a purely theoretical model positing that “1. Consumer-voters are fully mobile and will move to that community where their preference patterns, which are set, are best satisfied; 2. Consumer-voters are assumed to have full knowledge of differences among revenue and expenditure patterns and react to these differences” (p.419). One can wonder if in reality the level of elasticity assumed will be more restricted due to factors such as the practical feasibility of moving, parents possessing limited or incorrect
information, and the gravitational pull of existing social connections. These could explain the low number of redistricted Cumberland students leaving the public school district.

Several studies have assessed the impact of school boundaries on property values. Black (1999) compared property values on opposite sides of existing intra-district boundary lines in Boston suburbs and found that parents are willing to pay a 2.5% surcharge for a 5% increase in test scores. Bogart and Cromwell (2000) detected a decrease in property values in Shaker Heights, Ohio amounting to 9.9% at the mean house price following internal redistricting in 1987. Infusing a racial variable into the property value equation, Clapp, Nanda, and Ross (2008) in their data set of housing transactions limited to Connecticut between 1994 and 2004, discerned an inverse relationship between property values and the presence of Hispanic residents with an effect size exceeding the impact of test scores. Over time, however, the authors noted a change towards a more pronounced impact of test scores and a decreasing effect of any Hispanic presence on housing prices. Especially relevant in light of parental opposition to internal redistricting was a depressed appreciation rate for properties in close proximity to existing lines “because homeowners near the boundary may face additional uncertainty associated with possible, future boundary adjustments” (p.464).

An acceleration of racial and socio-economic segregation can hence be discerned. The Tiebout principle asserts that people choose to move to those communities whose tax rates and level of public services reflect their personal preferences, exerting a wealth-driven sorting effect condoned by the Supreme Court’s 1973 decision in San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez.

Districts tax property within their boundaries and nearly always keep the money they raise for use within those boundaries. Under this principle, some districts are rich and
The rich, preferring rich neighbors (both because they simply prefer to live among their own and because want their community to have high taxable wealth), pay that price; nobody else can. (Saiger, 2010, p.502)

In addition, as Saiger (2010) points out, “[f]inancial barriers double as racial barriers in a world where race and wealth correlate” (p.504). Moreover, wealth directly correlates with school resources and student achievement (Liu and Taylor, 2005). Attempts to redraw boundaries tend to be highly contested (Lemberg and Church, 2000), especially in suburban communities which due to Supreme Court rulings, respectively the 1974 Milliken v. Bradley and 1973 San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez, have been virtually immune from mandatory integration or wealth redistribution based on the historical tenets of local control and local funding.

A hiatus can be detected in the existing research with regard to perceived financial aspects of school redistricting as opposed to actual impacts. In addition, property values fluctuate over time, hence Black (1999), Bogart and Cromwell (2000), as well as Clapp, Nanda, and Ross’ (2008) findings of boundary-related depreciation could be under- or overestimates. The heightened emotions associated with school transitions and redistricting proposals may nevertheless intensify the perceived financial impact delineated by Clapp, Nanda and Ross (2008) of a domicile’s proximity to existing boundary lines.

Public schools in America: Decision-making framework. Ryan and Heise (2002) assert that “variables such as race and socioeconomic status, politics, and economics interact in complicated ways” (p.2048). Parent involvement in education historically has mainly been construed as an individual act. Community organizing as a strategy for school improvement and resistance to change is, according to Pappas (2012), increasingly becoming more commonplace,
reflecting the premise that “solutions should come from the people not policy or experts” (p.167). New technologies such as online social networks can play a pivotal role in rallying like-minded people around a common cause or shared belief as evidenced, for example, in the Concerned Cumberland Parents and CarlyntonSOS Facebook pages opposing internal redistricting plans. A digital divide may, however, impact opportunities for all stakeholders to equally participate in decision-making processes related to education (Zikuhr and Smith, 2012):

- **Racial digital divide**: Internet access: whites (80%), blacks (71%) and Hispanics (68%)

- **Socio-economic digital divide—annual household income**: Internet access:
  - less than $30,000: 62%
  - $30,000-$49,999: 83%
  - $50,000-$74,999: 90%
  - $75,000+: 97%

- **Socio-economic digital divide—educational attainment**: Internet access:
  - No high school diploma: 43%
  - High school graduate: 71%
  - Some college: 88%
  - College degree and beyond: 94%

The interrelationship between race, income, and segregationist residency patterns may result in a participatory advantage for white, well-off suburbanites in decision-making processes at the expense of racial minorities and lower-SES people residing in separate suburban enclaves and inner cities (Boudreaux, 2004; Gomez-Velez, 2008; Gresham, 2010; Ryan and Heise, 2002):

In the face of arguments that local governance is vital to local community and local citizenship come arguments that community and citizenship are debased by economic
and racial homogeneity and stratification . . . the actual, lived neighborhoods of the United States are Tieboutian—which is to say, aggressively nonrandom, consisting of persons who, in effect, have “chosen one another as neighbors” (Saiger, 2010, p.524, 525)

In addition, suburban residents possess the social and cultural capital to mount an effective opposition to intra- and inter-district redistricting, as exemplified in the *Milliken v. Bradley* and *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* Supreme Court decisions (Barron, 2009; Ryan, 2004), in order to protect the financial benefits incurred from residing in a wealthy school district, in particular community-funded educational advantage and high property values (Ryan and Heise, 2002).

[I]t is fair to say that *Milliken* both reflected and enhanced the political power of suburbanites. . . . Indeed, suburban schools possess what might be called “the suburban veto,” which effectively gives them the power to limit any education reform that would interfere with suburban autonomy. *Milliken* endorsed suburban autonomy in the field of desegregation, but the suburban veto has also been used to limit school finance remedies and to shape existing school choice plans. (Ryan, 2004, p.1646)

It could therefore be argued that suburban residents have exerted control over education both at the local level by opposing boundary adjustments and socio-economic/racial integration (Barron, 2009; Boudreaux, 2004) as well as at the federal level by lobbying members of Congress and the judiciary to support local authority and governance over education (Gomez-Velez, 2008). Paradoxically, while governance in theory should foster democratic decision-making processes (Gomez-Velez, 2008), asymmetrical power relationships based on race, gender, and SES (Gresham, 2010) have resulted in the emergence of the suburban veto (Ryan, 2004). Middle
class suburban parents’ opposition to integration, redistricting, and more equitable school financing is well documented. However, the emphasis has predominantly been on interdistrict changes such as busing, funding redistribution, and school choice rather than intra-district initiatives. It was theorized that given the social stratification prevalent in most districts, similar protectionist responses by white, middle class parents as have been discerned at the meso-level between suburban and urban communities will likely occur at this micro level. My study’s findings support the validity of this assumption and therefore fill a gap in the existing research.

Intra-district boundaries according to Saiger (2010) as well as Gresham (2010) can be associated with financial, racial, and achievement concerns, each of which tends to invoke strong protective emotions in parents. Though academic achievement and concomitant socio-emotional functioning is of the utmost importance to wealthy, white suburban parents (Saiger, 2010), Yuen’s (2007) qualitative study established that even parents with a low-socioeconomic background are acutely aware of and extremely concerned about anticipated transition-related achievement declines.

School transitions: Academic and Socio-Emotional Effects

School transitions: Academic effects. Alspaugh and Harting (1995), Alspaugh (1998), as well as Mehana and Reynold (2004) all reported academic losses associated with a transition to middle school or junior high. Alspaugh and Harting (1995) however pointed to evidence in their data that achievement levels had rebounded to anticipated levels at the end of the second year post-transition. Duchesne, Larose, Guay, Vitaro and Tremblay’s (2005) longitudinal perspective revealed that achievement declines had already started in the final year of elementary school casting doubt on the causal effect between a transition to middle school and a temporary achievement dip. Potentially invalid generalizations of findings to other types of school
transitions may nevertheless impact how parents experience their child’s (proposed) transition as evidenced by Cumberland parents referring to Alspaugh and Harting’s (1995) conclusion of achievement declines associated with a transition to secondary education in order to oppose the 2010 and 2012 boundary adjustment plans.

Yuen’s (2007) research demonstrated the presence of anxiety about transition-related achievement declines among low-socioeconomic parents in an urban setting. My project, on the other hand, explores whether similar emotions are prevalent among parents with a different profile (white suburban middle class) and focuses on a different type of transition (internal redistricting to support a teaching and learning initiative).

The cumulative impact of successive transitions and related implications for grade configurations can be identified as a related research interest. Anderson (2012) reported reduced levels of belonging among students experiencing frequent transitions—even with transition supports in place—and increased levels of curricular fragmentation in reduced-grade span schools. Brown’s (2004) statistical analyses revealed a negative correlation between 9th grade assessment scores and the number of transitions students had experienced up until that point. Schwartz, Stiefel, Rubinstein and Zabel’s (2011) comparison of achievement across New York City schools showed students attending K-8 or K-4 followed by 5-8 schools outperforming peers in schools with more fragmented grade configurations. These findings led the authors to conclude that the timing of transitions and the length of time student cohorts remain together act as important mediating variables related to the effect of cumulative transitions. Data analyses in the Cumberland redistricting case reveal heightened concerns among parents about academic differences between schools rather than transition-related achievement declines per se.
Previous research has mainly explored the effect of transitions on students rather than parents. In addition, Yuen’s (2007) study exclusively focused on parental feelings related to the transition process for students entering middle school and did not explore possible social and psychological factors shaping attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors.

**School transitions: Socio-emotional effects.** In addition to academic declines, the transition to middle school or junior high has been associated with impaired levels of socio-emotional functioning. Grills-Taquechel, Norton, and Ollendick (2010) discerned gender-determined differential patterns. Though both male and female students had initially displayed comparably elevated levels of social anxiety upon transitioning to middle school, male students’ anxiety continuously declined between grades 6 and 8, which was not the case for their female counterparts. Social supports from peers, parents, and teachers did not appear to impact anxiety levels. Participants in Martínez, Aricak, Graves, Peters-Myszak and Nellis’ (2011) study indicated reduced levels of peer and teacher support in 6th grade compared to their final year in elementary school with pretransition levels of social support and socio-emotional functioning determining post-transition levels. The authors cautioned that they had been unable to separate puberty-related developmental from structural influences and emphasized the importance of transition planning to mitigate any negative socio-emotional impacts. Absent from these studies once again was a focus on same-level structural transitions, which would allow separating the confounding effects of developmental from structural changes. In addition, the socio-emotional effects on parents has been missing from the transition canon.

Suit’s (2007) phenomenological study involving interviews with parents, students, and teachers delineated communication and professional development as essential components of effective transition planning for Indianapolis, IN elementary students entering middle school.
My project’s findings confirm the importance of communication, in this case related to same-level transitions.

**Resistance as a Psychological and Psycho-Social Response to Organizational Change**

Organizations (including educational institutions) notwithstanding a natural inclination towards inertia (Lunenburg, 2010), according to systems theory, need to adapt to changes in their external environment in order to survive and thrive (Cibulskas and Janiūnaitė, 2005; Foster, 2010; Piderit, 2000). Foster (2010) points out that the existing literature has insufficiently investigated individual responses to organizational change at a more granular level: “there is a need to understand more about the complexities of individual response to change associated with resistance to change . . . many studies of change have oversimplified individual responses, often dichotomizing them as either altogether negative or positive” (p.4). My research, on the other hand, aims at obtaining an in-depth understanding of parental responses at the individual and collective levels to an intra-district boundary adjustment. Employing Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory of individual responses (including resistance) to organizational change allowed for the analysis of experiences at a fairly intricate level. In addition, stakeholder theory was included in the theoretical framework for investigating challenges to and pressures on existing group boundaries resulting in resistance (Raza and Standing, 2011).

*Resistance* as a theoretical construct gained prominence in the 1950s spurred by the 1951 publication of Lewin’s force field theory of change (Foster, 2010). This arguably remains a somewhat elusive, fluid, and inadequately defined construct possibly due to the assumption of a universally shared and accepted mental concept of what resistance is and entails. A case in point are the vastly different conceptual representations captured in two definitions of resistance Agócs (1997) provides (“I define institutional resistance as the pattern of organizational behavior that
decision makers employ to actively deny, reject, refuse to implement, repress or even dismantle change proposals and initiatives” (p.918)) and Van Dijk & Van Dick (2009) citing Bartunek (“Resistance is commonly regarded merely as behavior not in line with the attempts of the change leader” (p.143)) while Foster (2010) and Lunenburg (2010) opt not to include a definition at all into their analyses and discussions of resistance to organizational change.

Bartunek’s definition of resistance is conceptually more closely aligned with parental opposition to internal redistricting and is therefore embraced as an accurate description of the term “resistance” for the purposes of this study with the caveat that this endorsement is topic-specific. In addition, while Van Dijk and Van Dick (2009) regard resistance as a social concept (“Resistance, however, is a socially constructed phenomenon which is identified, defined and continually re-defined through the interaction of all parties involved in the change” (p.143)), Lunenburg (2010) attributes the origins of resistance to psychological forces (“There is a human tendency to resist change because it forces people to adopt new ways of doing things” (p.4)). Lunenburg’s inclusion of group resistance and dependence in his enumeration of otherwise internal psychological obstacles to change such as trust, uncertainty, and loss as well as Van Dijk and Van Dick’s (2009) discussion of self-esteem and self-concept—unambiguously psychological constructs—while otherwise considering resistance a social process provide support for the position that resistance incorporates both psychological and social components. The results of this research project provide further evidence for resistance including both psychological as well as social dimensions.

Cibulskas and Janiūnaitė (2005) present a multifaceted analysis of resistance sources (including social, psychological, and psychoanalytical factors), which provided guidance for analyzing the information shared by focus group participants:
1. Structural factors: coercive/imposed change initiative, lack of information, lack of support;
2. Organizational factors: complexity of the change, available resources, institutional myopia, intra-organizational emotional profile, and power relations;
3. Individual factors: emotions, expectations, attitudes, and subconscious stereotypes;
4. Emotional factors: distrust, fear, uncertainty, loss of safety;
5. Cognitive factors: lack of understanding, unwillingness to comprehend the change, selective information processing
6. Motivational factors: habit, power distribution;
7. Competence: self-efficacy or questioning one’s ability to deal with the change and adjust one’s values;
8. Sociological factors: fear of losing socio-economically-based connections, peer pressure influencing individual behavior; and

The authors list but did not further explore this latter subgroup of causes for resistance to organizational change asserting that “it is very difficult to identify them because people are prone to hide their passions, aggressions and other unconscious elements and mask their outbreaks (sic) by other—rational or psychological and emotional elements” (Cibulskas and Janiūnaitė, 2005, p.73). By superimposing Levinson’s psychoanalytical organizational change theory onto focus group data, this study attempts to uncover the presence of unconscious and subconscious factors which impacted parents’ attitudes, reactions, actions, emotions, and behaviors.

Resistance according to Burke (2008) should not be considered opposition to change per se, but rather as an expression of resentment over loss of a desirable item, condition, or power.
Whatever the type of individual resistance, apathy might be worse: “At least with resistance, there is energy, and the person cares about something” (Burke, 2008, p.93).

Kurt Lewin’s 1951 three-stage force-field analysis of organizational change (1. unfreezing followed by 2. moving to a more desirable state and 3. refreezing a newly attained state of equilibrium with resistance potentially exerting a negative impact at each of the transition points) has played a pivotal role in organizational change theories (Foster, 2010; Lunenburg, 2010; Piderit, 2000). Piderit however asserts that the Newtonian action and reaction principles underpinning Lewin’s assumptions are too one-dimensional and hence inaccurately reflect the intricacies associated with responses to change. She instead proposes a tripartite model “capturing . . . responses along at least three dimensions” (p.783): emotional (feelings), cognitive (beliefs), and intentional (actions and behaviors). In addition, Szabla (2007), relating three leadership strategies for planned change (rational-empirical; normative-reeducative; and power-coercive) to Piderit’s multidimensional conceptualization of people’s responses to change, provided an additional level of analysis for assessing any tentative causal relationship between parents’ perceptions of the leadership strategy used to communicate the redistricting initiative and their cognitive, emotional, and intentional responses. The mediating influence of fairness perceptions (Brotheridge, 2003), human cost (King Rice and Malen, 2003), justice (procedural and distributive) (Foster, 2010) and feelings of loss (Gavin, 2003; Lunenburg, 2010; Van Dijk and Van Dick, 2009) proved equally important for obtaining an in-depth understanding of parental experiences and resistance, especially with regard to the four evaluative lenses (trust, fairness, equity, and transparency) referenced by study participants.

Conflict originating from differences in opinion about the future of an organization and the necessity for change may be inevitable and part of the human condition. When well-
managed, conflict can unleash creativity, bolster innovation, and strengthen or create interpersonal relationships resulting in improved collective functioning and superior decision-making related to organizational change (Piderit, 2000; Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Perez, 2003). Deutsch, as discussed by Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Perez (2003), analyzes subjects’ responses to change along six axes:

- Confront conflict versus Avoid conflict
- Aggressive demeanor versus Gentle, unassertive demeanor
- Rigid response versus Flexible response
- Emotional response versus Intellectual-rational response
- Attempt to escalate conflict versus Minimizing differences of opinion
- Bluntness in opinions and emotions versus Concealing opinions and emotions

This multi-axial paradigm was integrated into the research design by means of the attitude rating scale (Appendix I), which aimed at obtaining a more sophisticated understanding of participants’ current and retrospective post-facto responses to the change under investigation.

To assist with processing the diverse types of loss associated with organizational change, Levinson (1972) recommends providing people with opportunities to talk about their change-related feelings and emotions, limiting the practical impacts of a transition (for example by offering relocation assistance) and emphasizing the organizational ideal. Lunenburg’s (2010) strategies for overcoming resistance to change mirror Levinson’s recommendations to a large degree: education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, negotiation and agreement as well as manipulation and cooptation with explicit and implicit coercion as last resort options under specific circumstances. Gavin (2003) suggests re-establishing basic trust, autonomy, and initiative for healing any psychological wounds caused
by an organizational change. Research questions 2 and 3 (“Which internal and external factors are considered to have negatively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members?” and “What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members?”) were designed to explore the validity and applicability of Levinson, Lunenburg, and Gavin’s suggestions within the Cumberland redistricting initiative.

Summary

Establishing intra-district school boundaries is a technically complex and value-laden process that brings into relief ethnic segregation, financial stratification, and divergent achievement patterns across neighborhoods and schools. Periodic adjustments tend to be unavoidable due to changing enrollment patterns and the need to address untenable socio-economic and racial imbalances, which become more pronounced over time due to the combined effect of assortative mating and the Tiebout effect.

Racial and socio-economic disparities can be discerned throughout the history of the American public school system. Legal rulings in racial desegregation cases reflect three stages: (1) Support for the separate but equal principle until (2) the seminal 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling (3) with increasing judicial tolerance of unintentional racial segregation since Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg Board of Education (1971). The 1974 Milliken v. Bradley decision striking down interdistrict integration, de jure and de facto granting suburban locales immunity from mandatory desegregation, has arguably bolstered white, middle class families’ proclivity for racial as well as socio-economic stratification and isolation resulting in what Ryan (2004) coined ‘the suburban veto.’ However, towns and school districts do not tend to be
racially and socio-economically monolithic entities but rather consist of different enclaves or neighborhoods with differing profiles. While prior studies had focused on interdistrict frictions (mostly between urban and suburban locales), somewhat surprisingly intra-district tensions between constituting neighborhoods has remained largely unexplored. An internal redistricting initiative within a suburban setting presented a unique opportunity for investigating whether latent or blatant racism, class-consciousness, and isolationist tendencies had influenced parents’ experiences with a mandatory transition of their child to a different within-district elementary school.

Organizations have to adjust to changed conditions in their external environment to avoid becoming obsolete. The change literature according to Foster (2010) has neglected to explore responses at the individual level. In addition, the concept of resistance appears inadequately defined. This research project investigates individual responses to an intra-district boundary adjustment and considers resistance as a construct incorporating both psychological and social aspects, allowing the transposition of Cibulskas and Janiūnaitė’s (2005) psychological, social, and psychoanalytical sources of resistance onto the data during coding and consecutive analyses.

Resistance and conflict, while generally considered negatively mediating variables within a change process, can also energize people and infuse creativity, innovation, and collaboration into a dispute resulting in improved collective functioning and superior decisions according to Burke (2008), Piderit (2000) as well as Uline, Tschannen-Moran and Perez (2003).

A number of strategies, initiatives and supports for overcoming the psychological effects of change have been delineated by Levinson (1972), Lunenburg (2010) and Gavin (2003), including communication, education, re-establishing trust, and improving self-efficacy. Research questions 2 and 3 (“Which internal and external factors are considered to have
negatively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent and School Committee members?” and “What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent and School Committee members?”) were designed to investigate the use and impact of these strategies within the 2012 Cumberland redistricting.

A qualitative paradigm seemed essential not only to obtain a solid understanding of transition-related emotions, feelings, and attitudes in relation to resistance but also to allow for the in-depth discussions between focus group participants this multifaceted research topic warrants. The six parent focus groups consisted of participants whose child had transitioned to one of the four destination schools in late August 2012 and who were assumed to live in close proximity to one another, likely reflecting their neighborhood of residency’s ethnic and socio-economic homogeneity. It was anticipated that participants’ similarities would create a safe atmosphere encouraging honest responses, in-depth reflection, and openness about emotions which, according to Levinson’s psychoanalytical organizational change theory, are steeped in feelings of loss and originate from largely unconscious and subconscious dimensions of the psyche. Levinson in *Psychological Man* (1976) posited that systems theory focuses on interactional forces between compositional actors and agents but fails to take into account the largely emotional drivers of behaviors which became a major focus of this project.

The study’s three research questions encapsulate the psychological and social dimensions associated with school district and neighborhood boundaries explored in this literature review:

- How did parents experience a mandatory transition of their child to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative?
• Which internal and external factors are considered to have negatively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members?

• What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members?

Chapter III: Methodology

Qualitative Research Tradition

This study employs a predominantly qualitative research design with parent focus groups representing the primary data source. Additional information (mainly for triangulation purposes) was collected through attitude rating scales, one School Committee focus group, and an interview with the district Superintendent.

Saldaña (2011), presenting a fairly broad definition of qualitative research, provides support for Creswell’s (2007) statement that textbook authors increasingly are shying away from defining qualitative research—Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun’s 2012 textbook How to design and evaluate research in education for example describes but does not define qualitative research—to avoid erecting artificial confines to a fluid and ever-expanding array of research methods.

Qualitative research is an umbrella term for a wide variety of approaches to and methods for the study of natural social life. The information or data collected and analyzed is primarily (but not exclusively) nonquantitative in nature, consisting of textual materials . . . that document human experiences about others and/or one’s self in social action and reflexive states. (Saldaña, 2011, pp.3-4)
Qualitative approaches nevertheless share a number of common characteristics (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2012)—also reflected in this project—such as:

- data collection in the natural setting (five of the six parent focus groups took place in the schools students had transferred into);
- the researcher collecting data;
- reliance on multiple types of data (data sources include parent and School Committee focus group transcripts, attitude rating scales completed by parent participants, and a transcript of the Superintendent’s interview);
- focus on the perspective of participants (as evidenced by the selection of a focus group methodology);
- inductive data analysis (transcripts were coded with codes grouped into themes resulting in an inductively generated theoretical model);
- emergent design (research questions were allowed to change throughout the data collection and analysis process; the original research questions were modified to include a focus on covert psychological factors impacting parental experiences after exploring the work of Harry Levinson in light of responses to organizational change); and
- holistic perspective by focusing on complex interactions (the research questions, theoretical framework, literature review and selected focus group methodology all reflect a preoccupation with both psychological as well as social factors influencing parental experiences regarding redistricting-related transitions).

Ultimately, while the researcher in the context of a qualitative research design can rely on a number of methodological approaches such as Thomas’s (2006) general inductive framework
discussed ahead, there are no standardized methods for data analysis (Saldaña, 2011). In Maxwell’s (1995) words, there exists no “‘cookbook’ for doing qualitative research” (p.79).

**Research Design**

Three research questions emerged from a review of the school transitions literature: (1) How did parents experience a mandatory transition of their child to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative?; (2) Which internal and external factors are considered to have negatively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members?; and (3) What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members? The qualitative research design relied on six parent focus groups as the primary data collection tool. For triangulation purposes, additional information was obtained by means of an interview with the Superintendent, one School Committee focus group, and parent attitude rating scales.

The focus group methodology provided a particularly apt data collection method for exploring parents’ experiences: In addition to providing a forum for collective reflection, a focus group gives a voice to participants who may not divulge information through other methodologies (Liamputtong, 2011; Saldaña, 2011). Liamputtong (2011) explicitly referenced the power of focus groups for obtaining a better understanding of lived experiences through the eyes of the participants: “A focus group is a research tool that gives ‘a voice’ to the research participant by giving him or her an opportunity to define what is relevant and important to understand his or her experience” (p.4), thus directly aligning the selected methodology with the first research question. Moreover, the ability of the focus group format to “uncover aspects of understanding that often remain hidden in the more conventional in-depth interviewing model”
(Liamputtong, 2011, p.4) reinforces the selection of Levinson’s psychoanalytical approach to organizational change as part of the theoretical framework underpinning data analyses.

The focus group format offers a powerful research tool for discovering and unraveling collective sense-making processes grounded in symbolic interactionism around the phenomenon of interest:

Symbolic interactionism is a framework which greatly emphasizes the essence of meaning and interpretation as crucial human processes. Individuals ‘create shared meanings through their interactions, and those meanings become their reality’ . . . the focus group methodology allows the researchers to examine the ways in which people collectively understand an issue of concern and then construct meanings around it.

(Liamputtong, 2011, p.16)

This research project reflects a social constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2007) focused on obtaining a better understanding of complex processes by relying “as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” and inductively generating “a theory or pattern of meaning” (Creswell, 2007, pp.20-21) by means of a proposed theoretical model.

Saldaña posits that within a qualitative paradigm the researcher is considered “to be the primary instrument [italics in original] of the endeavor” (2011, p.22) with his or her epistemological theories shaping the research design and data analysis processes: “Thus, there are no such things as “neutral,” “bias-free,” or objective lenses for qualitative researchers. There are, however, guidelines and procedures available to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of one’s knowledge construction” (2011, p.23). Chapter 1’s positionality statement delineates how the researcher’s professional role as a central office administrator in the district under investigation may have created a more administrative-rational than empathetic-emotional
position towards the research topic. A white, middle-class background shared with the vast majority of focus group participants could have further impacted if not limited a multifaceted interpretation of the data. Overestimating the emotional impact of internal redistricting on parents by focusing on emotion-laden transcript excerpts and affiliated codes may have represented a third potential source of bias.

A range of measures to enhance trustworthiness as related to credibility (validity, internal validity, reliability), transferability, dependability, and confirmability including but not limited to triangulation, audit trail through analytical memos, peer debriefing, and analysis of disconfirming evidence are discussed at the conclusion of this chapter. These reflect a concerted effort to negate potential researcher bias or epistemological narrowness.

**General inductive approach.** The general inductive approach to qualitative data analysis consists of the allocation of codes to textual fragments which are repeatedly grouped into increasingly more general and abstract meta-categories. According to Thomas (2006) this methodology can be situated within a tradition of inductive research designs allowing the emergence of concepts and themes from the data through researcher analysis “without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (p.238) and fulfills three purposes: (a) Condense raw textual data into a brief, summary format; (b) Establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data; and (c) Develop a framework for the underlying structure of experiences or processes evident in the text data (Thomas, 2006, p.237).

It could be argued that the general inductive approach as presented by Thomas (2006) incorporates characteristics of both a phenomenological methodology as well as action research creating a multifaceted paradigm potentially resulting in a richer analysis of the phenomenon
under investigation than either method in isolation might be able to engender. More specifically, a general inductive methodology combines a phenomenological study’s focus on “an intimate awareness and deep understanding of how humans experience something” (Saldaña, 2011, p.8)—in this case how parents experienced a redistricting initiative causing their child to transition to a different elementary school—with action research’s goal of “not just observing social life, but reflecting on one’s own practice or working collaboratively with participants to change their setting and circumstances for the better” (Saldaña, 2011, p.18). This project does so by identifying factors, strategies, supports, and initiatives which either ameliorated or hampered the change process. The findings outlined in Chapter 5 can guide future redistricting initiatives (and potentially also other types of large-scale structural change), either in the district studied or other districts. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) emphasized that generalization of qualitative studies is not determined by sound methodology or representative sampling but rather depends on other practitioners’ judgment regarding the transferability of findings to different settings.

**Participants.** Contrary to quantitative research with its intent to generalize findings by using a representative sample reflecting the intended population, qualitative studies tend to rely on purposeful sampling consisting of individuals who “can best inform the researcher about the research problem under investigation” (Creswell, 2007, p.118). However, as Krueger and Casey (2009) point out, purposeful sampling and random sampling are not mutually exclusive.

Participants in this study included the district Superintendent and School Committee members. Even so, Cumberland residents whose children were affected by the 2012 internal boundary adjustment indisputably represented the main research interest. The Cumberland School Department operates five elementary schools (Ashton, BF Norton, Community, Cumberland Hill, and Garvin). The intended population consists of the parents of all
approximately 430 K-4 students (grade of attendance during the 2011-2012 school year) who, according to May 2012 district data, were scheduled to attend a different school due to the redistricting initiative, resulting in six subgroups based on destination school as delineated in Table 2.

Table 2

2012 Cumberland Redistricting: Transition Patterns and Number of Students Affected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2012-2013 Destination School</th>
<th>2011-2012 Sending School</th>
<th>Number of students affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashton</td>
<td>Cumberland Hill</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF Norton</td>
<td>Garvin</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Ashton</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Cumberland Hill</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garvin</td>
<td>Ashton</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garvin</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The practice of locating potential research participants by obtaining a list of all people who meet predetermined criteria is advocated by Krueger and Casey (2009). Three homogeneous focus groups consisted of parents whose children moved from one origin school (second column) to the same destination school (first column). Due to the limited availability of participants, a fourth group was created including both Community and Ashton parents whose children had all transitioned to Garvin school and could therefore be labeled as *semi-homogenous*. The Ashton to Community group was too small to warrant a focus group. Two heterogeneous groups with parents from multiple destination schools were also established in a concerted effort to elicit discrepant views and reduce potential peer pressure by neighbors.
Maxwell (1995) regards the term “sampling” problematic with regard to qualitative studies “because it implies the purpose of ‘representing’ the population sampled” (p.88). Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012) as well as Liamputong (2011) propagate the use of purposeful (criterion) sampling for qualitative research. Saldaña (2011) on the other hand mentions the possibility of random sampling while Krueger and Casey (2009) actually recommend this whenever possible to reduce selection bias. Random sampling was attained by instructing the Excel program to assign a random number to each row on the spreadsheet provided by the district’s data manager listing the name and contact information of every redistricted student and sorting the entire file based on these random numbers from high to low. Any student no longer enrolled in the Cumberland School Department, in addition to those students attending a specialized program to either meet their IEPs or due to limited proficiency in English as well as former school choice students, were first removed from this list after cross-checking each name in the Aspen student management system which updates enrollment information in real time. Liampattong’s (2011) position that “[m]ore often, researchers employ a combination of methods in gaining access to research participants” (p.54) supports this procedure, which consisted of initial purposeful or criterion sampling followed by random sampling and resulted in what could be called “purposive random sampling”. A total of 180 selected parents (30 per subgroup) were contacted to participate in this study. Ultimate focus group sizes ranged from two to nine reflecting Creswell’s (2009); Liampattong’s (2011); Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun’s (2012) as well as Krueger and Casey’s (2009) recommendations. The large number of invitees who did not respond or declined to participate could potentially have posed an internal validity threat of the mortality subtype “if [italics in original] those subjects who are lost would have responded differently from those from whom data were
obtained. Many times this is quite likely, since those who do not respond or who are absent probably act this way for a reason” (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012, pp.167-168). A similar issue can be discerned with excluding from this study parents who chose to send their child to a charter school or private school in response to the redistricting decision.

**Recruitment and access.** Access to participants and venues was negotiated by formally informing the Superintendent of Schools in writing (Appendix B) about the project requesting permission to (a) obtain and use district data, (b) organize focus groups, and (c) use district sites for focus group sessions. Recruitment efforts commenced after receiving IRB approval (Appendix O) and the Superintendent’s consent in writing (Appendix N).

Creswell (2007) identified three interconnected potential recruitment and access problems a qualitative researcher may encounter: participation, building trust, and access. Incentives or compensation may entice people to participate in a study. Saldaña (2009) recommends compensating individuals for their time by means of a gift card, cash, or non-monetary reward such as food, which may be essential to allow lower-income and minority parents to participate. Krueger and Casey (2009) asserted that while cash incentives are the most effective, within non-profit and educational environments providing food or a carefully selected inexpensive gift is also acceptable. Based on this information, a decision was made to offer focus group participants a light dinner during their session prepared by the school district’s food services department at a cost of $7.50 per person, paid by the researcher.

Parent focus group meetings were scheduled on weeknights at the participants’ neighborhood school or the district’s central office to accommodate busy schedules, minimize transportation efforts, and conduct sessions at a familiar location providing both comfort and privacy, thereby reflecting Krueger and Casey’s (2009) as well as Liampattong’s (2011)
recommendations for the selection of venues and meeting times. The School Committee session, due to the limited number of participants, provided flexibility with regard to time and location and occurred on Thursday April 18, 2013 in the District Meeting Room at central office.

Trust was established by adhering to a number of ethical guidelines. Maxwell (1995) reminds researchers that any project “is always, to some degree, an intrusion into the lives of the participants in your study” (p.85). In addition to obtaining IRB approval prior to data collection, participants were provided with consent forms as part of the initial invitation (Appendix F) and prior to the start of each focus group (Appendix G). This consent form stipulated the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary and consent could be withdrawn at any point, measures to protect the anonymity of participants such as only using first names, as well as potential risks and benefits of the study adhering to Creswell’s (2007) and Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun’s (2012) guidelines.

Data collection. The primary data collection instrument for this study consisted of six parent focus groups. Only parents whose child had transitioned to a different school due to the redistricting initiative and was still enrolled at the time of recruitment met the selection criteria.

Triangulation refers to the practice of comparing qualitative data obtained from one source of information with other viewpoints or evidence from other data sources. This practice allows researchers to overcome limitations associated with any particular data collection method; provides a wider range of opinions; and positively impacts the trustworthiness, validity, and credibility of a study (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012; Liamputtong, 2011; Saldaña, 2011). Three additional data sources were incorporated in this study to complement and supplement information obtained from parent focus groups: (1) An in-depth interview with the Cumberland School Department Superintendent who proposed the reorganization initiative and had prior
experience with internal boundary adjustments in North Kingstown, a suburban Rhode Island district with a comparable enrollment (4,138 students in October 2012 versus Cumberland’s 4,648) (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2012); (2) Attitude rating scales completed by parent participants; and (3) A focus group consisting of Cumberland School Committee members who had voted on the redistricting proposal.

Krueger and Casey’s (2009) enumeration of focus group characteristics simultaneously offers a succinct definition: “(1) people, who (2) possess certain characteristics, (3) provide qualitative data (4) in a focused discussion (5) to help understand the topic of interest” (p.6). Superimposed onto the research topic, this definition can be restated as (1) parents (2) whose children had to transition to a different school due to an internal redistricting initiative (3) (4) jointly discussing a range of opinions related to (5) their experiences with this specific type of structural transition not mandated by law, policy or court ruling. Additional information was obtained from (1) School Committee members, who (2) had voted on the redistricting proposal (3) (4) jointly discussing and analyzing (5) parental responses to the redistricting and associated transitions. The aim was not to reach consensus but to attain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by creating a forum at which participants felt safe to openly discuss similar as well as divergent responses, perceptions, feelings, emotions, attitudes and beliefs. Liamputtong (2011) argues that

Focus groups provide rich and detailed information about feelings, thoughts, understandings, perceptions and impressions of people in their own words. . . . Focus groups are valuable for obtaining in-depth understandings of the numerous interpretations of a particular issue by the research participants. . . . This is the reason why focus groups
are particularly suitable for exploring issues ‘where complex patterns of behaviour and motivation are evident, where diverse views are held’. (p.6)

The reference to “complex patterns of behavior and motivation” validates the appropriateness of the selected methodology and theoretical framework in light of both the intricate psychological processes involved in organizational change discussed by Levinson (1972, 1976) as well as the complex social processes outlined in the literature review when school boundaries intersect with ethnic and socio-economic stratification.

A number of advantages and limitations related to a focus group methodology have been discerned in the research literature. Liamputtong (2011) points to the opportunity for in-depth discussion enhanced by interactional processes among a limited number of participants who have been selected based on similarity with regard to concerns or experiences. Creswell (2009) regards the control that can be exerted by the researcher as a desirable characteristic, though highly structured approaches can also stymie the communication between and among participants. Possible limitations consist of participants providing superficial information combined with a reluctance to share intimate thoughts for fear of ridicule and social repercussions (Liampattong, 2011). Krueger and Casey (2009) dispel six common criticisms regarding focus groups by suggesting solutions, which were employed to optimize data collection procedures for this study:

1. **Criticism:** Focus groups tend to intellectualize.  **Solution:** Triangulation.  **Study:** Supplemental data sources consisted of (1) an interview with the Superintendent of Schools, (2) one School Committee focus group, and (3) attitude rating scales filled out by parent participants.
2. **Criticism:** Focus groups do not tap into emotions. **Solution:** Incorporate strategies that elicit emotions. **Study:** Use of attitude rating scales during parent focus groups.

3. **Criticism:** Focus group participants may make up answers. **Solution:** Obtain information from different data sources. **Study:** Parent focus group information was supplemented with and compared to attitude rating scales data, an interview with the Superintendent, and data collected from one School Committee focus group.

4. **Criticism:** Focus groups produce trivial results. **Solution:** Restrict group size to 12 or fewer. **Study:** Focus group sizes ranged from 2 to 9.

5. **Criticism:** Dominant individuals can influence results. **Solution:** Moderator interferes. **Study:** Liamputtong (2011) suggests identifying dominant talkers prior to the start of the focus group, seating those people in close proximity to the moderator and, if needed, resort to prompts such as “‘Thank you, John. Are there others who wish to comment on that question?’”, “Does anyone feel differently?” or “That’s one point of view. Let’s hear what others have to say” (p.81). These prompts were jotted down on the interview protocol as a mnemonic tool.

6. **Criticism:** Focus groups results are unreliable. **Solution:** Triangulation. **Study:** Parent focus group data were compared to information obtained from attitude rating scales, an interview with the Superintendent of Schools, and one School Committee focus group.

The authors conclude that “no method is perfect and . . . research methods are highly situational, in that they are highly dependent on how they are used, the expertise of the researcher and the environment in which the research is undertaken” (Krueger and Casey, 2009, p.13).

The main justification for using the focus group format as a data collection tool lies in its acclaimed uncanny ability to surface deep meanings compared to other methods such as surveys.
and individual interviews (Liamputtong, 2011), which was essential in light of the hypothesis that covert and subconscious or unconscious psychological and social factors impact parents’ responses to and experiences with their child’s transition to another school following internal redistricting. In addition, this project aims at attaining an improved understanding regarding the range of attitudes and emotions associated with large-scale structural change; at discerning and analyzing differences in parental experiences; and at uncovering constituting emotional, cognitive and intentional drivers of responses to change as delineated in Piderit’s (2000) tripartite model.

Maintaining confidentiality is especially important when focus groups are presented with potentially sensitive issues involving highly personal emotions. Similar concerns might arise related to divulging experiences and attitudes which may encounter social disapproval. The research design incorporating homogeneous groups of parents living in close proximity could to an extent have jeopardized privacy and anonymity. Liamputtong (2011) points to the harm that inappropriate disclosures during or after focus group sessions, either by the researcher or participants, may inflict:

The most disturbing and unethical damage in research occurs when participants are harmed by the disclosure of their private world. According to the principle of non-maleficence, researchers have a responsibility to ensure the physical, emotional, and social well-being of their research participants. (p.26)

Krueger and Casey (2009), however, point out that confidentiality is diametrically opposed to the academic expectation of establishing an audit trail for assessing the validity of findings. A number of strategies to safeguard focus group participants’ privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality based on recommendations by Liamputtong (2011) were incorporated into the
data collection process: signed consent prohibiting the disclosure of information; not using names in the research report; password-protecting all electronic files listing participants’ names; keeping any records containing confidential information as well as recordings in a locked file cabinet; introductory and concluding statements emphasizing the importance of confidentiality; using name tags displaying first names only; stipulating in the invitation that all information provided would be considered confidential and only be used for the purposes of this study; and destroying documents as well as deleting electronic files five years after completion of the dissertation. A focus group approach by design ultimately may be more prone to confidentiality breaches compared to other methodologies: “However, the main ethical concern with using the focus group method is that there is more than one research participant in a group at a time. The researcher cannot ensure that all discussions in the group will remain totally confidential” (Liamputtong, 2011, p.25).

All focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed by Rev (www.rev.com), a professional transcription service guaranteeing stringent confidentiality measures, in preparation for the coding process. In addition, a note-taker attended each session, as recommended by Liamputtong (2011), to mitigate the impact of malfunctioning equipment or inaudible fragments.

Krueger and Casey (2009) suggest for a two-hour session to develop a protocol consisting of approximately a dozen questions reflecting five categories: (1) an opening question asking about facts to break the ice; (2) questions acquainting participants with the topic(s) under investigation; (3) transition questions steering the discussion into the direction of the key research questions; (4) two to five key questions starting at about the one-third or halfway mark of the session; and (5) reflective concluding questions geared towards determining participants’ final positions. In addition, Krueger and Casey (2009) advocate (a) the use of activities that are
emotive in nature such as asking participants to create lists, draw a picture or fill out a rating scale as well as (b) providing an introductory statement explicitly stipulating the topic and rules of engagement. These suggestions shaped the parent focus group protocol developed for this study (Appendix H). The School Committee protocol incorporated the same suggestions with the exception of any activity-based interludes, which were deemed incongruent with the goal of obtaining factual and interpretive information rather than eliciting and surfacing unconscious and subconscious drivers of behavior and emotions. Following Krueger and Casey’s (2009) recommendation, the focus group questions were reviewed by people possessing expert knowledge about the topic and revised according to their suggestions: Dr. Phil Thornton, Superintendent of Schools, because of his leadership role in the redistricting initiative; Dr. Chris Unger, Dissertation Advisor and Dr. Lisa Colwell, Director of Special Education, due to their expertise with interviewing as a research method, and Ms. Sandy Pickering, a parent impacted by the reorganization.

**Parent focus groups.** The research design centered around three homogeneous focus groups exclusively consisting of parents who had experienced an identical transition with regard to origin and destination schools, one semi-homogenous group, as well as two additional heterogeneous groups to mitigate any limiting factors caused by focus group homogeneity. Liamputtong (2011) recommends using homogeneous groups when depth of knowledge is important while heterogeneous groups are preferred to discover the breadth of different opinions, experiences and attitudes. The inclusion of different types of groups was therefore a deliberate choice intended to yield more sophisticated results than any option in isolation could potentially engender.
Superintendent interview. An interview with Dr. Philip Thornton, Superintendent of the Cumberland School Department, provided a first source of triangulation data. Obtaining information on parental responses as perceived by the Superintendent was the primary reason for incorporating his views into this research project. In addition, the interview contributed to the external validity of the study by explicitly asking him to compare the Cumberland redistricting experience to a similar initiative Dr. Thornton had previously spearheaded in North Kingstown, a suburban Rhode Island school district with a comparable enrollment.

Creswell (2007, 2009) as well as Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) recommend an interview protocol consisting of (a) a heading listing the day, time and names of the interviewer and interviewee followed by (b) instructions and (c) approximately half a dozen questions reflecting the research questions starting with an innocuous icebreaker and (d) a concluding statement thanking the interviewee. The protocol developed for the Superintendent’s interview (Appendix E) was modeled after the template recommended by Creswell (2007) and, as advocated by Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012), incorporated knowledge questions (“What process or procedures were followed in redrawing boundaries and what were some of the issues that arose?”; “Describe the range of parent responses you have encountered prior to, during, and after the transition process”), experience questions (“What were your reasons for pursuing internal redistricting?”; “What (if any) lessons did you learn from the entire process, especially with regard to parents?”), opinion questions (“What in your opinion were some of the motivators driving parents’ behaviors and emotions?; “What supports, initiatives and strategies in your opinion had a positive impact on the process?”; “What factors in your opinion exerted a negative influence?”; “In what ways was the elementary redistricting in Cumberland similar to and different from your previous reorganization experience in North Kingstown?”), and feelings
questions (“How in hindsight do you feel about the redistricting decision?”). The introductory statement was intended to convey a sense of respect and create an atmosphere of comfort and equity minimizing the possibility of a lopsided power relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Saldaña, 2011). The interview was audio-recorded with the researcher taking notes.

**Attitude rating scales.** Twice during each parent focus group session participants were asked to fill out the same attitude scale (Appendix I). An attitude scale consists of a set of statements or dyads intended to uncover and discover respondents’ overt and covert attitudes related to the concepts of interest. Attitude scales often are presented in the form of a rating scale (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012). Krueger and Casey (2009) recommend that attitude rating scales be simple and quick. “The idea behind the rating exercise is that each person rates a series of items without discussion, and then the results are tabulated and used as the basis for further discussion” (p.43). Deutsch’s six dyad-based profiling of people’s responses to change (Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Perez, 2003) was modified to reflect an attitude rating scale format based on Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun’s (2012) semantic differential example. Within this study the attitude rating scale fulfilled the dual function of obtaining additional data for triangulation purposes and offering an emotive interlude during focus group discussions as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2009).

**School Committee focus group.** A focus group consisting of School Committee members who had voted on the redistricting proposal was included in the research design for three reasons. First, the information obtained from School Committee members served as an additional triangulation layer. Second, a solid qualitative paradigm focused on in-depth understanding of a phenomenon arguably benefits from, if not requires, the inclusion of multiple and varied perspectives. Third, in light of the selected theoretical framework, School Committee
members’ macro perspective aligns with systems theory’s bird’s eye view of organizational change. As such it provided an important complementary perspective to parents’ micro-level perceptions analyzed in light of Harry Levinson’s psycho-analytical theory on organizational change, emphasizing predominantly intrapersonal factors.

The interview protocol developed for the School Committee focus group (Appendix M) to a large degree mirrored the parent focus groups’ template reflecting Krueger and Casey’s (2009) recommendations with regard to number and types of questions as well as guidelines for introductory and concluding statements. Potential participants were contacted by means of a written invitation (Appendix K) detailing the purpose of the study, practical aspects related to the planned focus group, stipulating that the session would be audio-recorded, and delineating measures to safeguard confidentiality. The informed consent form (Appendix L) further detailed the purpose of the study as well as participants’ rights and protections.

Data analysis. The audio-recordings of the six parent focus groups, the interview with the Superintendent, and the School Committee focus group were transcribed by a professional transcription service (www.Rev.com) in preparation for coding. Mean scores were calculated for each item on the parent attitude rating scales followed by a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test to determine whether differences between initial and current responses were statistically significant.

As discussed previously, the sequence of data analysis adhered to Thomas’s (2006) general inductive methodology consisting of initial coding followed by grouping codes into larger categories and determining meta-concepts or themes ultimately resulting in the development of a proposed theoretical model.

Creswell (2007, 2009), Maxwell (1995), and Saldaña (2009; 2011) present at face value different data analysis models for qualitative research which, upon closer inspection, share the
same key stages reflecting Thomas’s (2006) general inductive methodology: (1) Data collection followed by (2) transcription resulting in raw data ready for (3) coding. Codes are (4) clustered in meta-categories or themes followed by the discernment of (5) connections or interrelationships between core concepts, which can be represented in (6) a theoretical model.

Coding refers to the process of isolating relevant pieces of information or passages from the original text or transcript—Maxwell (1995) refers to “fracturing” (p.96)—and assigning meaning to the selected fragments (Creswell, 2009) through codes. Saldaña defines a code as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (2009, p.3; 2011, pp.95-96). Grouping of codes into larger categories for comparative purposes in turn reveals themes and concepts (Maxwell, 1995; Thomas, 2006) or “patterns of meaning” (Liamputtong, 2011, p.173). Coding as an interpretative act always embodies a level of subjectivity (Saldaña, 2009) though it allows transforming site-, person-, or situation-specific data into more general and potentially universal theories or assertions (Saldaña, 2009; 2011).

Coding occurs at two levels: first cycle coding in which one or more initial codes are assigned to every relevant datum and second cycle coding establishing connections between initial codes resulting in the discernment of meta-codes or themes (Saldaña, 2009). A plethora of methods exist regarding both first cycle and second cycle coding. The selection and integration of methods according to Saldaña (2009) depends on the topic and purpose of the study at hand. Once again subjectivity and relativity permeate the methodological process: “Most methodologists concur that coding is “an idiosyncratic enterprise” . . . and the “search for one perfect method of data analysis is fruitless”” (Saldaña, 2009, p.30). The following integrated coding sequence was utilized in light of answering this project’s research questions:
First Cycle Coding

Goal #1: General analysis of data collected. The motivation is purely inductive, supporting the emergent nature of qualitative research by approaching the data without any predetermined objective, focus, or preconceived notions.

Method 1: Elemental

1. Descriptive coding: Assigning a summarizing code to passages +
2. In vivo coding: Using elements from participants’ actual statement as codes; in vivo codes are represented with quotation marks +
3. Process coding: Codes describing actions, interactions, and emotions; process codes include a gerund form (-ing).

Goal #2: Analyze data in light of the research questions.

Method 2: Affective: Focus on emotions, values, conflicts, or judgments; Aligned with Levinson’s (1972, 1976) psycho-analytical theory of people’s responses to organizational change.

1. Emotion coding: Labeling emotions represented in the data. Cf. Research question 1: “How did parents experience a mandatory transition of their child to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative?” +
2. Values coding: Coding values, beliefs, and attitudes. Cf. Research question 1: “How did parents experience a mandatory transition of their child to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative?” +
3. Evaluation coding: Adding magnitude codes (+ and -) to other codes reflecting value, merit, or demerit of programs, policies, actions, and initiatives. Cf. Research questions 2 and 3: “Which internal and external factors are considered to have negatively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members?”; “What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members?”
Second Cycle Coding

Goal: Develop categories, themes, and concepts (cf. general inductive analysis as delineated by Thomas (2006)).

Method: Pattern coding: Establishing meta-categories as “more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (Saldaña, 2009, p.152) which overarch clusters of first cycle codes.

CAQDAS or Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software facilitates data analysis processes mainly by providing an electronic repository for transcripts, coded passages, and analytic memos resulting in time efficiencies as well as enhanced validity by creating a solid audit trail. Potential disadvantages consist of the learning curve associated with using CAQDAS, fairly prescriptive data analysis processes, a focus on data rather than interpretation, and the lack of attention to interactional patterns (Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, 2012; Krueger and Casey, 2009; Saldaña, 2011). The MAXqda 11 CAQDAS software package was selected for this project based on Creswell’s (2007) description of the options for organizing coded fragments.

Data storage. Following Krueger and Casey’s (2009) and Saldaña’s (2011) recommendations, every electronic file was saved in multiple locations (personal computer hard drive and USB flash drive). Adding the date of initial creation in the document’s title allowed for storage in chronological order. To protect participants’ privacy and anonymity, hard copies of records containing personally identifiable information are stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home. All electronic files have been password protected using the following sequence: Open Microsoft Word and Excel: File → Info → Permissions → Protect Workbook (Excel) / Protect Document (Word) → Encrypt with Password. Any records are available for
validity of the study and trustworthiness

trustworthiness in qualitative research is established through transparency, specifically by providing the reader with rich descriptions of events, sites, and participants as well as detailed information about procedures, choices, and interpretations (saldana, 2011). lincoln and guba (thomas, 2006) identified four broad categories of trustworthiness: (1) credibility; (2) transferability or generalizability; (3) dependability; and (4) confirmability.

credibility. fraenkel, wallen, and hyun (2012) argued that credibility consists of the conglomerate of three research concepts: validity, reliability, and internal validity. validity refers to procedures enhancing the accuracy of research findings (creswell, 2009). these measures, however, merely increase the odds that the research results reflect reality but do not guarantee this outcome. maxwell (1995) mentioned three caveats related to validity: validity is a goal rather than a concrete product; validity is relative and depends on research purposes and circumstances; and evidence rather than methods reduces threats to validity. validity-related evidence can be divided into three categories: content-related, criterion-related, and construct-related evidence (fraenkel, wallen, and hyun, 2012). this study incorporates measures related to each evidence type:

- content-related evidence:
  - purposeful random sampling (only redistricted parents who had experienced the type of transition under investigation were included for random sampling)
Different types of questions (Krueger and Casey, 2009) and limited group sizes (Krueger and Casey, 2011; Liamputtong, 2011) enhancing the accuracy of information obtained from focus groups.

- Criterion-related evidence: Triangulation of information: Parent focus group data were compared to attitude rating scale results as well as information provided by the Superintendent and School Committee members.
- Construct-related validity: Dissertation Committee members ascertained the validity of findings.

Additional validity measures or strategies discussed by Creswell (2007) and Saldaña (2009; 2011) incorporated in the research design consist of peer debriefing, the creation of analytic memos, analysis of discrepant information, and clarification of potential research bias thus significantly exceeding Creswell’s (2007) recommendation to use at least two validation strategies. No focus group participants accepted the invitation to review a draft of the Research Findings chapter.

Reliability refers to the stability of findings across time, sites, and circumstances (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012). A number of measures intended to increase reliability such as obtaining good-quality audio by using a digital recorder, accurate transcriptions, and consistent coding through defining and specifying codes whenever necessary became an integral part of the data collection and consecutive analyses. For practical reasons the use of multiple coders and calculating interrater reliability, while representing a strong reliability measure (Creswell, 2009), could not be accomplished and arguably represents a methodological weakness. The use of multiple other reliability procedures was however intended to mitigate any impact of a single coder method.
Systematically ruling out alternative explanations for findings establishes internal validity. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) discern ten major threats to internal validity, which were used to guide the research design:

1) Subject characteristics: Selected participants differ in some important way from the intended population. The purposeful random sampling technique in addition to using both heterogeneous and homogeneous focus groups was aimed at significantly reducing the odds for selection bias with regard to parents.

2) Mortality: Loss of subjects. A mortality threat due to the large number of randomly selected parents declining to participate in focus group sessions may have impacted findings, as their motivation(s) could reflect one or multiple factors which might be significant in light of the redistricting experience.

3) Location: The location of data collection impacts findings. Following Krueger and Casey’s (2009) recommendation to use a familiar venue, parent focus groups occurred at the school participants’ children attended at the time with one heterogeneous session taking place at central office. Offering a comfortable environment should have been conducive to obtaining representative information, minimizing any location threat.

4) Instrumentation: Data collector characteristics, instrument decay across multiple administrations, and data collector bias influence the data collected. Measures were taken to stabilize each constituting element of an instrumentation threat:
   - Data collector characteristics: Notetakers were instructed to record interactional dynamics between participants as well as with the moderator. The introductory statement to focus group sessions was intended to empower participants and reduce any power inequalities.
• Instrument decay: Use of a focus group interview protocol with questions established in advance.

• Data collector bias: Potential biases are explicitly detailed and discussed.

5) Testing: Pretest-posttest interference. A slight testing effect may have been prevalent due to the administration of the attitude rating scale twice during the same session.

6) History: Significant other events may impact participants’ responses. The upheaval caused by the proposed introduction of standards-based report cards could have exerted a history threat on parents’ perceptions of their child’s new school. The school district’s increased FY14 funding request and affiliated property tax increases, the release of NECAP test results, and the probably unavoidable comparisons of schools and teachers by parents may have posed additional history threats.

7) Maturation: Passing of time naturally influencing perceptions rather than the transition event. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) argued that using a control group is desirable to offset any maturation effect. While the research topic and study design were not conducive to including a control group as parents whose children were not impacted by the intra-district boundary adjustment would not have been able to provide relevant experiential information, the data obtained from two heterogeneous focus groups should have contributed to stabilizing the impact of any maturation threat. In addition, data were collected within the same school year during which transitions occurred. The effect of time distorting people’s memories, however, may be an unavoidable threat associated with a more longitudinal research focus.

8) Subject attitude: Selection for participation in a study may influence data obtained. Subject attitude presents a genuine threat with focus groups while simultaneously
counteracting a mortality threat. Krueger and Casey (2009) pointed out that being invited to participate in a focus group can be construed as an honor. Including discrepant data in analytical processes is intended to moderate the impact of any subject attitude threat.

9) Regression: Extremely high or low results ending up closer to the mean in consecutive testing. The two administrations of the attitude rating scale presents the only instance in which any regression effect may have occurred. Aggregation of individual scores should to a large degree have erased the impact of outlier data.

10) Implementation: The experimental group receiving unintended advantages positively skewing test results. The research design did not include any experimentation nor did it reflect an experimental group versus control group format.

In summary, subject characteristics, mortality, testing, history, maturation, subject attitude, and regression may have posed potential threats to internal validity. The research design aimed at mitigating their impact to the degree possible, though, mainly due to the qualitative non-experimental design, was more geared towards stabilization than precluding or excluding the impact of extraneous influences.

**Transferability.** Transferability, external validity, or generalizability are three terms used interchangeably to denote the applicability of research findings beyond the site, phenomenon, and participants included in a study (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012; Maxwell, 1995). Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) asserted that the transferability of qualitative studies is determined by practitioners and enhanced through replication in other settings with different participants: “Qualitative investigators, then, are less definitive, less certain about the conclusions they draw from their research. They tend to view them as ideas to be shared, discussed, and investigated further” (p.437). Maxwell (1995) on the other hand, introducing the
concept of face validity, claimed that in the absence of evidence to the contrary “there is no obvious reason *not* [italics in original] to believe that the results apply more generally” (p.115).

**Dependability.** Lincoln and Guba, as mentioned by Thomas (2006), recommend establishing an audit trail and conducting a research audit in conjunction with member checking as three measures for increasing a study’s dependability. Focus group members were invited to participate in member checking (though no one accepted this offer) as detailed in the concluding section of the interview protocols (Appendixes H; M) and all data will be preserved for five years post completion of the dissertation allowing approved auditing. Moreover, this project was subjected to intellectual and methodological scrutiny by the advisor and other members of the dissertation committee.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability was established through triangulation of data. Information obtained from focus group participants was compared and contrasted to other data sources, more specifically attitude rating scales filled out during parent focus group sessions, an interview with the Superintendent, and one School Committee focus group.

**Chapter IV: Research Findings**

**Introduction**

The results and data analysis section of this project is comprised of four parts. After revisiting the context of the study, a brief description of the data sources is presented followed by an in-depth analysis of the data collected. The final section summarizes the major findings in relationship to each research question.

**Study Context**

The aim of this qualitative study is to better understand how parents experienced a school district’s redistricting initiative involving a mandatory transition of their child to a different
elementary school. In March 2012, the Cumberland (RI) School Committee approved the Superintendent’s proposal to adjust the internal boundaries determining which of the five elementary schools residents’ children attend. This adjustment was necessary to accommodate full day kindergarten in each of these schools and to equalize buildings’ usage by realigning student enrollment with plant capacities.

**Data Collection**

Information obtained through parent focus groups represented the primary data collected for this study. Triangulation occurred by means of three additional data sources: (1) a focus group of School Committee members who had voted on the redistricting proposal; (2) an interview with the Superintendent, and (3) an attitude rating instrument administered during parent focus groups. All data were obtained between April 8 and April 30, 2013 (13 months after the initial decision to redistrict) to decrease the potential impact of history and maturation threats to the study’s internal validity (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012).

**Parent focus groups.** A total of six parent focus group sessions were conducted, with two to nine participants each, comprising a total of twenty-eight parents. Focus groups allowed the researcher to obtain first-hand information, within a forum conducive to collective interpretation and analysis, from participants who had experienced the redistricting and associated transition.

**Attitude rating scale.** In addition to participation in focus groups, parents also filled out a six-item seven-point rating scale reflecting Deutsch’s dyads dissecting how individuals respond to change. Participants were asked to indicate their initial feelings towards the redistricting prior to a group discussion on this topic. Later on in each session, parents again were asked to fill out an identical scale this time reflecting their current responses. It should be stressed that the initial
administration asked participants to indicate “how they remember” initially feeling about the redistricting rather than reflecting how they actually felt at the time.

**School Committee focus group.** Three of the seven School Committee members who approved the redistricting plan participated in a focus group allowing the researcher to collect additional information regarding parental experiences from a different vantage point.

**Superintendent interview.** Finally, Dr. Phil Thornton was interviewed to obtain a second complementary perspective. In addition, the Superintendent’s prior redistricting experience in a comparable district expanded the discussion beyond the scope of the Cumberland case.

**Data Coding and Analysis**

Several coding processes were employed for the first cycle of coding. General descriptive coding and emotion coding were used most frequently. In vivo coding and process coding functioned as auxiliary coding strategies within the descriptive coding process. Evaluation coding allowed further nuancing by assigning + and – magnitude codes to emotion and description codes, though those were ultimately replaced for reasons of clarity by the words “positive” and “negative” when transferring codes into MAXqda 11. In addition, values coding was employed due to the preponderance of attitudinal descriptors in the transcripts. Coding was initially completed by hand using paper and pencil followed by the use of MAXqda 11 to electronically record and tabulate each fragment. Double coding not only assisted with addressing redundancies, omissions, and errors within the initial coding round but also facilitated the discernment of themes through pattern coding. Emerging connections between codes were iteratively revised, refined, and sometimes abandoned during the data analysis process. Analytic
memos assisted with and guided this inductive process ultimately resulting in the development of a proposed theoretical model.

The three research questions guided data analyses. The process of comparing and contrasting similarly coded excerpts from all transcripts (parent focus groups, School Committee focus group, and Superintendent interview) for each research question resulted in an emerging thematic narrative.

**Research Question 1: How Did Parents Experience A Mandatory Transition Of Their Child To Another Elementary School Due To A Large-Scale Redistricting Initiative?**

Table 3 lists the seven themes which percolated from the data related to how Cumberland parents experienced their child’s transition to a new school due to the 2012 redistricting:

**Table 3**

*Themes Reflecting How Parents Experienced the Mandatory Transition of Their Child.*

- Parents initially experienced anger, denial, disbelief, and acceptance. Their responses evolved over time mostly towards acceptance.
- Parents’ cost-benefit analyses influenced their attitudes and emotions over time.
- Parents consulted alternative information sources to supplement official messages.
- The transition process ruptured social connections.
- Parents attempted to outwardly reflect a positive attitude towards their children but internally struggled with fear, anger, and anxiety.
- Parents described four lenses through which they viewed any information pertaining to the redistricting: equity, transparency, trust, and fairness.
- Most but not all children and parents’ transitions were ultimately considered positive.
Parents initially experienced anger, denial, disbelief, and acceptance. Their responses evolved over time mostly towards acceptance. Parents’ answers on the attitudinal survey, discussed in a later section, as well as their comments during focus groups revealed diverging responses to the redistricting news. These reflected anger, denial, disbelief, and for many eventually acceptance of the redistricting news.

Across focus groups, parents described initially feeling angry and attributed their anger to varying causes such as increasing the total number of transitions (“The change, the changing schools three times, or twice, that made me feel angry”), the potentially negative impact on property values, and a protective response towards their children (“I was mad... Because I worry so much about my fourth grader”). One participant explained how in her opinion many parents’ anger may have originated from fear and nervousness: “I don’t think it was so much anger as it was fear and nervousness. I think it came across as anger... it was more fear...”

Some parents discussed initial responses arguably suggesting denial, for example not expecting to be directly impacted (“we probably thought maybe we wouldn’t be affected by it”) or trusting that the redistricting proposal would be voted down by the School Committee based on the fate of previous redistricting attempts: “No, and I just thought that one didn’t pan out and this one probably won’t either, to be honest, because there was a big uproar...” Others assumed the existence of viable alternatives as detailed by one parent: “So, I mean, I think with any change, most people’s reaction is oh no, I don’t want change... Is there another way to do this?” A mother shared how her family until the very end refused to believe or accept that the redistricting would impact them: “Even when the official letter came neighbors got a letter two weeks after that saying they were staying, so my kids were still hopeful that we were getting one of those letters too.”
Disbelief presumably occurred when parents expected immunity from redistricting either because of a domicile’s location at a distance from the old boundaries ("but I was honestly thinking that it was wrong, the math was wrong, there was no way. No matter how many times I blew it up on my computer . . . . I said there’s no way") or due to its proximity to the neighborhood school. As one parent stated, “I was more than shocked when I found out, because . . . we walked to school. . . . It took us a little while to really grasp it.”

A significant number of parents indicated early acceptance of the redistricting for a variety of reasons commenting that “change happens,” that the proposal made sense, and that it would benefit the town (“It helped me rationalize the process because I’m in favor of full-day kindergarten”) with some reportedly even defending Dr. Thornton’s redistricting proposal, evidenced in the following quote: “So I found myself . . . defending the redistricting in a vocal manner and saying, no this is a good thing. This is a good thing because people were really responding to it irrationally.” Other parents described early acceptance with concomitant apprehension, for example by asserting that “it’s our natural instinct to get apprehensive of any change.”

Eventually, the vast majority of parents described having come to accept the decision, particularly after observing their child’s positive response to being in a new school. One parent explained, “I love the school. I’m actually very happy that we shifted.” Another added, “I think we were happier with the way it ended up . . . . It seemed a better way to do it, to have everybody just flow down; that’s the way I feel . . . .” Knowledge and familiarity with the destination school reportedly contributed to rationalization and acceptance processes. As a mother detailed, “I was familiar with this school too . . . [and] knowing that . . . made it better for me to accept it.” A significant number of parents shared how their positive experience with the
transition, and in particular observing their children being happy at the new school, assisted with acceptance replacing their initial anger, fear, and anxieties, for example, “Like I said, I was really mad. Now I’m glad that he’s more comfortable here . . . . He’s doing well and he’s made new friends. All the things I was worried about turned out OK.”

However, with acceptance, some parents still expressed residual apprehension towards the redistricting initiative despite having largely accepted it. One mother stated, “How I feel about the redistricting is different than how I feel about the school. I like the school, I love the teachers, my experience here is really positive. . . . [but] in many ways I still don’t necessarily agree with the redistricting and the redistricting process.” Several parents indicated residual discomfort with some of the procedural aspects of the redistricting initiative, in particular how the new boundaries had been established: “You can’t throw a house over here and this house goes over here, it needs to be a little more thought out. Maybe even talk to the people. Sit down and have a conversation” and

The other issue that I had is how did they really do the lines in determining who went where. . . . This block could be going to one school, but the backside could be going to another. So you’re separating the kids that grew up together and the kids who would have gone to school for a long period of time together.

Despite an overall acceptance with time, some focus group participants continued to express resentment, feeling powerless and defeatist (“but in reality we knew that you could move or this is what you get”) or harboring a continued preference for their child’s old school.

Finally, while the research design excluded parents whose children were no longer registered with the Cumberland School Department, two data sources tentatively signal that a small number of redistricted parents decided to opt out of the public school system. One School
Committee member mentioned a parent who, after expressing dissatisfaction with the redistricting, ultimately decided to have her child attend a private school. Additionally, the July 1 through September 1, 2012 enrollment data revealed that four redistricted students eventually left the district. However, during that same timeframe 104 non-redistricted K-4 students had been disenrolled.

**Results from the attitudinal survey.** An analysis of the attitudinal rating scale, administered twice during each parent focus group, allowed for a quantitative examination of parents’ initial and eventual attitudes towards the redistricting. The attitudinal survey was based on Deutsch’s six dyads reflecting how people respond to change (Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Perez, 2003):

- confront conflict versus avoid conflict
- aggressive demeanor versus gentle, unassertive demeanor
- rigid response versus flexible response
- emotional response versus intellectual-rational response
- attempt to escalate conflict versus minimizing differences in opinion
- bluntness in opinions and emotions versus concealing opinions and emotions

To record parents’ responses (1) as they remembered their initial feelings to the redistricting announcement and (2) how they currently felt about the initiative, the constituting components of Deutsch’s dyads were presented on opposite ends of a seven-point scale, rated from -3 (strongest agreement with the statement to the left) to +3 (strongest agreement with the statement to the right). Of course, caution should be exercised when interpreting results as both administrations of the attitude rating scale occurred during the same focus group session. As pointed out before, the initial response should in effect be interpreted as parents’ memories of
their initial emotions. Despite this methodological weakness, the significant discrepancies between initial and current responses indicate that attitudes had evolved over time. The results of the survey are presented in Table 4, along with a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test to determine statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Table 4

Parent Rating Scales: Responses.

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Mean initial response: -0.29; Mean current response: +0.68; Δ = +0.97

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test: W(22)= -144, Z= -2.33, p= 0.0198

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Mean initial response: +0.19; Mean current response: +1.32; Δ = +1.13

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test: W(21)= -173, Z= -3, and p= 0.0027

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Mean initial response: +0.39; Mean current response: +1.71; Δ = +1.32

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test: W(21)= -162, Z= -2.81, and p= 0.005

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Mean initial response: +0.43; Mean current response: +1.64; Δ = +1.21

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test: W(19)= -128, Z= -2.57, p= 0.0102

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Mean initial response: +0.64; Mean current response: +1.50; Δ = +0.86

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test: W(20)= -134, Z= -2.49, and p= 0.0128.
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Mean initial response: -0.71; Mean current response: -0.11; Δ = +0.60
Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test: W(15) = -72, Z = -2.03, and p = 0.0424.

A modest increase of +0.97 in mean scores in the direction of avoiding conflict between initial and current responses is caused in large part by a reduction of -2 scores (confront conflict) with a concomitant increase in +3 (avoid conflict) responses. This shift mirrors qualitative data reflecting three current parental responses all characterized by conflict avoidance: acceptance, resentment, and leaving the public school system.

Two of the eleven respondents moved from a predominantly aggressive demeanor to a neutral position with the other nine shifting towards a gentle, unaggressive demeanor.

The most pronounced move overall is associated with the rigid versus flexible response dyad. The mean shifted in the direction of a flexible response by +1.31 with the amount of +3 scores increasing from 3 (11%) to 10 (36%) with only one respondent indicating a residual slightly rigid response (-1). These findings seem aligned with the abundance of qualitative data provided by focus group participants pointing to some level of acceptance and may explain the low prevalence of redistricted parents disenrolling their children from the public school system.

The virtual identical means cores between the dyads emotional versus intellectual-rational response and rigid versus flexible response could indicate a possible connection: As parents’ emotions waned, perhaps they became more flexible in their attitudes?

The relatively low number of respondents (n= 8) who indicated initially attempting conflict escalation appears to confirm School Committee members’ observation that they had expected a more pronounced opposition against Dr. Thornton’s redistricting proposal. The shift
is nevertheless more muted with a larger number of respondents indicating a current attitude towards the center of the spectrum compared to the rigid versus flexible and emotional versus intellectual-rational dyads.

Parents’ directness in expressing their opinions and emotions overall appears to have decreased with a shift towards concealment, which is also reflected in the qualitative data revealing a more conciliatory attitude over time compared to initial reactions.

All differences in means between initial and current scores on each dyad of the attitude rating scale proved statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval.

**School Committee and Superintendent perspectives on parental responses.** Information provided by the Superintendent as well as School Committee members corroborated the shift in initial parent responses towards acceptance. As the Superintendent stated, “Most [parents], when they came in to see me, if they wanted to come see me, would understand the reasoning.” Parents affirmed the Superintendent’s depiction, evidenced for example by the following statements: “I just had a couple [of] questions and I picked up the phone and it was him . . . so I just asked him some questions about things . . . and he told me exactly where things were at that point. . . . That was actually helpful” and “I think as long as you can see the logic of why they’re doing it, it makes it easier to accept that it has to happen.”

**Parents’ cost-benefit analyses influenced the evolution of their attitudes and emotions over time.** At each focus group, parents discussed factors which had influenced their emotions and attitudes over time. Many parents described the process of weighing pros and cons in order to determine their position. As one parent said,

Part A is yes, you are your child’s best advocate and you should do everything in your power to do what you think is best for your child, whether it’s to say yes, we should do
this redistricting because I’ve got a child who’s going into full-day K and the only way they’re going to do this is redistricting. . . . Or, I’ve got an older child who’s going to fifth grade, they’re going to be bumped into a school for one year. How does this benefit me?

In keeping with this response, another parent stated,

A lot of it had to do with my ignorance. A lot of my fear and concern and being angry. I also didn’t feel like I was well informed of cost benefit analysis like what are we getting from this, what is the town getting, what is my kid getting?

Some parents detailed being able to accept and support the redistricting by infusing an altruistic factor of the “greater good” into their personal cost-benefit analysis (“if . . . no greater good to come to anybody, then I thought that that would be a big waste, but I think that . . . a lot of children . . . benefit from doing this”) while others focused on the potential negative impact of their children having to attend another school without any personal gain (“and I’m not reaping any of the . . . my children are not reaping any of the benefits, so yes, I was not thrilled”). Two interconnected cost-benefit analyses appear to have occurred simultaneously: an internal analysis in conjunction with an external counterpart, the latter jointly construed for example on Facebook, in discussions at the soccer field, and at school bus stop as reflected in the following excerpt:

I would also … there was a lot of discussion, what I refer to as the bus stop chats. There was a lot of discussions with parents. I heard about it on the Facebook page and then I went to the bus stop, there was a lot of discussion.

Any new information was reportedly incorporated into these cost-benefit analyses, influencing parents’ opinions, attitudes and overall response to both the redistricting and their child’s
transition to a new school, exemplified for instance in one parent’s statement that “At first I was really emotional. . . . But then . . . then I heard good things, so I got better”.

**School Committee and Superintendent perspectives.** Both School Committee focus group members as well as the Superintendent referenced cost-benefit analyses by parents—especially around full day kindergarten—and reflected on how some parents based their analysis on advantages transcending their nuclear family while others solely focused on personal impact or gain. As the Superintendent stated, “They appreciated the full-day K, thought that was great, but some of them had already got theirs, so it really didn’t have a value for them.”

**Alternative information sources were consulted to supplement or supplant the official messages.** Although some parent focus group members praised the Cumberland School Department’s communication related to the proposed redistricting plan, many others deemed the frequency and quality of communication efforts inadequate. As a result, parents attempted to obtain additional information from both formal and informal sources. One mother succinctly described this ‘filling the communication void’:

I just go back to I feel like the district as a whole didn’t get out in front of it. There was so much misinformation and kind of bits and pieces of information that were passing informally, the bus-stop conversation. Basically misinformed people or … I want to say limited, I don’t think it’s misinformed. They had limited information for making decisions with limited information.

Uncertainty about the final boundaries and the release of multiple maps with evolving lines prolonged the process and heightened feelings of stress and angst both at the individual as well as communal levels. A parent labeled the situation as “the threat of not-knowing” while
another referred to collective Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (“... we are going to have PTSD from redistricting in my neighborhood”).

The perceived scarcity of information allowed for the emergence and proliferation of rumors. Parents described turning to neighbors, friends, teachers, the media, and social media for additional information to supplement and at times even supplant the official district communication. A number of opinion leaders—peers considered by parents as unofficial authorities with regard to the redistricting proposal—seem to have emerged within the different neighborhoods as evidenced by statements such as “[Names omitted], the parents you trust . . . . Those are the parents that I chose to talk to and really I think they educated me and a lot of what was going on and explained things and we talked about it” and “Yeah. I think one of our neighbors was . . . so to speak, a ring leader of always talking to the Superintendent and would let everyone know that she was talking to the Superintendent.”

These neighbors-opinion leaders per focus group participants’ accounts fulfilled a triple role: (1) Facilitating collective processing of emotions, (2) Alleviating insecurities by inducting newer parents into the history and traditions of the town (“I will say that as somebody who didn’t grow up in Cumberland, you do listen to people who have been here for decades or more or who grew up here”), and (3) Rallying the troops as described by parents during two separate focus group sessions: “I had women knocking on my door: like, you have to come to this meeting, your kids are going to go to [name school omitted], you can't have them go there” and “there was a group of parents . . . they just didn’t want to do it period. . . . I don’t know how much time they have, but they would put these packets on our doorsteps all the time. It was all their opinions and it was signed by these three or four parents.”
Parents also sought teachers’ input. One participant shared how talking to teachers and the principal helped her accept her child’s mandatory transition to another school:

But, if it comes from a teacher, a kindergarten teacher, the 1st grade teachers, the principals telling you that it will be better in the long run and it’s really beneficial to have full day K, I think that helps better than listening to Dr. Thornton over and over . . . again.

In addition, a large number of parents referenced using the Internet (in particular the Concerned Cumberland Parents Facebook page) (1) as a primary information source (“I heard about it initially through the Garvin page on Facebook”), (2) as a complementary information source (“I went online. I talked to people whose children were students here. . . .”), (3) to verify information (“. . . and there was a lot of information that was put out on the website so at least you could see the maps, you could look at the numbers”), and (4) to find a forum for processing emotions (“Yeah, if it's a hot topic like redistricting it was just … it would be like 67 comments, and it was crazy”).

*The Valley Breeze*, the weekly free local circular, provided information (“I don’t know when they started talking about it in the Valley Breeze, but of course, isn’t that where everybody gets . . . that’s where you find out everything”) while also sensationalizing and distorting events such as Dr. Thornton’s meeting with Windsong parents and the allegedly consequent adjustment of boundaries (“I think too, the Valley Breeze didn’t help in that regard. They posted something that, I think, made it look like that’s what happened. People had a meeting with the Superintendent and then their kids were switched to a different school”).

**School Committee and Superintendent perspectives.** School Committee members indicated that they were well aware of rumors but refused to allow those to impact their attitudes towards Dr. Thornton’s proposal. Two of them discussed monitoring online conversations but
refrained from getting involved. The other participant described an active participation in discussions through the Concerned Cumberland Parents Facebook page and using this forum to disseminate information.

Throughout his interview, the Superintendent recounted how parents affected by the redistricting resorted to friends, neighbors, social media and The Valley Breeze for information with this communal interpretation resulting in the proliferation of rumors.

**Transitions ruptured existing social connections.** During each focus group, parents at length described how transitioning to a new school resulted in the rupturing of social connections for them as well as their children. Both to an extent are obviously interrelated as detailed by one parent: “It was more of, “This was part of who I had become, and I felt like I was leaving friends that I had made through my kids behind.””

The traumatizing effect of transitioning children having to leave their friends behind became a recurring theme during conversations, though typically parents described their children’s experiences through the lens of their own feelings as evidenced in the following quotes: “I was concerned about her friends, because all her friends are at her other school. She cannot break into the cliques. They like her, but . . . she walks around by herself at recess”; and “. . . but when you’re in the moment and that child is leaving their friends that’s very difficult and it becomes really emotional.” Yet, at the same time, parents expressed relief that notwithstanding occasional initial resistance caused by leaving friends behind, the vast majority of their children had actually transitioned smoothly, in large part due to the mediating impact of new friendships as evidenced in the following excerpts from different focus groups: “”I don’t have any friends in my class, I don’t want to go.” It was so funny because the first day at school, I heard ”I made a new friend today, her name is [name omitted]””; “They blend in beautifully.
They formed new friends from day two’; and ‘‘Oh, I can’t believe I’m leaving all my friends. Oh.’’ That took a while, but now he’s made new friends. They’re actually better friends, more like him, so that was good.”

Multiple focus group participants admitted encountering resistance from and exclusion by other parents when trying to become part of the new school community, contrary to their children who generally speaking were welcomed by the existing student body. Sometimes this outsider status was communicated subtly through language, for example by referring to transfer parents as “the [name school of origin omitted] people” or more directly by existing “cliques” attempting to “expel parents from outside.” Alienation ensued when parents realized their unfamiliarity with the building, practices, and resources exemplified by statements such as “For me, it’s like starting over in kindergarten or first grade. I had to learn a new school. I had to figure out how it operates, because it does operate a little differently.”

Focus group participants also recounted positive experiences and a fairly smooth integration into the new school. When one parent expressed that she actually felt “more part of this school”, another participant responded “That’s good, that’s good. We’ll all feel part of our current school eventually, but I think it’s going to take more than just one year” reflecting hope that any outsider feelings will prove temporary—a sentiment echoed by multiple participants during four of the six parent focus groups.

School Committee and Superintendent perspectives. School Committee members as well as the Superintendent corroborated the importance of friends and friendships for transitioning students. With regard to parent cliques, one School Committee member referenced an exclusionary reflex by both insiders and outsiders: “One thing about [name school omitted] . .
always … outsiders looking in. . . . The insiders didn’t want anything to do with the rest of the world. . . .”

Parents attempted to reflect a positive attitude and confidence towards their children but internally struggled with fear, anger, and anxiety. Parents frequently reported attempting to outwardly portray a positive attitude towards their children while internally experiencing intense feelings of doubt and anxiety. One parent described this ambivalence as follows:

Well, and not even that, I was just trying to make them feel good about themselves . . . and inside I was thinking, "Oh, my, gosh, I hope this isn't the worst thing that’s ever going to happen to us," but I try to be positive for them and that was hard for me.

Another participant during the same session used even more emotion-laden language to describe this emotional juxtaposition: “. . . even though she shed some tears and we do these things, and she comes home like this, and it might kill me inside, but I am not letting her see what I feel. It is still positive no matter what.”

Parent-child communicative processes related to the redistricting as reported by focus group members can be grouped into three meta-categories: non-communication; child-initiated communication; and parent-initiated communication. Parents attributed their decision not to initiate any communication with their children to (1) the intensity of their own initial emotions warranting peer-processing first (“Complete shock and very emotional to be honest. It became a huge topic of every probably conversation for a while and trying to hide it from the kids”), (2) denial and disbelief with a concomitant hope that the redistricting would be abandoned or not impact them, or (3) reluctance to share information until the plan had been finalized (“I tried not to give him any information until it was set in stone”). This communication delay made it easier
for some and worse for other parents to consequently engage in conversations with their children as evidenced in the following two statements: “Then by the time I had to talk to him, I was already good about it. I wasn’t in an emotional state . . . ” versus “I was getting a little I have to say bitter at the end. My kids were getting quite emotional about it and we tried not to talk about it until we know the final answer what was going on. It was a big deal.” Concealment attempts were at times thwarted when children heard in school about the redistricting, resulting in heightened emotions and child-parent frictions: “. . . trying to hide it from the kids, because I didn’t want them to be worried, but they actually heard at school and they came home very upset.”

In other instances children initiated the redistricting conversation, even though parents allegedly preferred not to broach the topic. Once communication had been established, parents again resorted to exclusively positive messages in an attempt to influence and shape their children’s attitudes: “This time I made a huge, concerted effort not to talk about it in front of my kids, and when they brought it up, I was such a cheerleader and so positive”; and “‘Well, this happened,” I'm like; “It's all right. Let's move on, tell me all the good things that happened.’”

Parents who opted from the beginning to talk with their children used different strategies. Some parents frankly shared their negative attitudes towards the redistricting, which other parents deemed inappropriate and hampering of their efforts at easing the transition for their children. One participant described how a young girl echoing her mother’s negative opinion temporarily undermined her daughter’s positive attitude towards the redistricting:

I had a little girl in the neighborhood who was playing with my daughter during the summertime and was saying I’m against redistricting in words that should not be coming out of a 4th grader’s mouth. . . . I knew it was coming right from her mother. . . . I said,
“[Name omitted], don’t worry about it. It’s going to be the best thing that ever happened to you.

Most parents reportedly opted for a more balanced approach in which feelings were openly discussed both pre-and post-transition with an emphasis on positive aspects. Comparative strategies were sometimes used when parents described their own emotions and experiences providing their children with a framework for processing feelings, illustrated for example in the statement “One of them is still having a tough time and I said I had to make new friends at your school too. I had to meet new moms and dads too . . .”

Finally, some parents discussed a more unilateral communication strategy characterized either by simply informing their child (“A decision’s been made and you have to deal with it and that’s it. There’s nothing you can do about it so don’t dwell on it”) or displaying genuine excitement about the redistricting without offering their child a forum for further discussion.

Focus group participants agreed that parental responses impact children’s attitudes, aptly summarized by one parent as “. . . how you present yourself is going to be reflected in your kids’ ability to transition successfully.”

**School Committee and Superintendent perspectives.** School Committee members and the Superintendent given the private nature of parent-child communication were unable to provide much information on this topic. One School Committee member nonetheless hinted at some teachers raising parents’ anxieties by providing “ammunition” against the redistricting proposal: “Whether it’s about re-districting or standards-based grading, they give ammunition. Parents give it to their kids. Teachers give it to the parents. It’s not very helpful.”

**Information was evaluated through four lenses: equity, transparency, trust, and fairness.** Throughout focus groups, conversations centered on widespread feelings of distrust
towards the school district leadership, which had started under the previous Superintendent’s tenure. This created a difficult environment for a new Superintendent to operate in, especially when presenting a new redistricting plan, which had the effect of reviving latent feelings of distrust towards the district’s leadership with a concurrent protective response in many parents, as for instance evidenced in the statement “I think in the past few years, the trust with the administration, the leadership is not there, so it’s hard to put trust in the hands of those people”.

Parents recounted a number of events which in particular had fueled feelings of distrust. The data used to initially redraw boundaries proved incorrect. Rumors about favoritism started to swirl following a boundary adjustment after the Superintendent had met with effected parents at a private residence. This was perceived and interpreted by some parents as fundamentally unfair, perpetuating existing inequities within the school system and the town. The interconnectedness of trust, transparency, equity, and fairness as evaluative lenses was succinctly captured by two parents attending different sessions when they stated “There were letters about how people . . . were being favored because they were rich people . . . and they were having the Superintendent over to their nice houses” and

It was funny because I remember when those meetings were taking place, how much anger some of those meetings caused, because people said, "Oh, well, he went to so-and-so's house and they had a meeting there, and those people complained. Now, did you notice that those kids are staying at [name school omitted]?"

At the same time, during the majority of focus groups, participants commended Dr. Thornton for his energy, approachability, sensitivity and outreach efforts resulting in enhanced levels of trust summarized by one parent as
Quite frankly, Dr. Thornton was new and he didn’t have a chance to really … you had to either trust him or you didn’t. I felt like I have to say just my personal opinion, I thought he did a phenomenal job handling a really lousy situation with a lot of grace. He did not take things personally, he really just reflected back and heard the concerns.

Transparency represented a second lens through which parents apparently evaluated the merit and demerits of the redistricting proposal. Focus group participants described how occurrences of transparency, lack thereof, or instances of over-transparency had influenced their feelings of trust/distrust, perceptions of fairness, attitudes regarding equity, and responses towards the redistricting and affiliated processes. Numerous parents explained that the evolutionary nature of the proposal, with its multiple revisions, had proven counterproductive as evidenced in statements such as “It changes several times. This will probably be the fourth or fifth revision. There was definitely a lot of angst amongst the whole town” and “so things kind of kept shifting, we were never really sure until it got right down to the end. Were we going to be able to stay? Were we going to have to move?” Moreover, the absence of a comprehensive proposal from the start, including a clear list of benefits, was considered problematic (“For me I’m a very reactive person, so I was very nervous when I heard it. Then like you, you get bits and pieces . . . . I wanted all the information, and you couldn’t get all the information at one time”). In combination with the use of initially erroneous data this apparently resulted in too much transparency, actually raising parents’ anxieties and sensitivities as did the Superintendent’s impromptu proposal to offer a subsidized before-school program at one school, which other parents perceived as unfair and inequitable:

I think that transparency was very into, however, there were some things done, during the decision-making phase that I think were … I don’t want to say too transparent, but maybe
and Dr. Thornton started throwing up these, “Oh, well maybe we could get a daycare provider” . . . that just set off a frenzy in town, and I don’t know that he realized that . . .

The actual determination of boundaries remained a sensitive topic throughout the entire process. Suspicions of favoritism—especially pertaining to the Windsong adjustment rumored to be the result of private meetings with the Superintendent—appear to have originated from a perceived lack of procedural transparency. During three sessions, redistricted parents discussed the counterintuitive nature of being redistricted when living in close proximity to the original school.

Parents nevertheless also reported three transparency-related factors which had positively impacted their emotions and attitudes: the opportunity to visit the proposed destination school, the Superintendent’s outreach and willingness to communicate with parents, and the public sharing of proposals-related data:

I think the School Committee meetings were very helpful and there was a lot of information that was put out on the website so at least you could see the maps, you could look at the numbers. I’m a numbers person so that helped me come to grips with why the change was more significant than we expected.

Focus group members presented a fairly nuanced perspective on equity. Some expressed a commitment to the common good (“Exactly, if . . . no greater good to come to anybody, then I thought that that would be a big waste, but I think that there are a lot of people, and a lot of children that are getting benefit from doing this”) echoing the position detailed by School Committee members. Others, however, while acknowledging the unacceptability of current inequities, confessed to having a hard time transcending the potential impact on their children. Multiple participants indicated that they had been unaware of existing inequities prior to the
redistricting conversation: “At that point, I didn’t have a lot of information as to how imbalanced the school numbers are. . . . I didn’t have all the information at the time.”

During their conversations, parents also referenced fairness as a fourth evaluative lens shaping their responses to the redistricting. A large number of participants described initially feeling treated or impacted unfairly because of (1) children’s prior transitions; (2) perceptions of favoritism, especially with regard to the Windsong boundary adjustment; (3) proximity to the original school; (4) fifth grade students having to change schools for one school year (“My initial concern because I have a 4th grader going to 5th grade, so she’s going to go to a different school for just one year”); and (5) immunity of school choice students (parents who had opted to transition their child to a different school after Ashton and BF Norton had failed to meet AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) benchmarks) from mandatory redistricting. One parent nevertheless indicated that in her opinion, as far as fairness was concerned, Dr. Thornton’s plan compared favorably to the 2010 proposal as it impacted more families thereby spreading the pain of transitioning more evenly across the entire town.

**School Committee and Superintendent perspectives.** During the School Committee focus group session, participants affirmed the pervasive levels of distrust among parents towards both the district administration and the School Committee as a decision-making body. Dr. Thornton admitted that the Windsong boundary adjustment had resulted in widespread innuendo of favoritism but explained that the correction of initially wrong data provided by the bus company resulted in shifting the Windsong area to Community school.

With regard to transparency, School Committee members reported that parents genuinely appeared to appreciate the opportunity to visit their child’s anticipated new school, even before the final vote. They confirmed parents’ statements about the widespread distrust towards the
district leadership dating back to the previous Superintendent, whose redistricting proposal was embedded within the proposed FY2011 budget, and agreed that the data provided to support the need for redistricting offered a level of transparency not experienced before. Dr. Thornton, while acknowledging the fallout of the Windsong home meetings, also indicated receiving parent appreciation for his willingness to discuss concerns regarding the redistricting proposals, which parent accounts corroborated.

Equity was the only topic discussed more at length by School Committee members and the Superintendent than parents. School Committee participants explained that their district-wide bird’s eye perspective allowed them to clearly discern pre-redistricting inequities in four areas: building usage, student achievement, support programs, and readiness for learning. They also referenced a moral obligation of elected officials to focus on the common good (“it was almost as if people had just resigned to the fact that we had strong schools and weak schools and they were okay with that. I wasn’t okay with that”) and disregard individuals’ sensitivities related to socio-economic associations and classifications, which had fueled intense opposition to any prior proposal to adjust the intra-district boundaries. As the Superintendent stated:

It had been some 18 years. It wasn’t done in the past because people would say it’s too difficult, too political, you can’t get it done because people don’t want to face it, that kind of thing. So we kind of faced the brutal facts here and we dealt with it and we did it and we held the line after we did it, because it had to be done.”

School Committee members discussed both the universal and relative aspects of fairness. While resolving inequities among schools in their opinion arguably represented an instance of universal or across-contexts fairness, one participant philosophized about the relativity of this concept: “One of my favorite issues … of fairness. Fairness to who? To them? To the
community as a whole? What is fair?” This ambiguity seems to embody the divergent parental attitudes towards the fairness elements associated with the redistricting initiative.

**Most but not all children and parents transitioned well.** The vast majority of focus group parents shared that their children had transitioned well, though three of the 28 participants reported significant ongoing transition-related issues due to difficulties establishing new friendships, not liking the new teacher, and bullying (“My daughter has [gone] from smiles and happiness to complete embarrassment, and degraded here, and she still cries to go to [name school omitted]”). Parents appeared to agree on the child-specific nature of the transition experience: “I think … we had two kids who moved. One I think it has worked out great, and for the other, I think it would have absolutely have been better for her to stay”; and “I think, for me, it’s different for each child. I think one child didn’t sleep for three weeks and had a rocky start and has done great since that point.” Children’s responses to the transition purportedly exacted a profound vicarious influence on their parents’ attitudes towards the redistricting experience with unproblematic transitions typically resulting in a rationalizing response (“. . . made me rationalize my thoughts and think that this is a good move and my daughter’s coped with the change. . . . We’ll make it work”). Parents in multiple instances described residual apprehension towards the transition while typically their children had adjusted more quickly as evidenced in the following two quotes: “Why are we trying to push this down everybody’s throat? . . . I still kind of feel that way a little bit, but then again, my girls have had a positive experience” and “I thought it was easier for the kids than I expected it to be and harder for parents”.

In addition to making new friends early on, parents delineated a number of other planned or more happenstance factors which had facilitated their child’s acclimatization to a new school: previous transition experiences, having friends on the bus, and a child’s easy-going personality.
Most parents reported that they actually had come to prefer the new school because of their children’s superior academic achievement, enhanced feelings of self-efficacy and self-esteem, and an adoration of the new teacher. One parent recounted how her daughter had openly distanced herself from her old school to a pre-transition friend during a Girl Scouts outing:

\[
\ldots \text{the poor little girl was saying to my daughter on the back seat, “Oh, you know, so-and-so and I were talking the other day at recess and we really miss you at [name school omitted].” They're seven years old, so . . ., “Well, yeah, you know what though, I don’t miss [name school omitted], I like [name school omitted].”}
\]

A few parents indicated that some transfer students had initially experienced some difficulties (typically only lasting a couple of days or weeks), mainly caused by novel procedures, routines, and programs: “I think it’s positive now. Rocky couple of weeks to start, but I think it’s a positive thing. . . . I would say two weeks to kind of get comfortable . . .”

**School Committee and Superintendent perspectives.** School Committee members confirmed the overall smooth transitions, as evidenced in the virtual absence of parent complaints and the positive feedback they had instead received: “Even now, looking back, almost everyone I talked to that was really upset and struggling with it, they’ll say, “Oh my gosh. We love it there. It’s great, it’s fine, he’s fine.”” The Superintendent affirmed a lack of post-transition complaints.

**Research Question 2: Which Internal And External Factors Are Considered To Have Negatively Impacted The Transition Process As Perceived By Parents, Superintendent and School Committee Members?**

The next sections present a synopsis of the answers provided by each of the informant groups (parents, School Committee members, and Superintendent) when asked directly which
internal and external factors exerted a negative impact on the transition process. This overview is followed by a more in-depth thematic analysis based on all the data collected.

Figure 2 visually displays participants’ responses when explicitly asked what factors in their opinion had negatively impacted transition processes.

**Figure 2.** Factors negatively impacting transition processes mentioned by participants when asked directly.

**Parents’ perspectives when explicitly asked.** Parent focus group members, when directly asked, mentioned six external factors which in their opinion had negatively impacted transition processes. First, distinct socio-economic associations related to each of the five neighborhoods clustered around the elementary schools had hampered transition-related collaborations. A transfer to a typically more southern and allegedly less prestigious school
elicited strong emotional responses in a majority of parents. Second, inter-school differences regarding curriculum, practices, policies, and traditions created discomfort. Many focus group participants also felt that the district’s communication pertaining to the redistricting proposal and associated transitions to a new school could have been more effective, possibly curtailing anxieties and the proliferation of rumors. In addition, the limited availability of formal mental health supports both pre-and post-transition was deemed inadequate. Fifth, some teachers attributed declining NECAP scores and classroom management problems to transfer students. *The Valley Breeze*, the local newspaper, reportedly at times had published sensationalized articles on the redistricting proposal, thereby exacerbating parental anxieties. Lastly, the bus company heightened parents’ confusion, doubts, and frustrations by initially providing incorrect data for the first iteration of the redistricting plan, releasing bus schedules late into the summer, and adjusting bus routes for weeks making children fearful of arriving late to their new school.

Parents also mentioned four internal factors which in their opinion had negatively impacted transition processes. Separation from friends caused emotional distress in children and vicariously in their parents as well. A general reluctance towards change contributed to opposition. Parents and children experienced feelings of not belonging to the new school community. Finally, a lack of trust in the district’s administration in conjunction with fairness-related concerns at times resulted in apprehension towards the redistricting proposal.

**School Committee perspectives when explicitly asked.** School Committee members mentioned two factors, both related to adults’ emotions, which in their opinion had negatively impacted transitions: Some parents’ vehement opposition to the redistricting initiative hindered a rational discussion on the merits of the actual proposal (Internal factor). In addition, a small number of teachers complained about their reassignment (External factor).
**Superintendent’s perspective when explicitly asked.** The Superintendent focused on the negative impact of traditional and new media (External factors). Participants in online forums mass-distributed at times incomplete and inaccurate information posing challenges for rectification through official communication channels. Similarly, *The Valley Breeze*’s articles sometimes reflected “a sensationalist slant on events” impeding facts-based discussions.

**Thematic data analysis.** Table 5 displays the six themes which emerged from consecutive coding-based analyses of all the information collected.

Table 5

*Factors Negatively Impacting Transitions: Thematic Analysis.*

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<td>1.</td>
<td>North-South divide (External factor)</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Inadequate district communication (External factor)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Negative messages by teachers, principals, School Committee members (External factor)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Mutual reinforcement parent-child emotions (Internal factor)</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Disempowerment, loss, and outsider status (Internal factor)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Inter-school differences with regard to curriculum, policies, practices, and supports (External factors)</td>
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**North-South divide.** Cumberland’s North-South divide, physically by highway I-295 as well as socio-economically (wealthier northern section) and ethnically (more racially diverse southern section), was extensively discussed, analyzed, and debated during each focus group. Parent participants who had been long-term residents described in detail the long-standing North-South separation within Cumberland (“It’s always been that way since I’ve been a kid, north and south, one is better than the other but it’s really it’s the same, just the rivalry”; “The attitude of
the town, the attitude of the North-South, the demographic, the whole … I think this is just ongoing when it comes to that North-South socioeconomic factor”).

The divisiveness of the Cumberland North-South line as well as the vitriol accompanying school boundary adjustment conversations surprised relative newcomers. However, both a parent focus group participant as well as the Superintendent referred to similar socio-economic separations in two other communities, one located in New Jersey and the other in Rhode Island:

In this town, certainly the 295 line was the thing. That’s pretty similar to my last district. Same thing, we had north and south. It was just reversed. So I think the more you see, the more people are similar in all the communities, and they have the same concerns.

(Superintendent)

Several parents shared how in their opinion comfort with equals was likely the driving force behind this social centrifugal process (“I think that a lot of parents, they think that they’re safe as long as they belong to a certain demographic . . .”; “But like I said in the beginning, a lot of parents are dominated by the demographics”), which reportedly exacerbated parents’ emotional reactions to the redistricting proposal due to the potential for socio-economic stigmatization:

“Right, I think that just has such a huge stigma, “Where do you go to school?””

Racial and class-based tensions within the different town sections were explicitly discussed by participants, though perhaps as a distancing and defense mechanism in multiple instances with the explicit caveat of not applicable to them personally. Others indicated feeling personally offended when Cumberland residents used terms such as “ghetto” and “wrong side of the tracks” and strongly denounced this classist attitude. Interestingly, focus group members residing in the northern section of town lamented feeling singled out and being labeled “racist and elitist.”
Hence, the proposed school boundary adjustments threatened to upset an already tenuous status quo along the socio-economic and racial I-295 North-South corridor. One parent even described this as fear of “getting screwed”. Another participant, during the same session, expressed how the redistricting nevertheless presented an opportunity for collective soul-searching about town-wide inequities: “The redistricting could have been and maybe still could be a great opportunity as a town, as a school-wide district to say here’s where we are. It doesn’t matter where you came from because we are all one now.”

School Committee and Superintendent perspectives. School Committee members confirmed the prevalence of redistricting resistance among parents based on the achievement discrepancies between northern and southern schools. Dr. Thornton, in commenting on parental responses to the redistricting, recounted how covert classism in his opinion constituted a main driver of emotions:

I go to homes in the towns and get people’s feelings, and people weren’t overtly classist. You had to tease it out, kind of like Socratically tease it out down two or three layers to get to it, but eventually, once they got their back up, they’ll just say it, and basically, they don’t want their kids with those kids. It’s a class issue.

Inadequate communication by the district. A large number of focus group parents deemed the manner in which the Cumberland School Department had communicated about the redistricting process inadequate. Dissatisfaction centered primarily around six issues: unclear communication, lack of information, premature communication, delayed communication, communication of incorrect information, and lack of dialogue.

While Superintendent Thornton was almost universally commended for his outreach to parents and explaining the proposal during PTO meetings, at a town hall meeting in the
Cumberland library, and in private homes, a number of parents resented that the proposal initially lacked clarity and detail—especially with regard to the reasons for redistricting and its potential benefits—with multiple revisions creating an extended period of uncertainty and anxiety for parents and children. One mother explained how this allowed the proliferation of rumors forcing the district into a reactive mode thus losing control over communication processes:

I feel like the district as a whole didn’t get out in front of it. There was so much misinformation and . . . bits and pieces of information that were passing informally, the bus-stop conversation. . . . I think that also the district in my opinion didn’t get out in front. . . . I felt like they were constantly on the defense, especially at the office.

The absence of a comprehensive plan from the start and the premature release of information based on what proved to be incorrect residency data were heavily criticized by focus group participants. The timing of communication efforts represented another source of parental frustration. Some parents argued that the redistricting conversation had started too late, not leaving enough time for careful vetting, discussion, and transition activities. Others lamented the tardiness of the final notification letter, causing practical complications such as procuring daycare services in a timely fashion (“When that letter didn’t come out . . . until I think it was the second week in August . . . what I heard at least 10 families had that issue of no daycare”).

Opinions differed sharply regarding the amount of dialogue around the proposal and obtaining input from stakeholders. While one parent complained that her request for a slight boundary adjustment was apparently not taken into consideration, another participant shared how the line was adjusted after she had brought an anomaly to the Superintendent’s attention.
Criticisms regarding a lack of dialogue were countered by parental accounts of conversations with administrators and phone calls returned by the Superintendent himself.

Multiple parents indicated that the late release of bus schedules in hindsight represented the worst part of the transition experience (“That was like the worst part I think of the transition to the new school, was the change in busing and times”), significantly impacting work schedules (“It was very worrisome, with working parents changing their schedule, making sure that you could get them on the bus”) and daycare arrangements. The bus company’s lack of communication was harshly criticized. One parent vividly described her frustration with Durham not responding to her voicemail messages: “People at Durham, I am sure you remember from my conversations there was nobody really taking ownership at Durham and you would try to call. I left several messages without a return call.”

Notwithstanding the numerous complaints regarding communication and information, a minority of focus group participants indicated feeling satisfied with the amount and quality of district communication (“This plan was explained and rationalized extremely well” and “My experience was that it was handled beautifully from the top down”).

School Committee and Superintendent perspectives. School Committee members discussed how the plan initially seemed counterintuitive to some of them as well until becoming aware of the overbuilding that had been allowed to occur over the years, shifting population densities within certain areas of the town. The Superintendent countered complaints about the speed with which the proposal was developed, discussed, and implemented by pointing out that the better part of a calendar year had elapsed between the initial unveiling of the first draft and the start of 2012-2013 school year.
Negative messages and actions by teachers, principals, and School Committee members. Throughout focus group sessions, parents detailed a range of messages and actions by teachers, principals, and School Committee members which, in their opinion, had exerted a negative influence on the redistricting and transition processes. Multiple focus group participants reported that teachers had informed their children about the redistricting discussion, resulting in a temporarily strained child-parent relationship (“... and they came home very upset that I didn’t tell them that they could possibly be going to another school”). These parents expressed ambivalence towards this modus operandi combining disapproval (“They had conversations in school about it, which I don’t think was probably the right thing. . .”) with some level of understanding (“I think they probably did that because there was a lot of animosity in the students”).

Other messages and actions deemed counterproductive consisted of teachers expressing satisfaction about next year’s smaller class sizes; implying to a parent that the destination school would not be able to support her child’s needs; and blaming transfer students for declining NECAP test scores: “And the teacher’s defense is . . . . Well, look who we have this year and who we let go this year. That didn’t sit well with me.”

Principals per parents’ reporting at times had also engaged in actions and communication that negatively influenced the transition process. One parent described overhearing an administrator singling out redistricted students for inferior performance on the state test. In addition, parents expressed disappointment with some principals for not honoring promises such as offering social groups for transitioning children or assigning transfer students to the same classrooms.
A small number of respondents accused the School Committee of not listening to parental concerns and retiring members not caring about the implications of their redistricting vote. One father stated that he “was very disappointed in . . . some of the comments made by the School Committee themselves. I felt like they weren’t really hearing concerns . . . just really showed an insensitivity to parents.”

School Committee and Superintendent perspectives. School Committee members confirmed parental testimony of teachers expressing redistricting-related frustration and anger to students and parents, specifically in cases of involuntary transfer to another elementary school or in response to anticipated larger class sizes. Dr. Thornton recounted how some kindergarten teachers had publicly questioned the academic focus of the envisioned full day program.

During their focus group session, all three School Committee members commented that not listening to concerns is an eternal complaint of constituents disagreeing with a decision.

Mutual reinforcement of parent-child emotions. Focus group participants described two often concurring processes of mutual reinforcement related to parent-child emotions: parents vicariously experiencing their children’s emotions plus parental projection of emotions onto their children. In some instances, parent emotions mirrored children’s as information was jointly processed by members of the same family who often share similar emotional traits as detailed by two parents attending different focus groups: “There are certainly people that react … different people react to this type of situation differently. Okay? We, as a family, are all rather introverted people” and “I think that emotionally we’re all pretty much the same at my house.” Examples of emotions simultaneously experienced by children and their parents revolved around missing friends (“we tried not to say we’re going to miss everyone”), transition-related anxiety (“Anxiety. . . . Just because of the change”), feelings of not belonging (“I feel ... my experience
is they don’t think they belong and I feel sad about it, because if you don’t feel you belong, your kids will not belong”), and pervasive unhappiness with the new school (“Do you know what? We are making a countdown of how many days left of school, because she can't wait to leave third grade”).

One parent attributed her negative emotions to an innate protective response towards children: “Yeah, and it’s not just that child, either. I think a lot of us felt that it’s just my kid, it’s my kid being impacted. Again, from the protection instinct, . . .” Other parents had actually embraced the mandatory transition of their child to a new school either because it surfaced comforting feelings of nostalgia associated with the destination school being their own childhood school or as a valuable learning and character-building experience. As one parent stated, “Kids have to be able to deal with change. They have to be resilient and when we have parents who are so resistive to change, we’re not teaching our kids how to be resilient and accepting of change.”

In a few instances, focus group participants discussed what they had perceived as attempts by other parents to negatively influence and shape their children’s emotions and attitudes towards the redistricting to align with their own, as evidenced in the following quote:

I felt bad for those people who were so against it, that actually made comments that they didn’t care, that it didn’t matter if their child wasn’t going to have a good experience because of their attitude, and I remember thinking, "Oh, my, gosh, those poor kids"

School Committee and Superintendent perspectives. Both School Committee members and the Superintendent attributed parents’ protective responses to heightened emotions in children and adults: “You have to realize it’s emotional. It’s about their kids, and any time you change a status quo on anything with your kids, it’s, I think, stressful” (Superintendent) and “They don’t
like you, because you’re someone who could do that to their child” (School Committee focus group).

**Disempowerment, loss, and outsider status.** Parents commonly discussed feeling disempowered and lacking control both pre- as well as post-transition. The School Committee approving the redistricting was perceived as a fait accompli from the start leaving parents feeling helpless (“I think, for me, trying to balance feeling very helpless, because I think it was very obvious from the get-go that this change was happening whether … regardless of what the community felt”) and disempowered (“Clearly I use the word control so I felt from my opinion that these decisions were being made, I was very disempowered in the process.”). Nevertheless, the ability to visit the destination school even before the final vote provided one parent with a sense of empowerment and regaining control: “I felt that my being able to come here and see the school and then give him input was my type of control. I had control over that situation . . .”

Multiple focus group members discussed how the transition to a new school caused feelings of loss, particularly with regard to the comfort and support provided by a familiar group of parents. One participant explained how “This was part of who I had become, and I felt like I was leaving friends that I had made through my kids behind.” The loss of bonds forged through PTO membership was described as particularly emotional: “I think it was difficult for me because I was so involved, I was on the PTO . . . and I think it was harder for me to let go, than it was the kids. I remember on the last day of school, going around the school and, yeah, I was just hysterical, just could not stop crying.”

According to parent accounts, some children experienced outsider feelings originating from socio-psychological factors (for example, not being adept at establishing new friendships), redistricting-related factors (specifically when only a small group of students from one
neighborhood were transitioning or friends were not assigned to the same classroom), and transition-related factors (“The reading? . . . Not so good. It emphasized that they were not part of the school”). Focus group participants also reported experiencing strong outsider feelings themselves when encountering resistance to their integration, closely mirroring some of their children’s experiences both with regard to etiology as well as psychological impact. Establishing new connections and friendships was described as challenging for adults as well (“There’s people in their roles and now we’re new people, so there’s not necessarily a role for us. I think it takes a while to figure out what your role is”), especially in light of the presence of cliques both involving receiving and transfer parents (“I feel embarrassed how parents are just so cliquey, worse than the kids . . . and then there are parents that try not to blend in because, well, they’re cliquey themselves, so it’s a different clique”). A sense of disorientation caused by unfamiliarity with the physical plant and site-specific practices at times seems to have hampered integration efforts:

I think people honestly forget that we don’t know for instance where the library is. . . . I don’t know where the kitchen is. . . . When I come to volunteer to make copies I don’t know where the copy machine is that parents use. No one told us.

School Committee perspective. One School Committee member confirmed the presence of cliquey behavior among parents at the individual schools but clarified that this behavior was already prevalent before the redistricting and attributed this to a protective reflex against outside criticism by “closing ranks”.

Differences between schools regarding curriculum, practices, and supports. In focus group participants’ opinion, their child’s transition to a different school surfaced and highlighted differences among schools. In addition to the divergent achievement profiles as reflected in the
NECAP state assessment, parents detailed differences with regard to (1) curriculum, (2) academic supports, (3) behavior supports, (4) extracurricular activities, and (5) customs and practices. With regard to the curriculum offered at the destination versus the school of origin, some parents reported significant differences. Others disagreed and deemed the curriculum at both schools largely identical: “I don’t think it’s any different . . . . I think they’re all pretty consistent. The papers are very similar to what my son had at that age.” A third group of parents considered the curriculum comparable with teachers employing different instructional approaches.

The lack of consistent practices regarding academic supports such as 504 plans and Response to Intervention (RtI) was referenced multiple times as a related issue. One parent detailed how apparently her son’s accommodations plan had not been received by the destination school. Finding out that the original document could not be located in central office either further negatively impacted her feelings of trust, providing additional support to the assertion that parents employed the concept of trust as an evaluative lens.

Opinions were more uniform with regard to differences in behavior supports between schools. While one parent expressed reassurance upon discovering that PBIS (Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports) was a district-wide initiative being implemented in every elementary school, many other parents complained about interschool differences with regard to behavior supports, behavior strategies, behavior frameworks and behavior expectations as evidenced in quotes such as “Yeah, but it wasn’t an empty threat at [name school omitted] though . . . . If you didn’t earn . . . you didn’t go”; “… it's a different … it seems to me, like I don’t remember PBIS last year at [name school omitted], but my kids never talked about it”; and “I think discipline is very different here. That’s another area that I’m having issues with.”
Differences in extracurricular activities were also noted with parents and children experiencing strong emotions associated with the loss of traditions, which required them to alter their expectations, as illustrated by one parent sharing her daughter’s reaction when realizing she would not be able to attend the annual Field Day in fifth grade: “. . . and Field Day . . . my daughter . . . hysterically sobbing, and my neighbor looked at me, and was like, "What is…?" I said, "That’s like their prom, like to them, that connection with their friends."” The Sweetheart Dance, math club, and student council represent additional examples of different traditions and extracurricular activities discussed during focus group sessions. In the end, as one parent explained, this was factored into cost-benefit analyses determining parents’ responses to the redistricting and transition processes: “But, in the new school we were safety patrol and we have math club, we have other things that make up to it. You love some, you lose some . . . .” Differences between schools impact how parents experience their child’s transition to a new school. A mother described how this for her resulted in ambivalence towards the redistricting:

I was very for this move . . . if things were across the board, with the schools . . . more like one another, and they had the same tools and . . . they disciplined the way they're supposed to . . . it should be sort of like that anyway and it's not, and those little things, that makes a difference.

*School Committee perspectives.* School Committee members discussed how real and perceived differences between elementary schools (in particular with regard to academic rigor and student achievement) permeated redistricting discussions, especially prior to their vote. They acknowledged interschool discrepancies though emphasized that the redistricting was aimed at providing equitable resources across schools, in part by aligning programs and services.
Research Question 3: What Strategies, Supports, And Initiatives Are Considered To Have Positively Impacted The Transition Process As Perceived By Parents, Superintendent And School Committee Members?

The next sections first present factors considered to have positively impacted transition processes as mentioned by parents, School Committee members, and Superintendent when explicitly asked. This is followed by a more comprehensive thematic discussion.

![Figure 3. Strategies, supports, and initiatives positively impacting transition processes mentioned by participants when asked directly.](image)

**Parents’ perspectives when explicitly asked.** Focus group parents in response to the question what factors had exerted a positive influence on transition processes referenced a finite number of strategies, supports, and initiatives. The Open House events exclusively for transfer
students received universal praise for the early familiarization they provided to transitioning students, significantly decreasing anxieties before the summer break. Transitioning in cohorts allowed for reliance on the known for facing the unknown. Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) at each school offered induction activities for new families such as play dates, tours, and picnics. Communication efforts by the Superintendent enhanced transparency and trust. Principals allegedly alleviated transition-related anxiety by organizing welcoming activities and personally connecting with transfer parents and students. Transitioning students were offered opportunities to meet their new teacher in advance while sending teachers reassured parents about the quality of teaching and learning at the receiving school. A small number of parents accepted the offer to visit the anticipated new school before the School Committee’s final vote and reported a powerful positive impact from observing high-quality teaching and learning activities in a nurturing environment, disproving widespread rumors about certain schools. Familiar staff members transferring as well aided with alleviating transition-related anxieties through existing connections. Parents whose children were reassigned to a smaller school discussed how the benefit of a more personalized environment aided their rationalization efforts. Finally, parents during one focus group reported how the collective transition to a new school had re-unified their neighborhood.

**School Committee perspectives when explicitly asked.** The three factors which in School Committee members’ opinions had positively impacted transitions echoed parents’ responses: the Open House events allowing parents and children to get to know their new school, teachers, and principal; school visits by parents prior to the final vote causing opponents to become supporters or at least accept the redistricting initiative; and the principals’ willingness to meet with transfer parents and children.
Superintendent’s perspective when explicitly asked. The Superintendent also pointed to the powerful positive effect of the Open Houses. In addition to the reassuring role played by principals, he referenced their logistical assistance with optimizing transition plans and anticipating issues early on. A third initiative which in his opinion greatly facilitated transitions consisted of outreach by means of parent meetings at private homes and disseminating information via the district website. Parents and School Committee members expressed a more ambivalent opinion regarding the home visits: While enhancing accessibility, they simultaneously raised suspicions about and rumors of favoritism.

Thematic data analysis. Table 6 lists the five themes reflecting strategies, supports, and initiatives positively impacting transitions commonly discussed by parents, School Committee members, and the Superintendent.

Table 6

Strategies, Supports, and Initiatives Positively Impacting Transitions: Thematic Analysis.

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Transition activities</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Support from teachers, staff, and principals</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Transitioning cohorts of students together</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Implementation of full day kindergarten</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Outreach by the Superintendent</td>
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Transition activities. After the School Committee’s vote approving Dr. Thornton’s redistricting proposal, one parent recollected feeling concerned about what, if any, supports the district would provide to ease her child’s transition to and assimilation into a new school. A number of formal and informal transition activities occurred between May and September 2012, which in parents’ opinion greatly facilitated transition processes. Two formal initiatives in
particular received high marks: the May and August Open Houses exclusively for transfer students and invitations to events at the destination school. The main activity at the May Open House consisted of a scavenger hunt aimed at familiarizing incoming redistricted students with their new school and its teachers. Focus group participants shared how, in addition to those two goals, the scavenger hunt also fostered collaboration and budding friendships among transfer students, allowed children and their parents to personally meet the principal and, perhaps most important, conveyed the message that children were not alone in their transition to a new school. One parent summarized the impact of the May Open House on her child as follows:

That’s what we had and that was the opportunity to see what other of your transitioning friends were in your class. And then also, they worked with each other during the scavenger hunt. . . . It really worked out well. . . . It helped my daughter immensely.

The activity also provided solace to parents. Not only did it allow them to get acquainted with the new school plant, the fact that teachers already knew their children’s names unequivocally communicated a high level of readiness: “His name was on everything. They were prepared for him.” In addition to the Open House events, parents appreciated receiving invitations to events at the destination school even before the close of the 2011-2012 school year, which as one father explained “. . . really helped integrate the new families, so to speak. That was very positive.”

A number of more informal transition activities also took place. The PTOs reached out to transfer parents and organized play dates at the schools’ playgrounds throughout the summer aimed at integrating the new students and their families into the social fabric of the school. While all PTOs reportedly offered play dates with a primary focus on establishing new friendships among children, only one PTO organized a Pizza Night specifically aimed at bringing entire families together.
Informal tours before and after the March 2012 vote were provided to parents who had voiced significant concerns about the destination school such as a perceived lack of academic rigor. One parent in particular provided a first-hand account of this initiative’s positive impact on herself and her daughter (Table 7):

**Table 7**

*Quotes Substantiating Positive Effect of Visit to Anticipated New School on Parent and Child*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Effect on parent</th>
<th>Effect on child</th>
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<td>“I took my lunch hour and I came here, because I wanted to see the school during the day when kids were in the classrooms . . . That made me feel 100% better when I came here.”</td>
<td>“. . . after we came here and did the tour, her whole opinion of this school changed.”</td>
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The vast majority of focus group participants considered the transition activities well-organized and appreciated the number as well as the different types of events offered, though others suggested that additional supports would have been desirable (“I felt like the kids needed more support emotionally leaving their school. I felt like the supports lacked a little bit there”). There appeared to be a consensus that starting the activities before the end of the school year was vital in avoiding an escalation of children and parents’ anxiety levels over the summer as evidenced for example in the statement that “There were so many opportunities put out there at the end of this school year, during the summer that . . . . By the time we had gotten there, she was so calm.”

Premature attempts at forced integration turned out counterproductive as many transfer parents decided not to participate (“Maybe that’s ... if you put them all together, for me it’s not a problem, but I did notice that a lot of new families didn’t attend.”) In addition, for redistricted students, joint activities such as reading week emphasized their outsider status: “. . . and the kids
were able to come in and sit. That didn’t turn out so well because they felt like they were the outsiders”.

*School Committee and Superintendent perspectives.* Dr. Thornton as well as School Committee members commented on the positive feedback received from parents regarding the Open House events. As the Superintendent stated, “Having the kids walk through their new schools to see their new location was big.”

*Transition supports provided by teachers and principals.* Many focus group parents at each session expressed appreciation for the emotional support provided by teachers and principals. Prior to the transition, teachers at the sending schools engaged in informal, reassuring conversations with students. One participant described how “Mrs. [name omitted] would take her in the hall and [say], “It’s going to be okay.” They had a lot of conversations about it, because half of their class was coming here.” Another parent also expressed gratitude for the thoughtful manner in which teachers had emotionally prepared the students who were going to leave their familiar school: “I have to say I’m very grateful the teachers in the old school had already, not brainwashed, but told the kids this is what’s going to happen, but don’t worry about it.”

Teachers at the receiving end were equally praised for their support before, during, and after the transition. Parents reported that any reservations were quenched by the genuine welcome they and their children received from teachers during the Open House visits (“. . . and every teacher showed up on a day that they didn’t have to be there in order to welcome the new kids into school”; “The teachers were outside of their rooms out here, with smiles on their faces, and "Hi, welcome to [name school omitted], and nice to see you, . . ."”) and were equally
reassured upon discovering that teachers had already requested information from the sending schools before the actual transition.

The level of teacher concern about and care for transfer students reportedly continued post-transition. Focus group participants discussed how smoothly the transition had occurred logistically—sometimes to a degree never experienced before with structural transitions—in large part due to teacher efforts:

His name was on everything. They were prepared for him. I actually had a better experience with him coming in to [name school omitted] than I ever had at [name school omitted], I felt like. The librarian knew his name. It was a very … somewhat my fear and my nervousness . . . and what I really experienced, it was like night and day.

As a result, many students took an instant liking to their new teacher, which facilitated other integration processes such as establishing new friendships, again alleviating parental concerns as evidenced in the following two quotes: “. . . but I think the fact that my daughter loved her teacher by the end of the first day was the biggest positive factor. She won her over right away, so there was no issue”; and “. . . her teacher has gone out of her way to help her . . . and she's had a very positive experience and she's made some really great, new little friends.”

Participants at two different sessions shared their epiphany that teachers matter more than school of attendance.

The welcoming attitude of principals during the Open House tours mirrored the teachers’. Parents had a high regard for principals’ personal introductions to each new student and their willingness to meet prior to the transition. Principals in parents’ opinion further ought to be recognized for steering staff and parents’ emotions into more productive directions by means of
their calm demeanor and strong presence (“He brought a strong presence because he was here”) throughout the redistricting conversation and transition to a new school.

School Committee and Superintendent perspectives. School Committee members, reflecting parents’ opinions, credited principals for their accessibility and for organizing the Open Houses. They commended principals for their strong and calming presence during the tumult which erupted after the first iteration of the redistricting plan was unveiled in December 2012. One School Committee member asserted that “the principals … they certainly cooled a lot of fires.” Dr. Thornton emphasized that especially the three principals with the longest tenure had been valuable assets for anticipating challenges pertaining to the different redistricting scenarios and student transitions: “I’d show them a model, and they could tell us right away about what it’d look like in their school.”

Transitioning cohorts of students as well as staff. The significant adjustments to intra-district boundaries in Cumberland resulted in large numbers of children having to transfer schools. Many children transitioned together with their friends and not as singletons. Parent participants almost universally indicated that the cohort-based moves had positively impacted their attitudes towards the redistricting in two ways. First, the large number of families affected made acceptance easier: “At least in my neighborhood, because they all recognized that they’re all going together.” Second, seeing numerous familiar faces on the bus provided parents and children alike with instant reassurance and a more positive perspective on the transition to a new school. As one parent poignantly explained:

That happened and then the day that school started, I was anticipating angst there, and it was the same bus, right, coming from the neighborhood and coming through our neighborhood, so it was all his buddies and all the kids that he had gone to daycare with.
It was that peace of knowing the same kids that made him comfortable. I describe the
day of and since as a non-event. It was more concerning beforehand.

According to parents, this cohort-based transitioning proved particularly helpful for children with
a tendency towards shyness as their friends transitioned along with them.

While some parents reported that transfer students were placed in the same classroom as
promised prior to the transition, others pointed out that this by no means had been a universal
practice. According to one parent, transition processes would have been further aided by
clustering groups of friends in the same classrooms. This parent expressed disappointment with
the fact that the other transfer children assigned to her daughter’s classroom were not friends of
hers: “She has some [name school omitted] kids in her class, but they weren’t her friends”.

Memories of children leaving friends behind still elicited strong emotions in focus group
participants eight months post-transition:

I think emotionally my son really struggled with the change and he was really … I think
just having to deal with him leaving some friends behind and having to build new
relationships, I think that was the biggest thing . . . . “No, he’s staying at [name school or
origin omitted],” and then he’ll start to cry. There were those kinds of things that I think
were really difficult emotionally.

Sometimes staff members and teachers transitioned as well. At least two focus group
parents wished that more teachers and support staff would have been reassigned. One parent
explained how in her view support staff transitioning may exert an even more pronounced
positive impact on children than classroom teachers “because your classroom teacher is the one
that changes every year.” Another mother described her relief when being informed that a
familiar guidance counselor would transfer with her children:
To be honest, the most positive thing that happened was Mrs. [name omitted] being here; the guidance counselor. She was at [name school omitted] last year and she was always around with the kids. They knew who she was and she actually called me the Friday before school started and said I’m here, I’m filling in . . .

School Committee perspective. While involuntarily transferred teachers seemed cheerful towards children and parents, School Committee members referenced the fury behind the scenes caused by mandatory transitions. Even so, like students and parents, those teachers appear to have assimilated quickly to their new school: “Some teachers were upset. A lot of teachers got displaced. . . . She went kicking and screaming . . . and now it’s her favorite place to be. . . . It’s one of those eye-openers.”

Opportunity to implement full day kindergarten. The 2012 Cumberland redistricting originated from a twofold mission according to the Superintendent: replacing half day kindergarten with a full day model and remediating actual enrollment versus building capacity discrepancies across the five elementary schools.

Focus group discussions regarding the introduction of full day kindergarten centered around six reasons why this initiative positively impacted parents’ feelings about the redistricting and their child’s transition—even if they were asked to make a sacrifice without a direct personal benefit. First, since full day kindergarten was considered an improvement to the entire educational system, it helped parents process some of their more negative emotions through rationalization. Second, parents were more open to accepting an older sibling’s transition to a new school in exchange for the anticipated academic and financial benefits associated with full day kindergarten (“Well, my wife and I have another kid who’s going to kindergarten next year, so the fact that we were so excited that there was going to be a full-day kindergarten, we
probably gave a positive vibe around the house about the whole redistricting idea”). Third, a full
day kindergarten program was expected to enhance the town’s desirability as a place to live, thus
increasing property values. This viewpoint is reflected in the statement that “I’m seeing the
school system . . . going forward, so that probably will add on value to my property, which is my
biggest investment.” Fourth, full day kindergarten provided an opportunity for a town-wide
improvement initiative potentially transcending internal socio-economic separatist tendencies,
especially with regard to the North-South divide. Fifth, for parents with children in different
grades, full day kindergarten aligned schedules. Programmatic weaknesses of a half day
kindergarten model represented a sixth reason for some parents to support the redistricting. This
attitude was either shaped by personal experiences with a half day kindergarten program (“Then
I saw my daughter go full day, and I know how unprepared my first child was all the way up
until fourth and fifth grade. He was behind”) or influenced by information received from trusted
teachers (“I do have a kindergarten teacher told me that. “Mrs. [name omitted] . . . . It’s better to
have full day K because . . . it’s going to help overall the town’s academic performance in the
long run”).

Not all parents, however, reported that full day kindergarten had positively influenced
their attitudes towards the redistricting and affiliated transitions. One focus group participant
explained that she still failed to grasp the connection between full day kindergarten and a need
for redistricting: “There’s already kindergartens in every school, so what’s the big deal of
making it a full day and then just putting another one in?” I didn’t get why you’re going to have
to move neighborhoods just because of this full-day K.” Another parent indicated that the
benefits of full day kindergarten in her opinion did not offset the disadvantages associated with
system-wide overcrowding. The most negative response came from one parent for whom the
introduction of full day kindergarten resulted in feelings of bitterness due to the absence of a
direct benefit to her family: “For myself I think it made me feel a little more bitter. I was already
upset as it was and my kids are not in kindergarten, they’ve passed kindergarten.”

School Committee and Superintendent perspectives. School Committee members
detailed how the full day kindergarten conversation had started during the previous
Superintendent’s tenure and gained importance after the release of a commissioned report in
2011 by an outside consultant recommending full day kindergarten to improve the district’s
long-term achievement profile. One School Committee participant explained that her support for
full day kindergarten was in part based on personal experiences with a half day program, which
she deemed inadequate.

AIMSweb curriculum-based assessment data according to the Superintendent had already
revealed the instant and significant positive impact of a full day program on student learning.
However, the influx of new students into the district after the implementation of full day
kindergarten, in addition to the high construction activity in Cumberland, is raising concerns as
all schools are operating close to their maximum capacity.

Outreach by the Superintendent of Schools. A large number of focus group parents
expressed respect for the calm and conciliatory manner in which Dr. Thornton had dealt with
emotions surrounding the redistricting proposal, regardless of their feelings about this initiative.
His determination and emphasis on remediating inequities and instituting district-wide
improvements purportedly helped parents realize the inevitability of redistricting and make peace
with their child transitioning to another elementary school. Focus group participants praised the
Superintendent for organizing meetings to update parents on revisions to the original plan,
listening to their concerns, being accessible, and demonstrating genuine care about the well-being of students.

Yet, discussions at times revealed an undercurrent of ambivalence originating from the Superintendent’s fairly recent tenure in Cumberland: “We had to really immediately trust Dr. Thornton’s vision without any track record . . . .” Other parents were blunter in their criticisms. Four recurring issues emerged throughout conversations: (1) the perceived success of the Windsong lobbying efforts; (2) prematurely releasing information which proved erroneous causing additional frustration; (3) anger about suggestions perceived as unfair (e.g. offering before school care only at one school), and (4) a too rapid pace of change resulting in the following exhortation by a focus group participant:

You’re changing curriculum, you’re changing districts, you’re changing this, you’re changing that. It was very fast for the town, or for me, for the town. He just wants to change everything. It’s like, “Dude, what are you doing? Take a step back. Get in your position and get acclimated before you start changing everything.”

School Committee perspective. School Committee members stressed the need for a change agent to address blatant inequities in the school system. Dr. Thornton’s previous redistricting experience in North Kingstown, RI added to their trust in his leadership skills.

Summary

Analysis of data obtained from parents, School Committee members and the Superintendent provided answers to the three research questions anchoring this study.

Research question 1: How did parents experience a mandatory transition of their child to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative? Parents’ initial responses to the Cumberland redistricting reflected anger, denial, disbelief, and
acceptance. These emotions tended to evolve over time towards more positive and constructive attitudes by means of cost-benefit analyses.

Any information regarding the redistricting and associated transitions was viewed through four evaluative lenses: trust, transparency, equity, and fairness. Incomplete, incorrect, and infrequent district communication drove parents to social media, friends/family/neighbors, teachers, and local media for more information, which tended to be inaccurate and anxiety-inducing.

Many parents attempted to display towards their children confidence and a positive attitude regarding the redistricting and associated transitions but inwardly struggled with anger, anxiety, fear, and insecurities. The rupturing of existing social connections (involving both parents and children) was described as an emotionally painful process. Most children, however, integrated quickly, assisted by the formation of new friendships; for parents, this process tended to take more time and effort in part due to resistance from existing groups and cliques.

**Research question 2: What internal and external factors are considered to have negatively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members?** Parents, Superintendent and School Committee members discussed a total of four internal and six external factors which, in their opinion, had exerted a negative influence on transition processes. Internal factors included outsider feelings, trust and fairness issues, change aversion, and mutual reinforcement of parent-child emotions. Inadequate communication by the district; differences in curriculum, policies, and practices between schools; limited transition-related mental health supports; sensationalizing by local newspaper; dissemination of incorrect information through social media; and negative messages from
teachers, principals and School Committee members were external factors that reportedly had negatively impacted the change process.

Research question 3: What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members? Parents, School Committee members and the Superintendent regarded the following strategies, supports, and initiatives as having positively impacted transition processes: transition activities (in particular the Open House events), support from teachers and principals, visits to the destination school prior to transitioning, outreach by the Superintendent, PTO-sponsored transition activities, transitioning cohorts of students and staff, move to a smaller school, re-unification of neighborhoods previously divided by school of attendance, and the opportunity to implement full day kindergarten.

Chapter V: Discussion of the Research Findings

This final chapter consists of six sections. First, the research problem and the selected methodology are revisited in light of Chapter 4’s data analysis. Second, the research findings are related to the theoretical framework (i.e. systems theory, stakeholder theory, Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory of organizational change) and the literature review as presented in Chapter 2. Third, a proposed theoretical model for depicting how parents respond to an intra-district boundary adjustment as a type of large-scale district-wide change is presented. The fourth section delineates limitations associated with this specific research project. Based on the research findings, the final sections provide practical guidelines to other districts considering redistricting (or a related type of large-scale change) and conclude with suggestions for further research.
Summary of the Problem

School districts, because of internal changes (such as enrollment and improvement initiatives) and external changes (for example dwindling resources, legal rulings, and increased competition from charter schools) (Creighton and Hamlin, 1995), may at times have to adjust their intra-district boundaries which determine the school residents’ children attend (Saiger, 2010). Due to the confluence of racial, socio-economic, and student achievement factors associated with school and community boundaries (Saiger, 2010), strong parental opposition tends to ensue. The Cumberland School Committee on March 8, 2012 approved the Superintendent’s redistricting proposal causing about one-fifth or approximately 400 of the elementary students to transition to another school at the start of the 2012-2013 school year. Parents at times expressed strong emotions before and after this decision, fearing negative academic and emotional impacts on their children with concomitant social ramifications for their family.

Both the limited research and the absence of a universal nomenclature regarding redistricting has exerted a confusing influence on debates and provided decision-makers with limited guidance. Undertaking this project hence necessitated the development of a transition taxonomy grounded in the different scenarios represented by the existing research in order to accurately typify the redistricting and student transition under investigation (Appendix A).

Prior research mainly relied on quantitative methodologies and predominantly focused on structural transitions; parent-initiated transitions; and boundary adjustments required by policy, law, or court ruling, typically within urban or rural settings. A qualitative in-depth focus on parental experiences and perspectives related to an intra-district boundary adjustment within a
suburban locale thus fills a research void. The development of a theoretical model and the delineation of practical guidelines further complement existing studies.

With this said, three research questions guided this research project:

• How did parents experience a mandatory transition of their child to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative?

• Which internal and external factors are considered to have negatively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members?

• What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent, and School Committee members?

Review of the Methodology

This exploratory study employed a qualitative framework based on the general inductive approach as outlined by Thomas (2006). Parent focus groups (homogeneous, heterogeneous and mixed) represented the primary data collection tool. One School Committee focus group, an interview with the Superintendent of Schools, and an attitude rating instrument completed by participating parents provided supplementary information. Recordings of focus group sessions and the Superintendent’s interview were transcribed by a professional agency (www.rev.com), and subsequently reviewed for accuracy prior to coding. First cycle coding resulted in the creation of initial codes which were grouped into supra-categories reflecting themes and patterns during second cycle coding.

Statistical analysis of divergent scores between parents’ initial and current (April 2013) responses, as indicated on the attitude rating scales, added a minor quantitative component to the qualitative analysis (QUAL + quan) of parental experiences. Results not only confirmed the evolution of initial emotions to more constructive and positive responses detected in the focus
group excerpts but also mathematically quantified this attitudinal shift according to Deutsch’s (Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Perez, 2003) six-dyadic conceptualization of people’s reactions to organizational change.

**Summary of Findings**

All data obtained were analyzed in light of the three research questions, which allowed for focused analysis.

**Research question 1: How did parents experience a mandatory transition of their child to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative?** Seven themes emerged from the data analysis process, capturing the essence of parental experiences:

*Parental responses varied yet reflect a finite number of emotions and reactions.* Parents reacted in different ways to a redistricting and related transitions. Initial emotions reflected anger, denial, disbelief, and acceptance. At the time focus groups were conducted (eight months post-transition) participants described acceptance, resentment, and leaving the public school district. Parents attributed their more negative emotions to a protection instinct (“because they’re our children and we’re doing it out of a protection instinct that we don’t want anything to go wrong”) with rationalization processes (“It helped me rationalize the process because I’m in favor of full-day kindergarten”) allegedly contributing to the shift towards more positive and constructive responses over time.

*Cost-benefit analyses influenced parents’ attitudes and emotions.* In addition to many focus group participants asserting that their attitudes had evolved over time, some parents referenced assessing the benefits versus drawbacks of the proposed redistricting conceptualized by one mother as a cost-benefit analysis: “. . . cost benefit analysis like what are we getting from this, what is the town getting, what is my kid getting?” Individual as well as town-wide factors
and “the common good” were reportedly taken into account. Parents also detailed how communal discussions of pros and cons, for example at bus stops and during soccer practice, complemented internal analyses.

**Parents consulted alternative information sources to supplement official messages.**

The majority of parent participants indicated disappointment with the school district’s communication efforts summarized by one parent as “I just go back to I feel like the district as a whole didn’t get out in front of it”. Incomplete, inaccurate, and inadequate information raised anxiety levels, described by one participant as “the threat of not knowing.” Parents reportedly turned to neighbors, friends, teachers, Facebook, and the local newspaper for information facilitating the proliferation of rumors regarding preferential treatment of high-SES neighborhoods.

**Transitions ruptured social connections.** Many children and their parents, as discussed at each focus group session, experienced feelings of loss caused by leaving friends behind. One parent succinctly described how the rupturing of social connections exerted an interconnected impact on both children and adults: “It was more of, “This was part of who I had become, and I felt like I was leaving friends that I had made through my kids behind.”” A small number of focus group participants nevertheless recounted a positive transition feeling “more part of this school.”

**Outwardly positive attitude but internally struggling with fear, anger, and anxiety.**

Several parents described attempting to display a positive attitude in the presence of their children while in many cases simultaneously struggling with fear and insecurity: “. . . and it might kill me inside, but I am not letting her see what I feel. It is still positive no matter what.” One parent identified the desire for a successful transition as the driving force behind this
emotional dichotomy: “how you present yourself is going to be reflected in your kids’ ability to transition successfully.” It could be argued that cost-benefit processes, especially when occurring within a group setting, probably acted as a release valve for parents’ internal emotions: “I also refer to it as the bus stop mob. . . . The parents were upset and there were eight of us having these really heated discussions about the school.”

Parents employed four evaluative lenses: equity, transparency, trust, and fairness. Throughout conversations, parents described how any information about the redistricting was filtered through four evaluative lenses further shaping responses. The initial reliance on incorrect residency data and the recent hiring of a new Superintendent exacerbated pre-existing trust issues, especially with regard to redistricting proposals. Transparency complaints unequivocally centered on the process used for revising boundaries. Situated at the intersection of trust, transparency, equity, and fairness-related concerns were rumors about reassigning wealthy residents to a more desirable school as evidenced in “There were letters about how people . . . were being favored because there were rich people . . . and they were having the Superintendent over to their nice houses.”

Most but not all children and parents’ transition experiences were positive. Only three out of 28 parent focus group members reported their children experiencing long-term adaptation and integration issues. The vast majority of children seem to have transitioned relatively effortlessly, thereby positively impacting parental perceptions of the redistricting initiative, associated transitions, and the new school. A few parents, however, expressed some residual apprehension. The statement “I thought it was easier for the kids than I expected it to be and harder for parents” poignantly summarizes the most commonly described transition experience.
Research question 2: Which internal and external factors are considered to have negatively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent and School Committee members? Review of all data collected revealed six recurring themes related to factors which in participants’ opinion had negatively impacted transition processes:

**North-South divide.** Socio-economic and racial differences between neighborhoods along the Interstate 295 line elicited strong emotional reactions in many parents, fearing reassignment to and association with a social stratum deemed inferior (“I think that a lot of parents, they think that they’re safe as long as they belong to a certain demographic . . .”). Parents detailed the pervasiveness of the town’s North-South divide (“It’s always been that way since I’ve been a kid, north and south, one is better than the other . . .”) with potentially concomitant stigmatization aggravated by the perceived quality differences between southern and northern schools (“Right, I think that just has such a huge stigma, “Where do you go to school?””; “You had the people from the North end of town that didn’t want to shift South because they wanted to be … well, due to test scores”).

**Inadequate district communication.** Parents discussed how the absence of a comprehensive initial plan in combination with several consecutive boundary adjustments had created widespread anxiety and allowed for the rapid dissemination of misinformation (“There was so much misinformation and . . . bits and pieces of information that were passing informally, the bus-stop conversation”), the emergence of alternative information sources (“I chose not to believe what Valley Breeze had said or what Facebook had said, because a lot of them are not fact. They’re just not facts”) and the proliferation of rumors.

**Negative messages and actions from teachers, principals, and School Committee members.** Parents reported disappointment with some teachers’ unprofessional behavior, for
example prematurely informing children that they might transition to another school, blaming transfer students for declining NECAP scores, and expressing excitement over smaller classroom sizes as a result of the redistricting. Some principals were criticized for not offering promised transition supports and failing to group transfer students in the same classrooms. School Committee members confirmed and countered parental accusations of not considering their concerns by asserting that “you will always be accused of not listening by the people who aren’t getting what they want”.

**Mutual reinforcement parent-child emotions.** Many focus group participants described feelings of anxiety and loss (in particular the loss of friends) experienced by both children and parents. One parent attributed the mutual reinforcement of transition-related emotions to an innate “protection instinct”.

**Disempowerment, loss, and outsider status.** The perceived lack of input in the redistricting conversation left many parents reportedly feeling disempowered, helpless and without control. In addition, some participants complained about their perceived outsider status at the new school caused by both unfamiliarity with the building, routines, and practices as well as resistance efforts by existing groups: (“I feel embarrassed how parents are just so cliquey, worse than the kids that they expel parents from outside . . .”). The loss of friendships fostered through school community membership was described in highly emotional terms. One mother reminisced how on the last day of school she wandered through the hallways and “was just hysterical, could not stop crying”.

Most children’s uncomplicated transition was attributed to the impact of both pre-transition and newly established friendships.
Inter-school differences regarding curricula, practices, and supports. The redistricting increased scrutiny of differences and inequities between schools by parents, School Committee, and Superintendent. Parents reported that common perceptions of divergent academic rigor proved mainly unfounded while differences with regard to support services such as 504 plans and behavior supports became more apparent. Having to relinquish school-specific customs and traditions (for example, the Sweetheart dance and Field Day) triggered emotional reactions in affected children and exerted a negative impact on parental perceptions of the redistricting (“I was very for this move, . . . if things were across the board, with the schools and they were more like one another . . . and it's not, and those little things, that makes a difference”).

Research questions 3: What strategies, supports, and initiatives are considered to have positively impacted the transition process as perceived by parents, Superintendent and School Committee members? Five re-emerging themes summarize strategies, supports, and initiatives considered to have positively impacted the transition process:

Transition activities. The Open Houses prior to the end of the school year exclusively for transfer students received unanimous praise for facilitating new friendships and familiarizing children as well as their parents with the new school. Informal tours and PTO-sponsored play dates were also described as easing integration processes. Activities mixing transfer and existing students, on the other hand, emphasized that “they were the outsiders.”

Transition supports provided by teachers and principals. Notwithstanding the aforementioned issues with negative messages, focus group participants lauded teachers and principals for the emotional support provided to transfer students both before and after their transition. Reassuring conversations, welcoming words, and a high level of preparedness reportedly enhanced parental trust in the school system and their acceptance of the redistricting.
Multiple parents detailed how positive experiences with teachers and principals dispelled rumors of academic inferiority surrounding schools in the southern section of Cumberland.

*Transitioning cohorts of students and staff.* In parents’ opinion, having friends transitioning as well reportedly helped their children transfer largely successfully to a new school. The familiarity provided by clustering transitioned students in the same classroom, in addition to some familiar staff members making the same transfer, greatly facilitated transition processes. Nevertheless, leaving friends behind remained a difficult emotional experience (“just having to deal with him leaving some friends behind and having to build new relationships, I think that was the biggest thing . . . really difficult emotionally).

*Opportunity to implement full day kindergarten.* The prospect of full day kindergarten allegedly affected many focus group parents’ attitudes towards the redistricting in a positive sense, mainly due to expectations of academic gains and rising property values. A small number of participants referenced “the common good” and profiled the introduction of full day kindergarten as an opportunity to overcome socio-economic rivalries among neighborhoods: “It doesn’t matter where you came from because we are all one now.”

*Outreach by the Superintendent.* Many parents commended Dr. Thornton for offering transparency, addressing inequities, engaging in conversations, and being accessible. A minority of participants nevertheless expressed concerns about his short tenure in Cumberland, the perceived successful lobbying by wealthy residents, and an overall weariness of change initiatives spearheaded by the Superintendent.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

Three organizational change theories informed data analyses: systems theory, stakeholder theory, and Harry Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory of organizational change. Each of these
theories provided a different lens which combined contributed to an improved understanding of parental responses to internal redistricting as an example of a large-scale structural change at the three levels of social systems (Burke, 2008): the total system (systems theory), the group (stakeholder theory), and the individual (Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory of organizational change).

**Systems theory.** Systems theory posits that organizations, in order to survive, have to adapt to changes in their external environment. This process of adaptation, however, tends to trigger resistance within constituting subsystems, which is exacerbated by any ambiguity related to the change (Amagoh, 2008; Burke, 2008; Bush, 2011; Raza and Standing, 2011). Systems theory proved helpful in framing the interactional relationships between the school district under investigation and its outside environment as well as between the different intra-organizational subsystems.

At the level of organizational adaptation to changes in the external environment, parents, School Committee members, and the Superintendent pointed to the need for full day kindergarten in order to remain competitive with other towns. In addition, the culture of accountability introduced by the 2001 *No Child Left Behind* act and the public reporting of student achievement data allowing intra- and interdistrict performance comparisons exerted a powerful influence throughout the redistricting process. Achievement discrepancies between schools located in the northern versus the southern sections of Cumberland fueled opposition to the redistricting and exacerbated negative emotions among parents.

With regard to the relationship between the Cumberland School Department and connected subsystems in the external environment, Durham School Services (the bus company) posed significant challenges to the redistricting and transition process. Parent focus group
participants reported that the use of incorrect information for the first iteration of the Superintendent’s redistricting proposal had significantly undermined their trust in the district’s ability to successfully develop and implement such a large-scale change initiative. Moreover, the rectification process unduly prolonged the period of uncertainty, heightening anxieties and allowing the proliferation of rumors as well as the emergence of informal communication channels such as Facebook. A second issue at the relational intersection of the district and the bus company as an outside vendor was the late release of 2012-2013 bus schedules requiring some parents to procure or alter daycare arrangements at the eleventh hour, thereby causing frustration. Parents also mentioned their dissatisfaction with the lack of responsiveness to inquiries by the bus company. Third, School Committee members confirmed some truth to the rumor that bus routes in the past had determined intra-district boundaries. The incorrect data provided, late release of bus schedules, deficient communication, and bus routes influencing school enrollment represented multiple instances of a negative impact by a related subsystem in the external environment on the organization’s image.

**Stakeholder theory.** Change alters connections between organizational members. Stakeholder theory focuses on delineating how and which interpersonal relationships are impacted by organizational change at the individual, unit, and collective level (Raza and Standing, 2011). Its premise that organizational change ruptures connections between members and modifies group boundaries augments a purely systems theory approach by infusing a focus on the impact of external change on intra-organizational boundaries.

Parent focus group participants vividly described how their child’s transition to a new school ruptured existing relationships (especially friendships) for both students and parents, resulting in disorientation and outsider feelings. Most children, however, were able to establish
new friendships, which assisted with the integration into a new school and feeling “at home”. In addition, transitioning students as cohorts—especially in conjunction with assigning transfer students to the same classrooms—kept some friendships intact, greatly facilitating transition processes and reducing anxieties. Parent participants described active resistance to their integration in the new school community caused by cliquey behavior, which was exacerbated by the socio-economic stratification within the different town sections and resulted in outsider feelings.

The powerful emotions elicited by loss experiences reportedly experienced by children and parents in this specific case connect stakeholder theory with Harry Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory of organizational change.

**Harry Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory of organizational change.** Levinson, echoing stakeholder theory’s central tenet, postulated that change involves severing ties and leaving comforting familiarity behind, causing intense experiences of loss and grief.

The four types of loss Levinson (1972) discusses (loss of love, loss of supports, loss of sensory input when rules have changed, and loss of capacity to act) were succinctly captured in the following statement provided by a parent focus group member, demonstrating their interconnectedness:

It’s hard to find a definitely a place [**loss of love**] … I think people honestly forget that we don’t know for instance where the library is. . . . When I come to volunteer to make copies I don’t know where the copy machine is that parents use [**loss of sensory input**]. No one told us [**loss of supports**]. I’m new here and I’ve had to say that many times. I’m sorry, I’m new here, I don’t know where I’m supposed to go [**loss of capacity to act**].
Recurring themes during focus group conversations included outsider feelings parents experienced when attempting to become part of the new school, as well as mourning lost friendships and social connections. Levinson, however, remained silent on the possibility of actions by others exacerbating feelings of loss, for example the shunning of transfer parents and emphasizing their outsider status. This project as such may therefore provide evidence for expanding his theory in two ways. In addition to the aforementioned impact of resistance by others on feelings of loss, focus group data appear to confirm the existence of a fifth type of loss: loss of performance, in this case fear of declining student achievement when children are reassigned to a school with a perceived inferior academic profile.

Levinson associates loss with mourning. Both Hirschowitz, as explicitly discussed by Levinson (1976), and Kuebler-Ross (1969) posited that emotions evolve over time towards more positive responses (reconstruction of social connections in the new environment according to Hirschowitz and acceptance in Kuebler-Ross’s model). The results of the attitude rating scales administered during each parent focus group confirm a positive change in parental attitudes, lending additional credibility to similar results obtained through the qualitative analysis of focus group data. Research findings, however, call into question the linearity of both Hirschowitz and Kuebler-Ross’s models. While parent responses to a large degree reflect Kuebler-Ross’s (1969) concepts of shock and denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, these proved neither exhaustive nor sequential. Data analyses instead reveal the likely catalytic influence of cost-benefit analyses on the evolution of parents’ emotions. The disempowerment alleged by parents appears to corroborate Levinson’s conceptualization of loss leading to impaired levels of control requiring processing through mourning.
Focus group data also support Levinson’s concept of *reciprocation* or the presence of an implicit psychological contract between a person and an organization. When breached, anger and frustration ensue both at the individual and collective level.

Freud’s emphasis on childhood experiences plays an important dual role in Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory of change. First, instinct-driven Id-responses need to be controlled by rational responses originating from the Ego and the moral, altruistic focus of the Super Ego, which transcends purely selfish actions. The presence of cost-benefit analyses as established by focus group data arguably reflects the Ego component tempering the more instinct-based Id-driven initial responses (for example anger, denial, and disbelief). The four evaluative lenses (trust, equity, transparency, and fairness) then may embody people’s Super Ego-based morality, allowing them to accept their child’s transition to a different school for the benefit of others.

Second, the Ego provides a number of coping mechanism: rationalization, projection, substitution (scapegoating), reaction formation or externally reflecting opposite feelings of those experienced internally, and idealization of another person. Focus group data reveal parents commonly (1) rationalizing the redistricting and associated transition by focusing on positive aspects; (2) projecting fears and anxieties onto their children, albeit mostly devoid of the blame Levinson associates with projection; and (3) attempting to outwardly reflect a positive attitude regarding the redistricting and transition in the presence of their children while internally experiencing fear, anxiety, ambivalence, uncertainty, and insecurity. Substitution arguably occurred when both a teacher and a principal attributed declining NECAP scores to transfer students. Idealization proper, defined as idealization of another person, could not be discerned in the research data. However, parents’ efforts to shield their children from a transition to a school deemed inferior could be construed as idealization of prior conditions, also exemplified in
attempts by parents to protect their family from the social stigma due to association with a more southern and, therefore, less desirable neighborhood. These protective responses further provide support for Levinson’s claim that the United States is a child-oriented society determining both the parent-child relationship as well as parents’ interactional patterns with organizations. This was succinctly captured by a School Committee member when describing parental pressure for preferential treatment:

That’s a frustrating answer to parents. If they have an issue that is about their family and you say, “But I represent 5,000 children. I’m doing what’s in the best interest of 5,000 children,” and then you start listing issues and data. They hate that.

The reported positive impact of transition activities validates Levinson’s (1972) claim that organizations can assist with and expedite the healing process by providing people who have experienced change-related loss with opportunities to communicate about and collectively process emotions. In a possible elaboration on Levinson’s theory, research data also reveal the emergence of impromptu forums when the organization either fails to provide such opportunities or offers them too late.

Finally, focus group data confirm Levinson’s (1972) assertion that organizational change tends to overlook the presence of covert, unconscious and subconscious psychological processes—especially feelings of loss. One father lamented, “The little people, the ones like this that live so close . . . got moved and shuffled.”

**Implications of Levinson’s theory for organizational change.** Relating research findings to Levinson’s psychoanalytical organizational change theory bears particular relevance in light of the deficiencies in the current research on resistance to organizational change discerned by Foster (2010) as well as Cibulskas and Janiūnaitė (2005), respectively a polarizing
oversimplification of responses at the individual level and exclusion of unconscious or subconscious intrapersonal factors. Moreover, this process allows for the extrapolation of specific suggestions for optimizing redistricting initiatives and other related types of large-scale change at the school district level.

Prior to developing any proposal, it may behoove administrators and School Committee members to carefully weigh the envisioned benefits (“the greater good”) against potential psychological impacts on children and parents, in particular feelings of loss caused by the rupturing of social connections anticipated by Levinson and corroborated in focus group accounts. Additionally, the individual and collective anger and frustration which can ensue due to the unanticipated unilateral breach of the implicit contract between the school district and parents (Levinson’s concept of *reciprocation*) and associated feelings of distrust may limit elected officials’ and district administrators’ tenures when they are unable to present a convincing argument supporting the need for change in light of preserving the organizational ideal.

Four suggestions specifically related to the actual change proposal can be delineated. First, Id-driven negative responses originating from parents’ innate protective reflexes towards their children should be anticipated. A clear and coherent explanation for the redistricting needs to accompany the proposal. Messages ought to be differentiated to connect effectively with the divergent initial emotions parents experience: anger, denial, disbelief, and acceptance. Second, anticipated positive outcomes should be emphasized to expedite acceptance through Ego and Super-Ego rationalization processes or cost-benefit analyses. Third, forums allowing for controlled collective processing of emotions through communication ought to be provided (for example small group sessions under the guidance of a mental health provider and an
administrator highly knowledgeable about the change initiative). These meetings can also alleviate parental stress caused by reaction formation, i.e. parents outwardly displaying confidence regarding the change towards their children but internally struggling with doubt, anger, anxiety, and fear. Lastly, involving parents in fine-tuning the proposal may counteract feelings of disempowerment originating from an inability to avert the change, assist parents with regaining control, aid rationalization processes facilitating acceptance, and provide parents with an opportunity to cope with feelings of loss in a constructive way.

Before and after the redistricting-related transition to a new school, a number of supports should be implemented targeting each type of loss discerned by Levinson. Loss of love could be alleviated by providing small group venues allowing transfer parents to discuss and thereby process their emotions. Tours of the new school, as described by focus group participants, enable parents to become familiar with the site’s culture, thereby counteracting loss of sensory input. Transition activities for the entire family such as play dates and a pizza party reportedly not only allowed transferring parents to get acquainted with the existing school community but also conveyed that many other families were impacted as well. These activities arguably exerted a positive cathartic effect and counteracted the loss of supports. Parent organization-driven outreach efforts to new parents (for example formal invitations to PTO meetings, peer buddies for transfer parents, and personal introductions at events) may mitigate loss of capacity to act caused by unfamiliarity with the new building, its procedures and protocols.

These recommendations based on Harry Levinson’s theory of organizational change are embedded in the fifteen guidelines and recommendations presented in a later section.

**Summary of the theoretical framework in relation to the findings.** The combination of systems theory, stakeholder theory, and Harry Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory of
organizational change provided an integrated, multifaceted framework for assessing the impacts on parents and children of the Cumberland redistricting initiative and associated student transitions. At the total system level, research findings confirmed systems theory’s conceptualization of organizational interdependence on other systems in the external environment, for example the NCLB accountability framework and the bus company. Parent accounts of ruptured social relationships reflected stakeholder theory’s central tenet that organizational change severs interpersonal connections and modifies group boundaries. With regard to individual responses to organizational change, Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory allowed for an in-depth analysis of parent responses by delineating the presence of mostly subconscious and unconscious processes such as projection, reaction formation, and reciprocation.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

The findings of this study support and extend the existing body of redistricting research. In order to provide a comprehensive discussion, each section of Chapter 2’s literature review is revisited and related to the results of this mostly qualitative investigation.

**Intra-district boundaries and internal redistricting mechanisms.** The school-housing connection (Saiger, 2010), with its associated social status and impact on home values, represents a major source of intense parental emotions towards an internal boundary adjustment. As one parent put it: “My children had all gone to [name school omitted], so I wasn’t interested in moving and how dare the school district change after I bought and built my house where I did.” Focus group discussions regarding Cumberland’s North-South divide along socio-economic and racial diversity lines reflected Ryan and Heise’s (2002) observation that neighborhoods in the U.S. tend to be segregated by race and income. Many parents indicated
that their opposition to the transition to a more southern school was based at least in part on a less desirable neighborhood profile.

Almost two decades had passed since the last redistricting in Cumberland. The Superintendent’s comment that “It wasn’t done in the past because people would say it’s too difficult, too political, you can’t get it done because people don’t want to face it, that kind of thing” supports Lemberg and Church’s (2000) assertion that school committees are reluctant to tinker with boundaries because of associated practical, psychological, and social aspects resulting in static intra-district lines (Brown and Knight, 2005). Moreover, the fact that determining boundaries is an ill-defined, ambiguous, and complex undertaking (Caro, Shirabe, Guignard and Weintraub, 2004) probably explains why some parents expressed residual suspicions about the fairness of the process and others gave credence to conspiracy theories, attributing the Windsong neighborhood re-redistricting to lobbying by powerful wealthy parents.

**Public schools in America: Historical framework.** The tensions between Cumberland’s constituting neighborhoods—especially with regard to the North-South divide—based on socio-economic and racial inequalities have been prevalent in the American public school system since the inception of the common school movement in the mid-19th century (Gomez-Velez, 2008; Mondale and Patton, 2001). A strong undercurrent of class awareness and social stratification shaped parents’ responses, emotions, and actions. Some parents presented these tensions in more muted terms (“. . . but there was a little bit of classist stuff where people were concerned and maybe there was fear”) whereas others were more forthcoming (“. . . and then the north versus south. North, oh my god. . . . It’s always been that way since I’ve been a kid, north and south, one is better than the other . . .”). The Superintendent provided the
strongest evidence for Gomez-Velez’ (2008) assertion of socio-economic and racial stratification still permeating the public school system:

I go to homes in the town and get people’s feelings, and people weren’t overtly classist. You had to tease it out, kind of like Socratically tease it out down two or three layers to get to it, but eventually, once they got their back up, they’ll just say it, and basically, they don’t want their kids with those kids. It’s a class issue.

This study provides a complementary micro-perspective to other research employing a macro-lens to study class tensions impacting public education.

**Public schools in America: Legal framework.** The seminal 1945 Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision requiring racial integration still reverberates post *Milliken v. Bradley*, the 1974 ruling which indicated acceptance to some degree of local racial imbalances, especially in suburban locales (Holley-Walker, 2012). The pre-redistricting concern about inequities between elementary schools as discussed by parents, School Committee members and Superintendent—in particular with regard to building capacities versus actual enrollment and varying NECAP scores—resonates in light of the *Brown* decision striking down the separate but equal principle. Focus group participants described neighbors distributing data packets sprinkled with references to class and racial undertones allegedly proving other schools’ inferior achievement. This may substantiate claims of ongoing socio-economic and racial segregationist preferences at the micro-level of the town of Cumberland reflecting national trends since the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* challenge to separate but equal practices.

The conservative argument that the mandatory desegregation following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling actually has accelerated white flight to the suburbs to escape racial diversity (Mondale and Patton, 2001) appears supported by focus group data. Parents at every
session emphasized the impact of the socio-economic and racial North-South divide fueling opposition to children moving south. Statements such as “A lot of parents prefer the safety net of a demographic that I am in. This group, I feel like I’m comfortable in this group” elucidate the effect of assortative mating on social and racial relationships. Bill Bishop (2008) posits that “Mobility enables the sociological equivalent of assortative mating . . . . Our wealth, education, and ability to move have allowed us to seek ‘those places and people that are comfortably akin to one another’” (p.41).

Public schools in America: Social framework. Research findings seem to support Liu and Taylor’s (2005) assertion of a dual obstacle to increased racial and socio-economic integration in schools: the home-school connection and local control of education limiting integration mandates in suburban communities. Parental opposition to their child’s transition to a large degree appears to have originated from fear of relinquishing the educational and social benefits derived from attending a school in a higher-SES neighborhood. The combined effect of assortative mating (Bishop, 2008) and the Tiebout effect (Tiebout, 1956) seems evident in Cumberland parents’ class-based responses to the redistricting proposal and transition of their child to a different school.

Public schools in America: Socio-economic and fiscal framework. The low number of parents disenrolling their children from the Cumberland School Department calls into question the actual strength of the Tiebout effect with regard to residents leaving communities when the tax and benefits structure no longer reflects their preferred balance, notwithstanding an exodus threat before the School Committee vote. Focus group participants however did anticipate an influx of new residents to Cumberland due to the implementation of full day kindergarten, improving the local tax base and increasing property values.
This study neither confirms nor disconfirms Clapp, Nanda, and Ross’s (2008) finding of decreasing property values associated with closer proximity to existing boundary lines. While some parents lamented an anticipated decline in their house values due to its new association with a more southern and, therefore, less desirable neighborhood, one mother shared that, when house hunting, she had been undeterred by her future home’s closeness to existing boundaries since she believed all the Cumberland schools offer a good education thus accepting any future redistricting. This latter attitude appears uncommon; most parents expressed strong negative feelings regarding a transition to a southern school due to socio-economic and financial concerns.

**Public schools in America: Decision-making framework.** No minority parents accepted the invitation to participate in this research project, which may be indicative of their larger non-participation in decision-making processes. One explanation could be found in Saiger’s (2010) assertion that “the actual, lived neighborhoods in the United States are Tieboutian—which is to say, aggressively nonrandom, consisting of persons who, in effect, have chosen one another as neighbors” (p.525). The concentration of racial minorities in the BF Norton neighborhood may not only have precluded most of them from selection for this study as no BF Norton students were redistricted but also could have exerted a silencing effect on those non-white residents living in neighborhoods where they are vastly outnumbered by white, middle class neighbors. The racial discrepancies regarding internet access between white, black and Hispanic people, exacerbated by race-based educational attainment differences as established by Zikuhr and Smith (2012), could further have tipped the scales of decision-making processes in favor of white, middle class suburbanites, as delineated by Boudreaux (2004), Gomez-Velez (2008), Gresham (2010), and Ryan and Heise (2002). The use of formal and informal
communication channels, including but not limited to bus stops, school playgrounds, local swim club, playgrounds, and Facebook, as well as the pamphlets distributed by residents opposing the redistricting may have represented a triple disadvantage for racial minorities due to (1) the latter’s potentially more limited social connections with white, middle class neighbors; (2) their lower levels of internet access; and (3) the exclusive use of English in discussions and debates. Rumors about favoritism and effective lobbying by wealthy Windsong residents after this area became re-redistricted to Community school, which represented a more desirable move from a socio-economic and achievement perspective, arguably reflects Ryan’s (2004) concept of “the suburban veto”.

**School transitions: Academic effects.** Prior research, mostly quantitative in nature and focused on structural transitions, has associated movements to another school with achievement declines (Alspaugh and Harting, 1995; Alspaugh, 1998; Duchesne, Larose, Guay, Vitaro and Tremblay, 2005; Mejana and Reynold, 2004), especially in case of successive transitions (Anderson, 2012; Brown, 2004; Schwartz, Rubinstein and Zabel, 2011). In addition, Yuen’s qualitative study revealed significant concerns about potential transition-related achievement declines even among parents with a low socio-economic background. Some participants in this study expressed anxiety over perceived quality differences among the five elementary schools impacting their children’s academic attainment but, contrary to previous research, did not directly correlate transitions to achievement declines.

**School transitions: Socio-emotional effects.** Focus group participants shared significant concerns about the socio-emotional impacts of a redistricting-related transition on their children. The severing of existing friendships in particular became a recurring theme, yet this was balanced by accounts of how the cohort-based transfers kept many friendships intact, facilitating
integration into a new school—especially when paired with familiar staff transitioning as well—thereby contradicting Grills-Taquechel, Norton and Ollendick’s (2010) study, which did not discern a significant anxiety-reducing effect attributable to social supports. Previous research had not explored the socio-emotional impact of transitions on parents, which became a major focus of this project. Parents described a more pronounced impact from ruptured social connections on themselves than on their children, with cliquey behavior at the destination school and their own lack of familiarity with overt and covert rules hampering integration efforts.

**Resistance as a psychological and psycho-social response to organizational change.** Research findings support Foster’s (2010) criticism that the organizational change literature has tended to oversimplify individual responses. The quantitative analysis of attitude rating scales confirmed focus group data suggesting that parental responses became more positive, constructive and conciliatory over time, likely shaped by cost-benefit analyses. Van Dijk and Van Dick’s (2009) conceptualization of resistance as a social construct was reflected in parents using Facebook to fuel opposition; the distribution of incendiary parent-produced informational packets; and the role of bus stops, school playgrounds, and the soccer field for the collective processing of information and emotions. However, resistance also appears to incorporate a strong concurrent psychological dimension, as evidenced for example in parents projecting their negative emotions and attitudes towards the redistricting and transition onto their children.

With the exception of organizational factors and competence, all other sources of resistance to organizational change delineated in Cibulskas and Janiūnaitė’s (2005) meta-analysis could be discerned in the research findings:
• Structural factors: lack of information (many parents considered the district’s communication inadequate) and lack of support (transfer parents experiencing opposition to their integration in the new school community);

• Individual factors: emotions (parental anger), attitudes (projection of negative emotions onto children), and subconscious stereotypes (North-South divide);

• Emotional factors: distrust (trust as an evaluative lens), fear, uncertainty (parents outwardly displaying confidence but internally struggling with fear and anxiety), loss of safety (rupturing of social connections);

• Cognitive factors: unwillingness to understand the change (parents unable to comprehend why the implementation of full day kindergarten required redistricting);

• Motivational factors: power distribution (emergence of opinion leaders); and

• Sociological factors: fear of losing socio-economically-based connections (rupturing of social connections with concomitant fear of stigmatization caused by association with a socio-economically less desirable neighborhood due to the confluence of assortative mating and Tiebout effects).

This study expands on Cibulskas and Janiūnaitė’s overview by providing an in-depth analysis of the mostly covert psychoanalytical factors fueling resistance such as parental projection and vicarious emotional processes mostly absent from prior research.

   Kurt Lewin’s three-stage force-field analysis of organizational change (Foster, 2010), while not selected as a core theory for this project, nonetheless anticipated the three-step evolution in parental responses as depicted in Table 8.
Table 8

Comparison of Lewin’s Force-Field Theory with Parental Responses to Redistricting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lewin:</th>
<th>Unfreezing</th>
<th>Moving</th>
<th>Refreezing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parental responses to</td>
<td>Initial response</td>
<td>Cost-benefit analyses</td>
<td>Current response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>redistricting:</td>
<td>(December-March 2012)</td>
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<td>(April 2013)</td>
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Piderit’s (2000) tripartite expansion inserting emotional, cognitive, and intentional dimensions into Lewin’s theory aligns with the multidimensional constituting factors of the cost-benefit analyses involving individual and collective emotions, assumptions and stereotypes.

Transposing Szabla’s (2007) classification onto the data, focus group participants’ descriptions of the Superintendent’s actions seem to reflect a combined rational-empirical (“I trusted this guy. . . . I felt like he had the data to support what he was thinking”) and normative-reeducative leadership style (“At that point, I didn’t have a lot of information as to how imbalanced the school numbers are”). One parent’s statement embodies traces of power-coerciveness: “The little people, the ones like this that live so close that got moved and shuffled.”

The four evaluative lenses of fairness, equity, trust, and transparency arguably reflect the principles of fairness (Brotheridge, 2003), human cost (King Rice and Malen, 2003), and justice (Foster, 2010) impacting resistance efforts. Feelings of loss resulting in resistance (Gavin, 2003; Lunenburg, 2010; Van Dijk and Van Dick, 2009) are evidenced by the plethora of vivid descriptions about the impact of severed social connections and loss of control.

Parents mentioned many of Lunenburg’s (2010) suggestions for overcoming resistance: education (include benefits in proposals); communication (create a clear message and communicate often using multiple channels); participation and involvement (involve parents in
fine-tuning proposals and initiatives); and supports (offer short- and long term transition supports to both children and parents).

**Summary of findings in relation to the literature review.** The findings of this qualitative research project analyzing how Cumberland parents experienced their child’s transition to a new school due to large-scale redistricting confirm, expand upon, and in some instances contradict prior studies. The school-housing connection unequivocally fueled parental opposition to the redistricting proposal due to the confluence of socio-economic, racial, and academic perceptions associated with schools located in more southern neighborhoods. Assortative mating had created five distinct but internally homogeneous neighborhoods with regard to race, class, and socio-economic status. Reassignment to a different “enclave” consequently resulted in emotional distress, outsider feelings, and disempowerment. The disadvantaged position of minorities in decision-making processes due to language, cultural, and social capital differences—particularly prevalent in white, middle class suburban locales—seems reflected not only in the apparent absence of minority parents in the Cumberland redistricting debates but also by the non-participation of these parents in focus groups.

This study expands upon prior research in at least four ways. First, results question the omnipresence of the Tiebout effect. While focus group participants anticipated an influx of new residents to Cumberland due to the appeal of full day kindergarten, a concomitant exodus of parents disagreeing with spending tax money on this initiative was not reflected in the disenrollment data. Second, this project provides a complementary micro-perspective to other wide-angle research regarding the suburban veto. Third, whereas previous studies had established a negative socio-emotional impact of transitions on children, research findings point
to an even more pronounced and longer-term impact on parents. Fourth, a psychoanalytical perspective had been virtually absent from the transition and resistance research corpus.

Some findings also contradict prior research. Parents did not express concerns about transition-related achievement declines yet worried about perceived quality differences between the school of origin and destination school. In addition, the significant positive effect of social supports provided by friends and staff challenges Grills-Taquechel, Norton, and Ollendick’s (2010) conclusions. It ought to be emphasized, however, that these authors had focused on students transitioning from elementary to secondary schools.

**Discussion of Findings: A Proposed Theoretical Model**

Reflecting Thomas’s (2006) general inductive methodology, the concluding phase of this qualitative project consists of the development of a theoretical model (Appendix P). This model visualizes the relationships among and connections between the central themes that have emerged from consecutive data analyses.

The combined effect of intertwined intra- and interpersonal processes influenced and determined parental responses to a redistricting initiative and related transition. At the intra-personal level, initial responses consisted of anger, denial, disbelief, and acceptance. Emotions and attitudes evolved over time due to the simultaneous influence of an internal-psychological and an external-social cost-benefit analysis. These cost-benefit analyses incorporated positive and negative factors which gradually solidified parents’ responses at the intra- and interpersonal levels. Four related evaluative lenses further impacted individual and collective analyses: trust, transparency, equity, and fairness. Parental responses at the time of data collection reflected a three-part typology: acceptance, resentment, and leaving the school district. Parents’ personality traits; previous experiences; stress levels; and knowledge about academic, socio-economic, and
psychological factors associated with redistricting and transitions functioned as supra-variables influencing intra-personal processes at every response stage.

Concomitant interpersonal processes characterized by multilateral communicative interactions between stakeholders dynamically interacted with intra-personal processes. Some parents engaged in bargaining attempts with the Superintendent and School Committee and, in response, received feedback from these actors. They further posed questions about the redistricting and affiliated transitions to teachers and principals who in turn provided guidance, support, and at times attempted to engage parents in lobbying efforts against the proposal prior to the School Committee’s vote. Projection of feelings and emotions onto children were commonly reported. Positive or negative feedback from children in turn influenced parental attitudes. Parents frequently probed neighbors, relatives, and friends about their responses to the redistricting resulting in the collective interpretation of events, facts, assumptions, and rumors. The conglomerate of information obtained through interpersonal interactions became incorporated in the internal cost-benefit analysis after osmotic transit through the four evaluative filters of trust, transparency, equity, and fairness, ultimately shaping parents’ current responses in April 2013.

Validity and Limitations

This research project incorporates a number of validity-enhancing strategies:

- Content-related validity: purposeful random sampling, inclusion of different question types in protocols, and limited group sizes;
- Criterion-related validity: triangulation of parent focus group data with attitude rating scales and information provided by the Superintendent as well as School Committee members who had voted on the redistricting in 2012; and
- Construct-related validity: expert review by dissertation advisor, second reader, and third reader.

The limited focus on one suburban community and one type of transition, however, significantly reduces the generalizability of findings; any extrapolation should only occur after careful examination of all parameters detailed throughout this dissertation. In light of this, a number of potential internal validity threats ought to be pointed out. First, notwithstanding the use of random sampling and including both homogeneous and heterogeneous focus groups, study participants could have differed in some relevant aspect from the target population. Case in point may be the absence of any minority parents among focus group members. A related threat is mortality: Selected parents who either declined the invitation or did not respond (totaling 152 out of 180 invitees or 84%) may have done so for a specific reason which by definition could not be assessed. In addition, a maturation effect caused by the passing of time could have skewed the research findings as could a history threat when new events reshape people’s memories. The research design had to rely on participants’ memories regarding initial responses as the closest approximation feasible and employ triangulation strategies to ascertain the stability and, therefore, the assumed reliability and accuracy of the data obtained through parent focus groups.

Proposed questions were reviewed by four experts (Dr. Phil Thornton, Superintendent Cumberland School Department; Dr. Lisa Colwell, Director of Special Education Cumberland School Department; Ms. Sandy Pickering, parent impacted by the redistricting; and Dr. Chris Unger, dissertation advisor) and consequently modified to reflect their feedback as a reliability measure. The validity and reliability of using Deutsch’s dyads as an attitude rating scale by transposing a seven-point scale had not been established in the research literature. Any results obtained in this fashion should therefore be subjected to heightened scrutiny.
The researcher’s professional affiliation with the Cumberland School Department may have positively or negatively impacted parents’ decision to participate and could have constrained focus group discussions. A notetaker was present at each session tasked with recording interpersonal interactions. These notes as well as all transcripts will remain available for five years as part of the audit trail. A concerted effort was undertaken to include disconfirming and discrepant data in analyses aimed at exposing potential biases and enhancing the objectivity of this study.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

This exploratory study investigating how parents experienced a large-scale redistricting initiative, including a mandatory transition of their child to another elementary school, reveals that responses can be grouped into a finite number of categories and tend to evolve over time in the direction of more positive and constructive attitudes. Psychological, social, and socio-economic factors exerted a profound and usually negative influence on redistricting conversations. Parents projecting their emotions onto their children, acute disempowerment and outsider feelings when existing relations were severed, and the effect of social stratification within Cumberland’s constituting neighborhoods, significantly hampered transition processes. Cohort-based transitioning, on the other hand, facilitated the integration of children into their new school due to the comfort and safety provided by pre-existing friendships. While most children’s transition and assimilation occurred rather effortlessly, parents in contrast more often retained a residual ambivalence towards the redistricting originating from feelings of loss (in particular loss of social connections) exacerbated by resistance from existing groups when attempting to integrate into the new school community.
Fifteen guidelines can be distilled from the data and research findings. These recommendations (listed in chronological order) could not only facilitate the implementation of redistricting initiatives in other communities but may also be applicable to other types of large-scale district-initiated change. This is particularly true of the first seven recommendations.

Prior to the development of a redistricting proposal:

1. Align curricula, policies, practices, and procedures across schools. Create consistency among schools with regard to instructional programs, methodologies, behavior supports, as well as customs and traditions such as hall monitors, school play, dances et cetera. Differences not only fuel opposition and resistance originating from feelings of loss but also exacerbate socio-economic contrasts between different neighborhoods.

2. Ascertain whether School Committee members may be willing to support a redistricting initiative. School boards tend to resist redistricting: “Since boundary changes, schedule changes, and site decisions impact students, parents, traffic patterns, and/or neighborhoods, community harmony is at risk” (Lemberg and Church, 2000, p.161).

Redistricting proposal:

3. Start the process early to provide sufficient time for discussion, feedback, and adjustments. Present a comprehensive proposal to avoid or minimize uncertainty-induced anxieties.

4. Develop a clear, coherent and data-based message. Communicate consistently and frequently using formal and informal channels. Ambiguous, contradictory, incomplete, and inconsistent information results in confusion, anxiety, and distrust.
5. Expand and differentiate the core message to connect with the differing needs and initial responses of parents and other stakeholders.

6. Involve parents in fine-tuning the proposal to enhance procedural transparency and institute effective peer-to-peer (parent-to-parent) communication.

7. Keep teachers, staff and principals fully informed as they can assist in the communication process.

8. Target real (bus stop, playground) and virtual (social media) peripheral spaces for communication purposes in order to control the message, effectively address rumors, and rectify incorrect information close to the source.

Prior to transitioning students:

9. Assign cohorts of friends—not just transfer students—to the same classrooms.

10. Transition a critical mass of staff as well.

11. Offer transitioning students and their families multiple opportunities to become acquainted with the new school and its staff. These activities should initially only involve transfer students.

12. Finalize bus schedules well in advance of the transition date to reduce anxiety among children and their parents. Moreover, ample time is essential for procuring after-school care and scheduling extracurricular activities.

After transitioning students:

13. Provide mental health support for those students who may experience short- and long-term transition-related difficulties.
14. Offer integration opportunities geared towards parents. Collaborate with parent organizations on developing activities to draw in transfer parents and counteract isolationist and protectionist behavior by existing groups and cliques.

*Ongoing:*

15. Periodically adjust boundaries, for example every five years. “You should probably have a plan that every five years or so to re-examine your system. You can’t do it every year, because people just don’t like that much change...” (Superintendent)

These recommendations reflect and incorporate strategies delineated in the organizational change literature geared towards overcoming resistance. As such, they possibly indicate a more universal applicability: education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, negotiation and agreement (Lunenburg, 2010); provide opportunities for change recipients to process their feelings, limit the practical impacts of the change, emphasize the organizational ideal (Levinson, 1972); and re-establish trust and offer initiatives for healing psychological wounds (Gavin, 2003). Due to the bounded nature of qualitative research, a careful examination of the parameters related to the 2012 Cumberland redistricting will be essential for assessing to what degree findings might be applicable to other change initiatives.

**Change Initiatives and Social Stratification: Challenges, Promises, and Strategies**

Focus group participants provided valuable information that allows for a further exploration of the impact of social stratification on change processes. Saiger (2010) characterizes school boundaries as “toxic” emphasizing socio-economic and fiscal differences between residential entities (neighborhood, municipality, city et cetera). Burke (2008), Piderit (2000) as well as Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Perez (2003), however, consider resistance to change, when managed well, as potentially beneficial unleashing creativity, bolstering
innovation, and strengthening existing or establishing new relationships which all result in improved collective functioning and superior decision-making processes related to organizational change. From this latter perspective, focus group data suggest that change initiatives could provide an impetus for residents and neighborhoods to rally around a common cause (“It doesn’t matter where you came from because we are all one now. That’s the thing that needs to really change”); engage in larger equity-focused conversations; overcome long-standing and ingrained animosities (“but to hear this overwhelming anger because of north and south is like whoa, do we not pay the same tax? Do we not go to the same town hall . . .”); and engender a perceptual shift away from individual loss, cost, and sacrifice towards “the greater good” (“Or decisions based on personal interest as opposed to the greater good.”).

That said, Ryan (2004) remains skeptical about the possibility of voluntary social integration due to the separatist impact of assortative mating processes, a perspective supported by the Superintendent’s descriptions of NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) reactions to the redistricting proposal (“NIMBY, not in my back yard. Don’t mess with our area; we’re wonderful”) exacerbated by parental concerns about property values and social status (“So SES demographics do matter both in, I think, achievement and it’s also in politics. These folks have the pool club. They have the status”). The purported parallels with other communities may be indicative of some level of universality. As the Superintendent explained, “I had one lady in my last community. I remember the quote. She said, ‘If you do this, it will lower our property values, letting those children into our school,’ kind of like the unwashed being let in.”

A number of statements by parents and School Committee members reflect a willingness and even desire to change common ego-centric attitudes by focusing on communal and collective
improvement through collaborations. For example, the Cumberland PTOs, as reported by parents, decided to set aside any rivalries to support the transitioning children and their families:

. . . the whole North, South, whatever, and everybody decided that they were going to work together to make this the best move for the kids. That this was about the kids, it wasn’t about the parents, and it wasn’t about where you lived or where you came from, this was about the kids and trying to make the kids move as easily as it could be. I think that that went well.

School Committee members also challenged parents’ individual entitlement-driven arguments opposing change (“In a public district you do not have a right to do that. . . . All the right you have to is a free education in the town. You do not have the right to send them to the one with the highest scores”) and expressed satisfaction with community members starting to understand the existence of untenable systemic inequities: “I was content that other people finally were figuring out a problem that had been under-lying for a long time.”

The literature and focus group data point to two major issues that tend to negatively impact socio-economic integration and equity: “the suburban veto” (Ryan, 2004) and the limited participation of minorities in decision-making processes and community organizing efforts (Pappas, 2012). Counteracting these forces may result in opportunities for successful systemic change in any district and community. After further defining these two issues and related challenges, the next sections present suggestions based on the findings of this research project.

**The suburban veto.** Ryan (2004) asserts that the social and cultural power white, middle class suburbanites possess has allowed them to successfully lobby the judicial system “to limit any education reform that would interfere with suburban autonomy” (p.1646). This veto, according to Ryan (2004), has been used to curtail desegregation efforts, inter-district fiscal
equalization, and school choice plans. Information provided by parent participants, School Committee members, and Superintendent Thornton reflected actions and behaviors suggestive not only of suburban veto efforts but also associated assortative mating and Tiebout-related reactions, all posing challenges to rapprochement and collaboration efforts that would supersede neighborhood-based social stratification.

**Challenges.** The Cumberland redistricting proposal, along with concomitant perceived quality differences between northern and southern elementary schools, apparently revived dormant class-based frictions and caused, as stakeholder theory would predict, opposition to the change initiative due to the anticipated rupturing of existing social connections and association with a neighborhood deemed socially inferior. Forces in the external environment (in line with systems theory’s core postulation of subsystem interdependence) exacerbated fears of social stigmatization resulting in resistance. Parents detailed, for example, how the local newspaper and realtors had exploited existing social sensitivities: “When we talked to the realtors, we were told to strictly stick to north of 295 and certain areas” and

but it quickly became apparent once you move here and start reading The Valley Breeze, the 'oh [name school omitted] School, it’s the best one'. We were in the [name school omitted] area and I’m like oh now what am I getting gipped, because I’m going to [name school omitted] . . . and then the whole north/south and it becomes so ... so as a total outsider, you come in and it’s clearly decisive the way it’s all portrayed and communicated.

Evidence for the presence of Tiebout-related responses, i.e. people purchasing homes in locales that align with their fiscal means, needs, and social perspectives, is reflected in statements such as “we’re all very territorial of where we want to go. We bought … that was the
other thing. We bought in an area where we wanted to send our children to school” and “but a lot of concerns about our test scores are higher, this is where I want my child, I've bought my house in this neighborhood.” Reported initial disdain for the school offering programs for English Language Learners as well as references to social stratification and “demographics” revealed attitudes arguably steeped in assortative mating: “the southern half of the town was more blue-collar; the northern half of the town is more white-collar. That concerns me”; “The attitude of the town, the attitude of the North, South, the demographic, the whole … I think this is just ongoing when it comes to that North, South socioeconomic factor”; and “I think that a lot of parents, they think that they’re safe as long as they belong to a certain demographic, which is what I personally do not believe.” One parent’s account of a similar geographic and socioeconomic division when the Moms’ Club split into subgroups due to ballooning membership, appears to point to a more universal change-related pattern:

I'm not kidding you, I join the Mom's Club, my daughter was six months old and had gotten too big, and apparently the by-laws, . . . it got too big so they had to redistrict it, and it was left up to the President of the time . . . but the way she did it, she chopped out [name neighborhood omitted], so it became Cumberland Moms’ Club [name neighborhood omitted] was like a whole separated club, but up until that time I had no idea that there was this.

**Strategies.** Analysis of focus group data reveals three possible strategies for counteracting suburban veto responses. First, systemic collaboration such as aligning curricula and auxiliary supports can foster partnerships (as exemplified in PTOs working together for the sake of transitioning children), which may eventually expand into larger community involvement across existing divisions. Or, in the words of Cumberland parents, “Yes, uniform school district.
Like town-wide planning, getting consistency across the schools so nobody feels like they’re missing something by going somewhere” and “The redistricting could have been and maybe still could be a great opportunity as a town, as a school-wide district to say here’s where we are. It doesn’t matter where you came from because we are all one now.”

Second, experiencing cultural diversity has the power not only to unite people previously divided because of socio-economic stratification but also to challenge stereotypes, which tend to fuel opposition to change. Two focus group participants provided accounts indicative of the potential for social blending to overcome diversity barriers. One parent reported how her assumption of English Language Learners negatively impacting academic standards was disproven when she toured a school prior to the School Committee vote. Another parent, at a different session, commented on her positive experiences with cultural diversity at the middle school level:

I was worried about going to [name middle school omitted]. North-South mentality, right? I . . . looked at private school . . . and I tell you, it’s been fantastic. The assimilation of all different types of students from all different backgrounds, I think that that’s what you find in the South part of Cumberland. Maybe I’m wrong. I think that there’s a more well-rounded people from all different economic statuses as well as backgrounds and ethnicity, so I think there tends to be a lot more tolerance for each other and the kids are brought up that way.

Lastly, equity-based conversations can stimulate rationalization processes and acceptance of change. As one mother stated, “I know that there might not be any other options because the numbers are so drastically imbalanced. So, I accepted it and that was it.”
Limited participation of minorities in decision-making processes. The virtual absence—by choice or/and because of the “Tieboutian . . . aggressively nonrandom” nature of communities (Saiger, 2010, p.525)—of minority participants in focus groups (even though a small number of minority parents were randomly selected and invited to participate) as well as any prior debates surrounding the Cumberland redistricting, represents a second meta-theme related to the impact of social stratification on change initiatives.

Challenges. Boudreaux (2004), Gomez-Velez (2008), Gresham (2010) as well as Ryan and Heise (2002) discuss the participatory disadvantage of minorities in decision-making processes typically dominated by white, middle class suburbanites. The reduced levels of Internet access, lower educational attainment (Zikuhr and Smith, 2012), and pervasive stratification of neighborhoods represent a triple challenge. Or, in Saiger’s (2010) words, “In the face of arguments that local governance is vital to local community and local citizenship come arguments that community and citizenship are debased by economic and racial homogeneity and stratification” (p.524).

Strategies. No data reflecting minority parents’ perspectives on the Cumberland redistricting could be obtained. The following suggestions for increasing the participation of minorities in educational change initiatives are based on personal reflection and experiences with involving minority parents in educational conversations, mostly related to special education procedures.

1. Increase Internet access by offering computer literacy workshops in parents’ native languages and making computers available, free of charge, at the public library and through local community groups, or by providing students with electronic devices capable of Internet access for use at home.
2. Active outreach to minority parents by parent organizations, teachers, staff, and principals.

3. Develop a system in which more knowledgeable minority parents or white middle class volunteers are available for one-on-one peer support.

4. Supply information in foreign languages and provide interpreters at discussion forums.

5. Invite minority parents to join change initiative-related committees.

6. Target community liaisons, cultural groups, pediatric offices as well as ethnic restaurants and supermarkets for the dissemination of information.

7. Consider minority representatives as valuable resources, capable of providing unique perspectives for optimizing change proposals and initiatives. Avoid ‘rubberstamping’ situations and token minority representation.

Action research incorporating a critical theory framework (for example Paulo Freire’s work on educating powerless groups in order to ameliorate their societal position (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres, 2009)) seems warranted in order to study minorities’ perspectives on change and increase their involvement in decision-making processes. Kicheloe (2008) asserts:

Thus, proponents of critical pedagogy understand that every dimension of schooling and every form of educational practices are politically contested spaces. Shaped by history and challenged by a wide range of interest groups, educational practice is a fuzzy concept as it takes place in numerous settings, is shaped by a plethora of often invisible forces, and can operate even in the name of democracy and justice to be totalitarian and oppressive. (p.2)
In summary, focus group participants presented information that confirmed the presence of social stratification in Cumberland as well as in other towns. In addition, parents implicitly and explicitly provided suggestions for counteracting isolationist trends and power inequalities that might promote social integration and collaboration at the communal level. These parental recommendations seem to reinforce the perspective that change initiatives and associated resistance can function as positive transformative forces, across school districts and communities.

Significance

This research project expands upon the existing research related to organizational change, redistricting, and student transitions. The development of a taxonomy integrating concepts and definitions used in the transition literature provides an opportunity for enhancing the clarity, specificity, validity and generalizability of existing studies and could end the current ambiguity both with regard to terminology as well as conceptualizations.

Suburban locales remain underrepresented in the transition research, which is highly problematic in light of the potentially toxic impact of race, class, socio-economic, and academic differences, which can result in segregationist trends within suburban communities fueled by a combination of the Tiebout effect and assortative mating. Moreover, suburban communities present unique challenges to change initiatives as their white, middle class residents possess the social and cultural capital to mount effective campaigns against proposals, lobby decision-makers, and to connect with like-minded people resulting in what Ryan (2004) coined “the suburban veto.”

The integration of systems theory with stakeholder theory and Harry Levinson’s psychoanalytical theory of organizational change enabled a multifaceted approach missing from
many other studies and allowed for the analysis of a change initiative—in this case internal redistricting—from a macro/total system (systems theory), meso/socio-organizational (stakeholder theory) and micro/individual-psychological (Levinson) perspective. For example, this study revealed how emotions associated with the rupturing of social connections (meso-level/stakeholder theory) become intensified through conscious and subconscious feelings of loss (micro-level/psychoanalytical theory of organizational change). No other research explicitly relying on a psychoanalytical theoretical framework could be located. The prevalence of data supporting mostly subconscious processes such as reciprocation, projection, and reaction formation impacting how parents (and by proxy children) experienced a redistricting initiative and related transition to another school points to a lacuna in the existing research—explicitly referenced in Cibulskas and Janiūnaitė’s (2005) meta-analysis of resistance to organizational change—that this study has started to address. In addition, the focus on parent perspectives allowed for establishing the impact of parental emotions on children’s experiences through projection and vicarious processes, which had remained absent from prior research which mostly relies on student data usually gathered within a more superficial quantitative fashion. This dissertation therefore complements and elaborates upon the current transition literature by focusing specifically on internal redistricting as a type of large-scale organizational change.

**Final Words**

The 2012 Cumberland redistricting presented an opportunity to study how parents had experienced this event, including the transition of their child to another school. As school districts nationwide are debating adjusting internal boundaries in response to enrollment changes and budget constraints, the need for additional research has become increasingly urgent especially in light of the conceptual ambiguity reflected in the existing literature. The
researcher’s professional role as a central office administrator in the district, while potentially impacting data collection and analysis processes due to possible biases and an unequal power distribution between researcher and participants, nevertheless offered unique levels of access and insider knowledge. The delineation of a theoretical model and practical guidelines is intended to assist with the optimization of redistricting initiatives and by proxy other types of large-scale district-initiated change.

Next Steps

Additional research is needed to establish whether this study’s delayed data collection may have impacted the accuracy of participants’ recollections and in some way skewed the data notwithstanding multiple measures designed to enhance the validity and accuracy of findings. Ideally information would have been collected immediately preceding and following the School Committee vote and again prior to and after the actual transition to a different elementary school. More longitudinal research is needed to assess the possibility of a further development in parental responses—for example increasingly declining levels of residual ambivalence and resentment in favor of full acceptance—beyond the eight months post-transition mark which for this study represented the end of data collection. The one-district focus makes any extrapolation to other locales and types of change initiatives highly tentative. Aside from the obvious replication of this project in other communities, future studies can provide complementary quantitative information, for example by focusing on students’ academic and socio-emotional functioning before and after a redistricting-initiated transition to another school. The inclusion of teacher and administrator focus groups could expand this study’s multi-perspectival approach and provide additional guidance in light of future redistricting initiatives. An exploration of potentially divergent experiences based on the age of students transitioning as well as parent and
student demographic variables (race, income, gender et cetera) is also warranted, particularly in light of the significant digital, social, and financial divides currently limiting the participation of minorities in decision-making processes (Boudreaux, 2004; Gomez-Velez, 2008; Gresham, 2010; Ryan and Heise, 2002; Zikuhr and Smith, 2012).
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Appendix A: Proposed Taxonomy of School Transitions

SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

**Non-Structural**
- Positive motivation: Pursuing better education
- Negative motivation: Job loss, divorce etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandated by law, policies, or court ruling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Closure
| Inter-district boundary adjustment/external redistricting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not mandated by law, policy, or court ruling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Closure
| Functional consolidation (support services only)
| Expansion
| Merger (absorption)
| Physical consolidation (becoming new entity)

**Structural**
- Not mandated by law, policy, or court ruling
- Existing grade configuration limit (e.g. entering middle school)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Merger (absorption)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Physical consolidation (becoming new entity)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDEA: Continuum of placement options at district-level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Racial Desegregation

**Consolidation**
- Grad-level reconfiguration

**Transfer to other in-district school making AYP (school choice)**

**Transfer to charter school**

**Voucher program**

**Racial Desegregation**

**IDEA: Continuum of placement options at district-level**

**Consolidation (school level)**

**Consolidation (district level)**

**Physical consolidation (becoming new entity)**

**Teaching and learning initiative (e.g. full day K)**
Appendix B: Request to Superintendent to use District Data, Conduct Focus Groups, and Use District Sites

Philip Thornton, Ed. D, Superintendent of Schools
Cumberland School Department
2602 Mendon Road
Cumberland, RI 02864

Permission for data collection.

Dear Dr. Thornton:

As you know, I have been enrolled in the Ed.D program at Northeastern University. Last Spring I finished the required coursework and have moved into the doctoral project/dissertation stage. At this point a proposal delineating a qualitative study investigating parents’ experiences regarding their child transitioning to another elementary school due to internal redistricting has been completed. In essence I would like to investigate using a focus group format how Cumberland parents whose children had to change schools due to the district’s recent elementary school redistricting have experienced this transition.

I would like to request your permission to:

a) **Obtain and use district data** indicating which students changed schools due to the 2012 redistricting initiative as well as parent contact information for the recruitment of participants after IRB approval has been obtained;

b) **Conduct focus groups.** The research design is based on a total of seven focus groups: One focus group consisting of School Committee members who voted on the redistricting proposal last March, five homogeneous focus groups consisting of parents whose children all moved from one origin school to the same destination school, and one heterogeneous group with parents affected by the redistricting initiative from across our five elementary schools;

c) **Use district sites** to conduct focus groups. The parent focus group sessions will take place in the evening at the schools children are currently attending (Ashton, BF Norton, Community, and Garvin) or at central office (District Meeting Room or Superintendent’s Conference Room), which will also be the location of the School Committee focus group. I am happy to complete any necessary paperwork associated with using school buildings and district sites at night and am willing for example to align focus group sessions with already scheduled activities such as PTO meetings to minimize the impact of my research on district resources.

The goal of the proposed dissertation is to obtain a better understanding of parent experiences related to their child’s mandatory transition to another within-district elementary school due to a redistricting initiative. As we discovered during the redistricting process last year, the existing research on this specific topic is virtually non-existing. Because of changing demographics and reduced budgets, many districts are currently exploring internal boundary adjustments and it is not unimaginable that at some point in the future we may again experience the need for another redistricting in Cumberland.

Your written permission is at this point required by Northeastern University’s IRB office as part of their review process. I am happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this project and hope that you will be able to support my request. You should also feel free to contact my advisor at Northeastern University, Dr. Chris Unger, at (617) 909-1360. Upon receiving your permission in writing I will forward this information to Northeastern University’s IRB office.

Sincerely,

Frederik Schockaert
Doctoral student Northeastern University
Appendix C: Interview Invitation Superintendent

Philip Thornton, Ed. D, Superintendent of Schools
Cumberland School Department
2602 Mendon Road
Cumberland, RI 02864

Request for interview (dissertation).

Dear Dr. Thornton:

As you know, I have been enrolled in the Ed.D program at Northeastern University. Last Spring I finished the required coursework and have moved into the doctoral project/dissertation stage. At this point a proposal delineating a qualitative study investigating parents’ experiences regarding their child transitioning to another elementary school due to internal redistricting has been completed. In essence I would like to investigate using a focus group format how Cumberland parents whose children had to change schools due to the district’s recent elementary school reorganization have experienced this transition and gain insight in how districts can accommodate and facilitate large-scale structural change initiatives.

In light of a sound methodological approach, multiple points of view will be incorporated. More specifically, parent perspectives will be compared to information obtained from a School Committee focus group and from you as the Superintendent of Schools. I would therefore like to invite you for an in-depth interview which I am happy to schedule it at a mutually convenient time and location. The interview is expected to last approximately 1-1.5 hrs.

Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the interview, you can stop at any time. Attached to this letter you will find an informed consent form. Please review this document carefully as it provides more information about the study and protections of participants. You do not have to fill it out at this point. You will be provided with a copy of the consent form prior to the start of the interview and asked to review and sign this document at that point.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a potential research participant, you should feel free to contact Nan C. Regina, Director Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115; 617-373-4588; Email: irb@neu.edu You may call anonymously if you wish to do so.

The current research on transitions in light of intra-district boundary adjustments is very limited, especially with regard to how parents have experienced this process. Changing enrollment and fiscal factors may warrant additional future redistricting initiatives in Cumberland. It is my hope that this dissertation will provide robust information to parents, administrators, and School Committee members when faced with a large-scale structural change decision.

Sincerely,

Frederik Schockaert
Doctoral student Northeastern University
Appendix D: Informed Consent Research Participants (Superintendent)

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Researcher/doctoral student: Frederik Schockaert; Principal Investigator: Dr. Chris Unger

Dissertation title: Parental experiences related to an intra-district boundary adjustment transition at the elementary school level.

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You are not required to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will provide you with a copy for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are the Superintendent of Schools who co-developed last school year’s redistricting proposal and presented it to parents, teachers, School Committee members and other stakeholders.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to a) obtain a better understanding of how parents have experienced their child’s transition to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative as well as b) delineate factors, supports, and initiatives perceived by parents, School Committee members, and the Superintendent as either helpful or having hampered the process. The goal is to gain insight and provide guidance related to large-scale structural change initiatives within school districts.

It is hypothesized that parent experiences related to their child’s mandatory transition to another within-district elementary school due to a redistricting initiative are influenced or even shaped by 1) psychological processes (internal) related to change; 2) social, historical, legal, financial, and political (external) factors; as well as 3) existing knowledge and research on transitions.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to participate in a one-on-one which will be audio-taped.

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?

The interview will take place at a mutually convenient time and location and is estimated to last approximately 1-1.5 hours.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There are no foreseeable risks involved in taking part in this study. As the sole Superintendent of Schools, any information you provide will be attributable to you. All records are going to be destroyed five years after the completion of the dissertation.
Will I benefit from being involved in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information obtained in light of this study may assist school districts and administrators with attaining a better understanding of parents’ responses to a large-scale structural change initiative and develop supports and strategies that facilitate transitions and minimize negative impacts.

Who will see the information about me?
As the sole Superintendent of Schools, any information you provide will be attributed and attributable to you. All electronic records and documents containing personal information about participants will be password-protected; hard copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All information will be destroyed, erased and deleted five (5) years after completion of the dissertation.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
You are not required to participate in this study. Ending your participation will not affect your standing. At any time during the study, you may refuse to answer questions or end your participation. If you choose not to participate, ignore this form and do not sign.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
Fred Schockaert          Chris Unger, Ed.D
Doctoral student           Dissertation advisor
Tel: 401-500-6878         Tel: 617-337-2400
Email: schockaert.f@husky.neu.edu     Email: c.unger@neu.edu

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you prefer.

Will I be paid for my participation?
There is no compensation for participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There is no cost to participate in this study.

I have read, understood, and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant and the potential risks. I agree to participate in this study on a voluntary basis.

__________________________________
Research Participant (Printed Name)

__________________________________    _____________ _____
Research Participant (Signature)       Date
Appendix E: Interview Protocol Superintendent of Schools

**Project:** Parental experiences related to an intra-district boundary adjustment transition at the elementary school level.

**Date of interview:** Time: Location:

**Interviewer:**

**Interviewee:**

*Dr. Thornton, thank you for taking the time to help me with my project. As you know, I am currently working on a dissertation investigating how Cumberland parents have experienced their child’s transition to another elementary school due to last year’s redistricting. In addition to collecting information from parents and School Committee members through focus groups, I am also interested in your opinion. With your permission I would like to audio-record this interview and take notes to fully capture your responses.*

**Questions**

1. What were your reasons for pursuing internal redistricting?

2. What process or procedures were followed in redrawing boundaries and what were some of the issues that arose?

3. Describe the range of parent responses you have encountered prior to, during, and after the transition process.

4. What in your opinion were some of the motivators driving parents’ behaviors and emotions?

5. What supports, initiatives and strategies in your opinion had a positive impact on the process?

6. What factors in your opinion exerted a negative influence?

7. In what ways was the elementary redistricting in Cumberland similar to and different from your previous reorganization experience in North Kingstown?

8. How in hindsight do you feel about the redistricting decision? What (if any) lessons did you learn from the entire process, especially with regard to parents?

*Thank you again for your assistance with my project. If following this interview you would like to share additional information or review the draft dissertation for accuracy and feedback, please contact me.*
Appendix F: Focus Group Invitation (Parents)

Dear XXX:

My name is Fred Schockaert. I am Cumberland School Department’s Deputy Director of Special Education and a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am currently working on a dissertation investigating how parents have experienced their child moving to another school because of last year’s redistricting.

According to the information I have received, your child had to transfer to a different school at the start of this school year. Your name was randomly selected from a list with all parents in this situation and I would like to invite you to participate in a small group discussion. This group discussion is tentatively scheduled for –date— at XXX school starting at 7pm and will last about 1.5 to 2 hours. Your input will be extremely helpful in obtaining a better understanding of how parents have experienced this transition. I would therefore like to ask you to consider participating and helping me with my dissertation. A light dinner will be served in appreciation for your time and effort.

Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the interview, you can stop at any time.

All information collected for this study will remain strictly confidential. Reasonable precautions and measures will be taken that the final research report does not identify you or any other participants. For example, no names will be used and all participants will be asked to sign a non-disclosure consent form. Documents containing participants’ names will be password-protected and destroyed five years after completion of the dissertation.

Attached to this letter you will find an informed consent form. Please review this document carefully as it provides more information about the study and protections of participants. You do not have to fill it out at this point. Should you decide to attend the focus group session, you will be provided with a copy of the consent form prior to the start of the discussion and asked to review and sign this document.

I would appreciate it if you could inform me whether you are willing to participate in the group discussion by calling me at 401-500-6878 or emailing: schockaert.f@husky.neu.edu You are also welcome to contact me should you have questions about this study.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a potential research participant, you should feel free to contact Nan C. Regina, Director Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115; 617-373-4588; Email: irb@neu.edu You may call anonymously if you wish to do so.

Sincerely,

Fred Schockaert
Doctoral candidate, Northeastern University

Enclosed: Informed consent participants
Appendix G: Informed Consent Research Participants (Parents)

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Researcher/doctoral student: Frederik Schockaert; Principal Investigator: Dr. Chris Unger

Dissertation title: Parental experiences related to an intra-district boundary adjustment transition at the elementary school level.

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You are not required to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will provide you with a copy for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are the parent of child who had to transition to a different elementary school in Cumberland because of last year’s redistricting initiative.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to a) obtain a better understanding of how parents have experienced their child’s transition to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative as well as b) delineate factors, supports, and initiatives perceived by parents, School Committee members, and the Superintendent as either helpful or having hampered the process. The goal is to gain insight and provide guidance related to large-scale structural change initiatives within school districts.

It is hypothesized that parent experiences related to their child’s mandatory transition to another within-district elementary school due to a redistricting initiative are influenced or even shaped by 1) psychological processes (internal) related to change; 2) social, historical, legal, financial, and political (external) factors; as well as 3) existing knowledge and research on transitions.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to participate in this study the researcher will ask you to join a focus group session, which will be audio-taped.

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?

The focus group will take place at your child’s current school or the district central office and is estimated to last approximately 1.5-2 hours.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There are no foreseeable risks involved in taking part in this study. All responses will be kept confidential and any records are going to be destroyed five years after the completion of the dissertation. Some participants may possibly experience emotional discomfort when sharing feelings, emotions, and opinions. There is also a chance that participants may know other participants socially.
Will I benefit from being involved in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information obtained in light of this study may assist school districts and administrators with attaining a better understanding of parents’ responses to a redistricting initiative and develop supports and strategies that facilitate transitions and minimize negative impacts.

Who will see the information about me?
Only the researcher of this study will have access to personally identifiable information. The final report will not use participants’ names. All electronic records and documents containing personal information about participants will be password-protected; hard copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All information will be destroyed, erased and deleted five (5) years after completion of the dissertation.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
You are not required to participate in this study. Ending your participation will not affect your standing. At any time during the study, you may refuse to answer questions or end your participation. If you choose not to participate, ignore this form and do not sign.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
Fred Schockaert  
Doctoral student  
Tel: 401-500-6878  
Email: schockaert.f@husky.neu.edu

Chris Unger, Ed.D  
Dissertation advisor Northeastern University, Boston  
Tel: 617-337-2400  
Email: c.unger@neu.edu

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you prefer.

Will I be paid for my participation?
A light dinner will be served in appreciation for your time and effort.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There is no cost to participate in this study.

I have read, understood, and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant and the potential risks. I agree to participate in this study on a voluntary basis.

__________________________________    _____________
Research Participant   (Printed Name)       Date

__________________________________    _____________
Research Participant (Signature)       Date
Appendix H: Interview Protocol Parent Focus Groups

Introduction (Adapted from Krueger and Casey, 2009, p.97)

Good evening and welcome to this discussion group. I appreciate you taking the time to be here tonight. This session is probably going to last for about two hours.

I am writing a dissertation on how Cumberland parents have experienced their child transitioning to a different elementary school because of last year’s redistricting. This is one of six sessions in which parents are given an opportunity to share their feelings and opinions about this event. While the reorganization affected your child or children, tonight we are going to focus on how you as parents have experienced this change before, during, and after the actual transition.

You were invited because you all have one or more children who had to move from ________ school last year to ________ school this school year (omit this sentence from heterogeneously grouped session). The goal of this project is to obtain a better understanding of how you as parents have experienced this transition and to find out what factors had a positive influence and which had a negative impact.

Ground rules

There are no right or wrong answers. You probably will have differing points of view and that is okay. Please share your thoughts with us; all input is welcome and will help with obtaining a better understanding of your experiences. Everything shared tonight is confidential; this is why our name tags only mention first names. I would like to ask you not to share any information exchanged tonight and you can expect the same from everyone else, including myself. This session is audio-recorded to make sure all your valuable input is available for further analysis. Ms. XXX is going to take additional notes and has signed a confidentiality agreement as well. Please be assured that my dissertation is not going to mention any of your names. Any documents that contain your first and last name are password protected. All records, including tonight’s recording are going to be destroyed five years after the completion of my dissertation.

Don’t feel like you have to respond all the time. However, any information you provide is extremely helpful. If you want to follow up on something that someone has said, if you want to agree or disagree, or give an example, you are welcome to do so. My role is to ask questions, listen to you, make sure everyone gets the chance to share and respond, and to make sure we don’t get sidetracked. I’m interested in hearing from all of you. So, if you are talking a lot—which is great—I may at times ask you to give the others a chance to respond and if you have been silent for a while, I may call on you and give you an opportunity to share your thoughts with us.

If you have a cell phone, please set it to silent or vibrate now. If you need to answer an urgent call, I am asking you to step out of the room so we can continue with our conversation. Feel free to get up and have some more food or another beverage. Bathrooms are located ...

Opening question

Let’s get started by finding out more about each other. We are going to go around the table one at a time. Tell us your first name, how long you have lived in Cumberland and what you like about this town.
# Interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question type (Krueger and Casey, 2009)</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening question</td>
<td>1. Tell us your first name, how long you have lived in Cumberland and what you like about this town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory question</td>
<td>2. How did you find out about the redistricting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition questions</td>
<td>3. How would you describe your initial response to the redistricting and the news that your child may have to attend a different elementary school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. What concerns and questions did you have when you found out about the redistricting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key questions</td>
<td>5. As a parent, how would you describe your experience with your child having to change schools due to the redistricting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. In your opinion, what factors have had a positive impact on the transition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. In your opinion, what factors have had a negative impact on the transition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Why do you think you responded to the transition in the way you did?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. What emotional and practical changes have occurred in your life because of your child’s transition to another school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity: Attitude rating scale 1: Initial response</td>
<td>10. Overall, how do you feel now about your child’s transition to another elementary school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending questions</td>
<td>11. What advice do you have for administrators and school committees considering a redistricting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. What advice do you have for parents who have just found out about a redistricting in their community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Is there anything else you would like to share?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Conclusion

Thank you all for being here tonight and sharing your thoughts, feelings and opinions. I realize that at times this must have been difficult and I appreciate your candor and honesty. My job is now to analyze all of your responses and those provided during the other sessions and look for patterns of similarity and difference. The current research on school reorganizations and associated transitions of students to a different school is very limited and I hope that our conversation is going to help other districts and other parents when faced with a similar situation.

Once again I would like to emphasize that everything discussed tonight is strictly confidential and should not be shared with anyone in person, in writing, or online.

Please make sure that you have signed and returned your consent form. If you are interested in reviewing parts of my analysis for accuracy, let me know and I will write down your email address. Thank you.
Appendix I: Attitude Rating Scales

Initial response to the redistricting-related transition of your child to a different school

Instructions: Listed below are six pairs of feelings. Place an “X” on the section between each pair that most accurately reflects your initial response, for example:

Yellow : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : Blue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yellow</th>
<th>Blue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confront conflict</td>
<td>Avoid conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive demeanor</td>
<td>Gentle, unassertive demeanor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigid response</td>
<td>Flexible response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional response</td>
<td>Intellectual-rational response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to escalate conflict</td>
<td>Minimizing differences of opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluntness in opinions and emotions</td>
<td>Concealing opinions and emotions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

--------------------------------------------------- STOP!!! DO NOT CONTINUE. ---------------------------------------------------

Current response to the redistricting-related transition of your child to a different school

Instructions: Listed below are six pairs of feelings. Place an “X” on the section between each pair that most accurately reflects your current response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yellow</th>
<th>Blue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confront conflict</td>
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<td>Intellectual-rational response</td>
</tr>
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<td>Attempt to escalate conflict</td>
<td>Minimizing differences of opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluntness in opinions and emotions</td>
<td>Concealing opinions and emotions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J: Confidentiality Form Notetaker

I, __________________________ (first name + last name) will act as a focus group notetaker for the dissertation project “Parental experiences related to an intra-district boundary adjustment transition at the elementary school level”.

All information shared before, during, and after any sessions is confidential and will not be disseminated verbally, in writing, electronically or in any other form to anyone except the researcher.

____________________________
Print name

____________________________     ___________________ _________
Signature       Date
Appendix K: Focus Group Invitation (School Committee)

Dear XXX:

In order to enhance my professional knowledge and skill set as the Deputy Director of Special Education and a central office administrator in the Cumberland School Department, I have been pursuing a doctoral degree from Northeastern University. I am currently working on a dissertation investigating how Cumberland parents have experienced their child’s transition to a different elementary school due to last year’s redistricting. I would like to invite you to participate in a small focus group consisting of School Committee members who voted on the redistricting proposal to complement information obtained from parents and Dr. Thornton.

The current research on transitions in light of intra-district boundary adjustments is very limited, especially with regard to how parents have experienced this process. Moreover, changing enrollment and fiscal factors may warrant additional future redistricting initiatives in Cumberland. It is my hope that this dissertation will provide robust information to parents, administrators, and School Committee members when faced with a large-scale structural change such as redistricting.

In light of the limited size of the School Committee focus group, I am happy to schedule it at a mutually convenient time and location. The session is expected to last approximately 1-2 hrs.

Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the interview, you can stop at any time. All information collected for this study will remain strictly confidential. Reasonable precautions and measures will be taken that the final research report does not identify you or any other participants. Documents containing participants’ names will be password-protected and destroyed five years after completion of the dissertation.

Attached to this letter you will find an informed consent form. Please review this document carefully as it provides more information about the study and protections of participants. You do not have to fill it out at this point. Should you decide to attend the focus group session, you will be provided with a copy of the consent form prior to the start of the discussion and asked to review and sign this document.

I would appreciate it if you could inform me whether you are willing to participate in the group discussion by calling me at 401-500-6878 or emailing: schockaert.f@husky.neu.edu You are also welcome to contact me should you have questions about this study.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a potential research participant, you should feel free to contact Nan C. Regina, Director Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115; 617-373-4588; Email: irb@neu.edu You may call anonymously if you prefer.

Sincerely,

Fred Schockaert
Doctoral candidate, Northeastern University

Enclosed: Informed consent participants
Appendix L: Informed Consent Research Participants (School Committee)

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Researcher/doctoral student: Frederik Schockaert

Dissertation title: Parental experiences related to an intra-district boundary adjustment transition at the elementary school level.

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You are not required to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will provide you with a copy for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a School Committee member who voted last school year on the redistricting proposal.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to a) obtain a better understanding of how parents have experienced their child’s transition to another elementary school due to a large-scale redistricting initiative as well as b) delineate factors, supports, and initiatives perceived by parents, School Committee members, and the Superintendent as either helpful or having hampered the process. The goal is to gain insight and provide guidance related to large-scale structural change initiatives within school districts.

It is hypothesized that parent experiences related to their child’s mandatory transition to another within-district elementary school due to a redistricting initiative are influenced or even shaped by 1) psychological processes (internal) related to change; 2) social, historical, legal, financial, and political (external) factors; as well as 3) existing knowledge and research on transitions.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to participate in this study the researcher will ask you to join a focus group session, which will be audio-taped.

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?
The focus group will take place at a mutually convenient time and location and is estimated to last approximately 1-2 hours.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no foreseeable risks involved in taking part in this study. All responses will be kept confidential and any records are going to be destroyed five years after the completion of the dissertation.

Will I benefit from being involved in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information obtained in light of this study may assist school districts and administrators with attaining a better understanding of parents’ responses to a redistricting initiative and develop supports and strategies that facilitate transitions and minimize negative impacts.
Who will see the information about me?
Only the researcher of this study will have access to personally identifiable information. The final report will not use participants’ names. All electronic records and documents containing personal information about participants will be password-protected; hard copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All information will be destroyed, erased and deleted five (5) years after completion of the dissertation.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
You are not required to participate in this study. Ending your participation will not affect your standing. At any time during the study, you may refuse to answer questions or end your participation. If you choose not to participate, ignore this form and do not sign.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
Fred Schockaert          Chris Unger, Ed.D
Doctoral student         Dissertation advisor Northeastern University, Boston
Tel: 401-500-6878        Tel: 617-337-2400
Email: schockaert.f@husky.neu.edu       Email: c.unger@neu.edu

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you prefer.

Will I be paid for my participation?
There is no compensation for participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There is no cost to participate in this study.

I have read, understood, and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant and the potential risks. I agree to participate in this study on a voluntary basis.

__________________________________
Research Participant (Printed Name)

__________________________________    _____________ _____
Research Participant (Signature)       Date
Appendix M: School Committee Focus Group Interview Protocol

Introduction (Adapted from Krueger and Casey, 2009, p.97)

Good evening and welcome to this discussion group. I appreciate you taking the time to be here tonight. This session is probably going to last about one to two hours.

I am writing a dissertation on how Cumberland parents have experienced their child transitioning to a different elementary school because of last year’s redistricting. In addition to parents’ perspectives, this project is also going to include the views, experiences, opinions, and interpretations of Dr. Thornton and from you as School Committee members who voted on the redistricting initiative last March.

Ground rules

There are no right or wrong answers. You probably will have differing points of view and that is okay. Please share your thoughts with us; all input is welcome and will help with obtaining a better understanding of your perceptions and experiences. This session is audio-recorded to make sure all your valuable input is available for further analysis. Ms. XXX is going to take additional notes and has signed a confidentiality agreement as well. Any documents that contain your first and last name are password protected. All records, including tonight’s recording are going to be destroyed five years after the completion of my dissertation.

Don’t feel like you have to respond all the time. However, any information you provide is extremely helpful. If you want to follow up on something that someone has said, if you want to agree or disagree, or give an example, you are welcome to do so. My role is to ask questions, listen to you, make sure everyone gets the chance to share and respond, and to make sure we don’t get sidetracked. I’m interested in hearing from all of you. So, if you are talking a lot—which is great—I may at times ask you to give the others a chance to respond and if you have been silent for a while, I may call on you and give you an opportunity to share your thoughts with us.

If you have a cell phone, please set it to silent or vibrate now. If you need to answer an urgent call, I am asking you to step out of the room so we can continue with our conversation. Feel free to get up and have some more food or another beverage. Bathrooms are located …

Opening question

Let’s get started with the first question.
### Interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question type (Krueger and Casey, 2009)</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening question</td>
<td>1. What was your motivation to become a member of the Cumberland School Committee?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory question</td>
<td>2. How and when did you find out about Dr. Thornton’s redistricting proposal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition questions</td>
<td>3. How would you describe your initial response to the redistricting proposal and the news that a significant number of students might have to attend a different elementary school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. What concerns and questions did you initially have regarding the redistricting proposal?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key questions</td>
<td>5. What issues related to the redistricting did parents bring to your attention before and after the vote?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. In your opinion, what factors have had a positive impact on the redistricting and student transitions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. In your opinion, what factors have had a negative impact on the redistricting and student transitions?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. What in your opinion were some of the motivators driving parents’ behaviors and emotions?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9. Overall, how do you feel now about the redistricting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending questions</td>
<td>10. What advice do you have for administrators and other school committees considering a redistricting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. What advice do you have for parents who have just found out about a redistricting in their community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Is there anything else you would like to share?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Conclusion

Thank you all for being here tonight and sharing your thoughts, feelings and opinions. I realize that at times this must have been difficult and I appreciate your candor and honesty. My job is now to analyze your responses and those obtained from parents and Dr. Thornton in light of similarities and differences. The current research on school reorganizations and associated transitions of students to a different school is very limited and I hope that our conversation is going to help other districts and other parents when faced with a similar situation.

Once again I would like to emphasize that everything discussed tonight is strictly confidential. Please make sure that you have signed and returned your consent form.

If you are interested in reviewing parts of my analysis for accuracy, let me know and I will contact you through email. Thank you for your contribution to my dissertation project.
Appendix N: Permission from Superintendent to Use District Data, Conduct Focus Groups, and Use District Sites

Cumberland School Department
Office of the Superintendent
2602 Mendon Road, Cumberland, Rhode Island 02864-3726
401/698-1600 Fax No. 401/698-4620
RELAY RI 1-800-745-6755
www.cumberlandschools.org

PHILIP D. THORNTON, ED.D.
Superintendent

February 26, 2013

Frederik Schockaert
Deputy Director of Special Education
Cumberland School Department

Dear Frederik,

I am in receipt of your letter requesting permission to proceed with a qualitative study on parents’ experiences regarding their child’s transition from one elementary school to another within the school district as a part of your dissertation at Northeastern University.

You have specifically requested permission to:
1) Obtain and use district data indicating which students changed schools in the 2012 redistricting initiative;
2) Conduct focus groups, and;
3) Use district sites to conduct focus groups.

Your request to conduct dissertation research is approved. I enthusiastically endorse your desire to perform research in our district and wish you all the best during the study.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Philip D. Thornton, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

PDT/CC

The Cumberland School Department does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, color or disability in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.
Appendix O: IRB Approval

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: March 13, 2013
IRB #: CPS13-02-06

Principal Investigator(s): Christopher Unger
Frederik Schockaert

Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University

Title of Project: Parental Experiences Related to an Intra-District Boundary
Adjustment Transition at the Elementary School Level

Participating Sites: School District Superintendent's Permission Letter on file

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7

Informed Consents: Three (3) signed consent forms

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: MARCH 12, 2014

Investigator's Responsibilities:

1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
recruiting participants into the study.

2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.

3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.

4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must
be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.

5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
prior to the expiration date above.

6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix P: Proposed Theoretical Model

[Diagram of Parental Responses to a Large-Scale Redistricting Initiative]

- **INITIAL RESPONSE**
  - Anger
  - Denial
  - Disbelief
  - Acceptance

- **CURRENT RESPONSE**
  - Acceptance
  - Resentment
  - Leave

- **POSITIVE FACTORS**
  - Open House
  - Clear communication
  - Teacher + principal support
  - Transition cohorts of students + staff
  - Gradual integration activities
  - Full-day K/benefits to larger community
  - Outreach by Superintendent

- **NEGATIVE FACTORS**
  - North/South divide
  - Communication issues
  - Academic concerns
  - Socio-emotional concerns
  - Negative messages from teachers and principals
  - Mutual reinforcement parent-child emotions
  - Severing relationships
  - Powerlessness + loss + outsider status
  - Differences between schools

- **Cost-benefit analysis**

- **INTRA-PERSONAL PROCESSES**
- **INTER-PERSONAL PROCESSES**

- **Existing knowledge of academic, socio-economic, and psychological factors regarding transitions**

- **Cost-benefit analysis**

- **Feedback**

- **Questions**

- **Projection**

- **Questioning**

- **Guidance Support Lobbying**

- **Feedback**

- **Interpretation**